THEATRE: LOOK CHARLIE

A sort of monologue with interruptions, conceived and directed by Jean Shepherd, assisted by a small cast. Production by Jerome Kretchmer and Dorothy Love. At the Orpheum Theatre, Mondays only.

"For years," said Shepherd, "I'd had this unbreakable rule—no blind dates. And here I was in this room, with the stucco walls that were reaching out at me, and the thick carpets, and the ferns, and it's hot, boy, it's hot.

"And I'm waiting for this chick called Esther Jane Alberry—all the girls I ever went out with were called Esther Jane Alberry—and I'm talking to her father, who's a Cubs fan (Cubs!) and all of a sudden I feel this electricity in the air and she comes into view down the stairs and SHE IS MAGNIFICENT."

This is Jean Shepherd, in his mid-50's and with almost total recall, reenacting the Shepherd, aged 14 ("a very tender age"), for the benefit of a capacity audience at the Orpheum Theatre last week.

Light of Truth

"Ten minutes later," he continues, "10 minutes later we're sitting on a Western Avenue streetcar heading for Joe Shacks' bowling alley, where it's 18 cents a line, and the other guy's talking to his date and Esther Jane is talking to the girl in front of her. And all of a sudden there's this bright light, and it's the light of truth and I'mspread-eagled against it and I can't get away, and the truth becomes clear to me: I AM THE BLIND DATE. And they are being nice to me."

"And all of a sudden my Bond suit is getting shiny, and I'm getting fatter and fatter, and I'm wearing shoes that are made out of bowling balls, and up above me is this great sign, this halitosis sign: 'DO YOU OFFEND?'"

And so ad-almost-infini-tum the monologue rolls along, and the audience is with this Poet-of-the Losers all the way, and he is with them—but not of them—and the identification is complete. "What is sadder than a walking butterfly," he asks. And: "Where did we go down the wrong path? We were meant to walk the earth like giants, hairy giants, and look at us now, sitting here on Second Avenue, across the street from Rattner's."

Audience Approval

The audience laughs uproariously when he begins: "Once I had this mother, and she had this big knee..." They laugh when he mentions the Reader's Digest or Saturday Evening Post or Ed Sullivan or John Foster Dulles or Mom ("Don't you feel the hate bubbling up in you?"). They giggle nervously when he talks of the Chicago White Sox and yelp with豺

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Jazz Band, and cartoonists Herb Gardner and Shel Silverstein. The four-page program itself is a delight.

J. W.