

Mostly about People

By Wally Traling



Mort Sahl

San Francisco — He sat drinking tea and honey still in costume — corduroy pants and orange sweat shirt — still highly keyed from his applauded comeback minutes before at the Hungri i. It had been 12 years.

It was quiet in his dressing room. A desk TV was on, without the sound.

"Great group tonight," he said. "I made my start here in 1953. Got \$75 for one week, and I'm still grateful to Banducci." Sahl has a three-week run ahead of him.

Sahl is 37, a court jester of the political world. Comic intellectual. He tickles the thinking man's funny bone.

Not everybody digs him, but he was big enough in 1960 to make the cover page of Time magazine.

"Pretty big deal," I said.

"Yah," he said. "Back east, Time is a sovereign state."

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He laughs in short spurts, like a primer. He laughs at his own wit, because most of it is spontaneous, and the sudden humor of it is like suddenly hearing it from someone else.

The slight, friendly, black-haired comic, with the hawk face and flared nostrils, has a tremendous social conscience. He worries about the state of things but can quickly mock them.

"Eighty per cent of my material is created on stage, just messin' round.

"And actually, y'know, I'm not an intellectual. I'm just hyper-verbal."

Sahl attended UC and UCLA where he said more revolts existed than do today.

"I did my bit, but I revolted alone. I never got along with the crowd. I was a loner and my dissent was against conformity.

"My father was in government—a court reporter — and he carved out my puritanical side. I don't use profanity in my act and I'm glad you noticed it. A few years ago people wouldn't laugh at profane and sacrilegious comics but today they do, probably because someone else does. There is so much bad taste these days. Actually, it is not so much bad taste as it is no taste at all."

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Sahl has been appearing in Washington, D.C. "Yah, I even met the President — briefly. I didn't know what to say for a change. What's a guy suppose to say to the president: 'Got the country in your wife's name yet?'"

"Humphrey came in while I was there and greeted Johnson: 'How are you today?' And the President snapped back, 'Is that all you ever think of?' I swear it happened," said Sahl.

Sahl refers to Humphrey as "Mr. Bright and Fresh."

"You know, here it is the first day of spring, just like the President promised!"

How did you get into this business, I asked.

"I was an engineering major, but politics has always fascinated me. Especially the stupidities of politics. I've figured out there are about 81 shades of political thinking in the country.

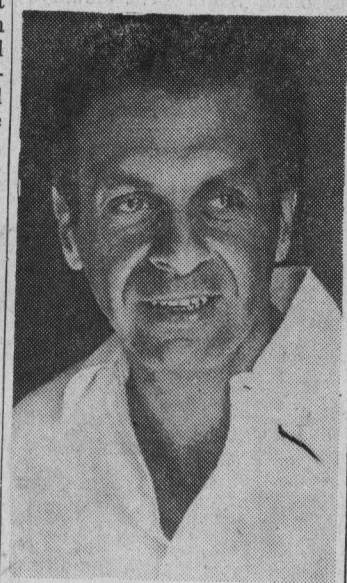
"It ranges from far leftwing to far rightwing, and then we have the great mass in the middle whose allegiance is economic. Right? Right!"

"My own politics? Oh, I run a very elusive course, leaning a bit to the left to correct for drift in the country."

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Is there a political area that doesn't get the laughs, I said.

"Yah, and it's a fascinating



thing. Anti-communist jokes seem to draw blanks.

"I think people are becoming bored with communism. Maybe it's because they are nervous about it. I think America is having a nervous breakdown."

The sharp-tongued comic is divorced. "Yes, I'm very single," he said, sipping tea. "I'm an outsider if there ever was one. My act is a part of me and sometimes it's a drag."

I asked Sahl how much he made a year, and he said about 350, and I guess that doesn't mean \$350, or maybe he said 50.

What do you like?

"I like talent, jazz, romantic ideas, heroes in literature. I like life's force and good people."

What don't you like?

"I hate conformity, greed. I dislike the idea that a bad idea can spread throughout the U.S. so fast by television. It's a dangerous situation."

What is your goal in life?

"My goal is to set an example for the people I have left behind — to make people come out of the darkness and laugh. "Right? Right."

Visitors' Conclave Tomorrow



DOUGLAS A. FARLEY

Donald Starr, chairman of the convention and visitors committee of the Greater Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce, reminds business firms of tomorrow's "Visitor Conference" and emphasized that they can make reservations at the door.

The conference, which will begin at 8 a.m. in the Cabrillo college little theater, will present ways to attract more visitor expenditures in the Santa Cruz area. The meeting will adjourn at noon.

Douglas A. Farley, manager