

THEATRE: LOOK CHARLIE

A sort of monologue with interruptions, conceived and directed by Jean Shepherd, assisted by a small cast. Production by Jerome Kretzmer 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 Allberry—all the girls I ever went out with were called Esther Jane Allberry—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-30'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'm spread-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-infinitum 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, 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

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approval when he suggests that TV Guide might be "the Rosetta Stone of the future." The archaeologists of the next era, he explains, will reconstruct our civilization from Channel 13's Friday-night schedule.

Onstage, as on radio (Sunday nights at 9, WOR), Shep is the perennial fal' guy. He's alone in a leaky rowboat with a leaky bailing can ("But I'm not alone really. We're all there. Even John Foster Dulles. He's the leakiest of all, in fact, but he doesn't know it"); he's 7½ years old and the only boy in town who doesn't have a decoder when the secret message comes over the radio on the Ovaltine hour; he's alone at home when the letter marked "occupant" arrives inviting him to overcome his troubles with a \$300 loan. ("How did they know? They didn't even know my name!")

On the other hand, though, he's apparently the only person in New York who knows a certain "in-

flammatory" secret. He reveals it during the course of the show: FRENCH POODLES ARE NOT PEOPLE.

Like the 4000-year-old Egyptian at the Museum of Natural History, he's in showbiz, the bigtime, and for the duration of his show at the Orpheum (the last of three performances takes place next Monday night) he has an excellent supporting cast including Lois Nettleton, Rita Gardner, Gerald Feil, Bob Thompson's Red Onion

Jazz Band, and cartoonists Herb Gardner and Shel Silverstein. The four-page program itself is a do-light. J. W.