

Jean Shepherd Sounds Off; He's a Summer Actor Now

By REX POLIER

PERSONALITIES in the entertainment and communications industry who have "worked" Philadelphia on their way up, usually have nice things to say about our town when they return on a visit.

But Jean Shepherd, who entertained over WRCV in 1950-51 when it was KYW, is especially lyrical about it. Shepherd is starring in "Destry Rides Again" at the Music Circus in Lambertville, N. J.

The medium-built, crew-cut personality, who has won a national reputation as a personality over WOR, New York, sounded like he really meant it, too.

He spoke warmly of Wayne, where he used to live, and the

charm of Philadelphia suburbs. He also appraised the city objectively, characterizing it as having "an almost European atmosphere, when I lived here."

Shepherd insists he is doing practically the same thing at WOR which he did here—"just talking." He is a monologist—"not a disc jockey"—and has a daily program where he does nothing but ramble—intelligently and wittily—over a broad field. He won national headlines a few years ago as the custodian of the "Night People," a term which he coined and which is now in the American Dictionary of Standard Usage.

"Night People" are those who spend their most active

hours from 11.15 P. M. on—the time when Shepherd goes on the air. He has established an electronic communion with them. When economic trouble over his program developed a few years ago, Shepherd made an impassioned appeal to his followers. He urged them to ask for copies of "I Libertine," a non-existent book. Retail outlets were flooded with so many requests that Shepherd eventually wrote such a book. The Night People also showed their ranks in such numbers that the station retained Shepherd.

SHEPHERD says emphatically, "I like to be free to do what I want to do."

Judging by his achievements in the past couple of years, he has. He has appeared in five off-Broadway dramas—serious ones, at that. He has edited some of the works of Hoosier humorist George Ade whose works, incidentally, he can quote by the page. It has been a labor of love. Shepherd has also managed to sandwich in a couple of Broadway one-man shows. In January, he makes his Broadway musical debut in a version of Leonard Sillman's "New Faces." He has written all his own material for it.

Radio, he gives one to understand, utilizes only that part of his talent which is best suited to the medium. He is, he cries, a lonely man in it. "I am an entertainer, a monologist—something hard to conceive in a medium that has degenerated to a point where it only has three things—news, disc jockeys and interviews."

He is on radio now because it allows him to say what he wants to say and in the manner he wants to say it. Outside of that, he has little interest in the medium which he once thought had such great promise. "I'm discouraged over it," he admitted. "It's so sad. It has become the commercial monopoly of the advertising agencies. In 1926, James Joyce said he felt that radio was the ultimate medium for the dramatist and novelist. Today, look what it has become."

SHEPHERD is also pretty glum about most of the other mediums and the theater—especially the theater. Theater parties, he wails, are robbing the theater of its birthright. "All producers talk it over with the Westchester County P.T.A. before they take their shows out-of-town for tryouts. If the P.T.A. doesn't like it—they don't take 'em out," Shepherd wailed.

He also foresees the day when Procter & Gamble sends all its employees to New York on a two-week vacation and holds every seat in the house of every theater. "After the first act, Durward Kirby will appear on stage and announce 'Ladies and gentlemen, this play is coming to you through the courtesy of —'"

This past year, he has appeared in five dramatic shows in a row, starting with an off-Broadway opus, "A Banquet for the Moon," in which he played the Devil. Others included "Look, Charlie — (A History of the Praterfall)", "Small-tacular," "Voice of the Blue." If you think most of these are way out, you are entirely correct. But that is the way Shepherd likes things.

He lives alone in Manhattan. He is an avid reader, thinker and opinion-manufacturer. He is seldom still. "I like to work, that's why I do all these things—I just like to work," he says.



ON STAGE: Jean Shepherd stars with Lisa Carroll in "Destry Rides Again," at Lambertville Music Circus.