

Jean Shepherd: Real Humor Is Indeed Alive

Every once in a while I feel inspired to rail on about something positive that's happened in the community. The last time I felt this way was after I had the good fortune to see the Lena Horne show over at DeVos Hall. That had such a positive effect on me that I still think about it often.

I got the same feeling last Tuesday night when I attended the one-man performance of Jean Shepherd at the Calvin College Fine Arts Auditorium. Just when I thought humor was dead, this man comes along and reminds me that it is alive and very, very healthy.

To be sure, most of the comedy we get nowadays is pretty thin. Motion picture comedy is a joke, if you'll pardon the expression. The Chevy Chase-Dan Aykroyd-Rodney Dangerfield idea of cinematic humor is near criminal.

Most stand-up comedians don't learn jokes, they learn new ways to put vulgarities together. While I'm into raunch as much as the next dirty young man, I want my comedy to be funny first and naughty second.

Anyway, Jean Shepherd, an idol of mine for about 23 years, managed to hold the stage for two hours and make me laugh until the tears rolled down my cheeks. But he also made me think about the human condition. He was widening my horizons as he tickled my funnybone. A person couldn't ask for more from a humorist.



*John
Douglas*

My only regret about his appearance is that more people in the West Michigan area weren't there to see him. I say that even though his concert was well attended. It's just that such experiences don't come along very often, so we shouldn't miss out when they do.

If this column in any way whets your appetite for a taste of Shepherd, let me be crass for a moment and recommend some novels that are presently in print. "In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash," "Wanda Hickey's Night of Golden Memories and Other Disasters" and "A Fistful of Fig Newtons" are all available. Shepherd is one of the few writers who can make me laugh out loud when I'm reading.

Also available on video cassette for sale or rent is Shepherd's movie, "A Christmas Story," which is filled with gems of humor.

Shepherd has a cast of characters who flow through most of his work. We old-time fans know these people as though they were close friends. Everyone should have the opportunity to meet Ralph Parker, the Old Man, Schwartz, Flick, Helen Weathers, Perlmutter and poor old Zynzmeister who has to always sit in the back of the class because of where his name falls alphabetically.

These folks will make you laugh and occasionally tug at your heartstrings. In either case, they're good for our souls.