

Humorist, Writer, Actor Shepherd Objects to Old Tag of 'Radio Man'

Jean Shepherd is ever expanding his horizons. He is a novelist, television personality, filmmaker, playwright, Broadway stage performer, radio personality, recording artist and nightclub performer.

And now there is a college course on this popular humorist.

Calvin College is offering as an interim course "Growing Up in America: The Wit and Wisdom of Jean Shepherd." Fifty students are engaged in taking the course, which runs three hours a day, five days a week, for three weeks. The students will have an extra treat in that Shepherd himself will make an appearance in the class for a question-and-answer session on Jan. 28.

The course is being taught by Quentin Schultze and David Holquist, professors in communication arts and sciences at Calvin.

"There are very few people around to study who have been involved in all the major media," explained Schultze, who said Shepherd's work is valuable for studying media comparisons. "Shepherd is one of the best humorists in the United States today."

Schultze said true humorists are rare. The difference between a humorist and a comedian is that a comedian goes for a laugh while the laugh for a humorist is a by-product of something important the humorist has to say. Schultze believes Shepherd has important reflections on American life.

Contacted at his offices on an island near Ft. Myers, Fla., Shepherd said he is "very interested in that class they're teaching. My work is in most college curricula around the country but generally

it's taught in American literature or American humor. This is the only one I know where they teach a course on just my work."

When told it had been a surprise that such a course existed, he replied, "Why? You wouldn't feel that way if it was John Updike there were studying. That's a real put-down," Shepherd retaliated. "My work is such that all my listeners or readers think I'm very unofficial. I'm not like John Updike, who's official. They think, 'Gee, why would they be teaching a course in Old Shep down at the school?'"

It is true that the legion of Jean Shepherd's fans believe that "Old Shep" is a friend rather than someone in the pantheon of American writers and performers.

"I used to feel honored by that," he said, "but it works against me because invariably some guy will write a review that'll say, 'Have you ever heard of Jean Shepherd? Well, nobody has but me so I'll tell you about him.' In show business that's the ultimate putdown. It's the ultimate putdown to tell your readers that obviously they don't know who this guy is."

Well, if you don't know who Jean Shepherd is, it's only because you've been living in your garage for the last 20 or 30 years. Shepherd has put out six comedy albums, written seven books including "In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash" and most recently "A Fistful of Fig Newtons," published stories in Playboy, National Lampoon and Car and Driver, written the screenplay for the film "A Christmas Story," produced and starred in a Public Television Series entitled "Jean Shepherd's America," wrote sev-

eral American Playhouse shows for PBS and had a long running and very popular radio show on WOR in New York City.

His stint on the radio show is what drives Shepherd buggy as many people think of him as a radio personality.

"I don't care what they know me from," spoke Shepherd with disgust in his voice. "I'm so tired of that. They think I'm going to go back and be a disc jockey. I'm a performer and a writer and I don't like this business of 'He's a radio man.' The time I was on radio in New York I was also on Broadway. I was doing plays. That was when I published 'In God We Trust.' I'm one of the few guys in the business who has used every available medium. I write, I act and perform in nightclubs. Radio was never any more important to me than any other media."

And actually it is onward and upward for Shepherd in many media.

"We're working on a project called 'Jean Shepherd's World' in which we would use a different country as a backdrop for the show. A lot depends on the finances of PBS this year," he said.

When asked if he would consider working for commercial television, Shepherd replied, "To me public television is commercial. They pay just as much, you know."

But Shepherd isn't putting all his eggs in the television basket. He is knee deep in yet another movie.

"I'm working on a film for Matt Dillon. We're old friends. He played in one film for me ('The Great American Fourth of July and Other Disasters') and we became very good friends. He likes my stuff and his manager has been after me for a script. That's the next big project I'll be involved in. Plus I'm finishing a



In town to attend a class on his work, Jean Shepherd will give a performance Jan. 28 at Calvin College Fine Arts Center.

book. I have a book every couple of years. This will be my seventh."

Shepherd also just finished writing a play which is being published by Dramatic Publishing for use in college theaters. He's a bit closed mouth about the play's subject matter but he did say that it was not based on any of his published stories and it is about a senior in high school.

While Shepherd is in Grand Rapids to participate in the classroom, he will make two public appearances. On Jan. 28, from 3 to 5 p.m., he will be at the Calvin College Bookstore to autograph

his books, for sale at the bookstore, which is in the Commons on campus.

At 8 that night, he will appear in concert at the Calvin College Fine Arts Center auditorium. Reserved seat tickets are on sale at the Calvin College Special Events Office. They may be purchased by telephone at 957-6282 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 1 to 4 p.m. on Saturday. Prices are \$7.50, \$5 and \$3.

When asked what he planned to do at the concert, Shepherd replied with a twinkle in his voice: "I'll be funny."