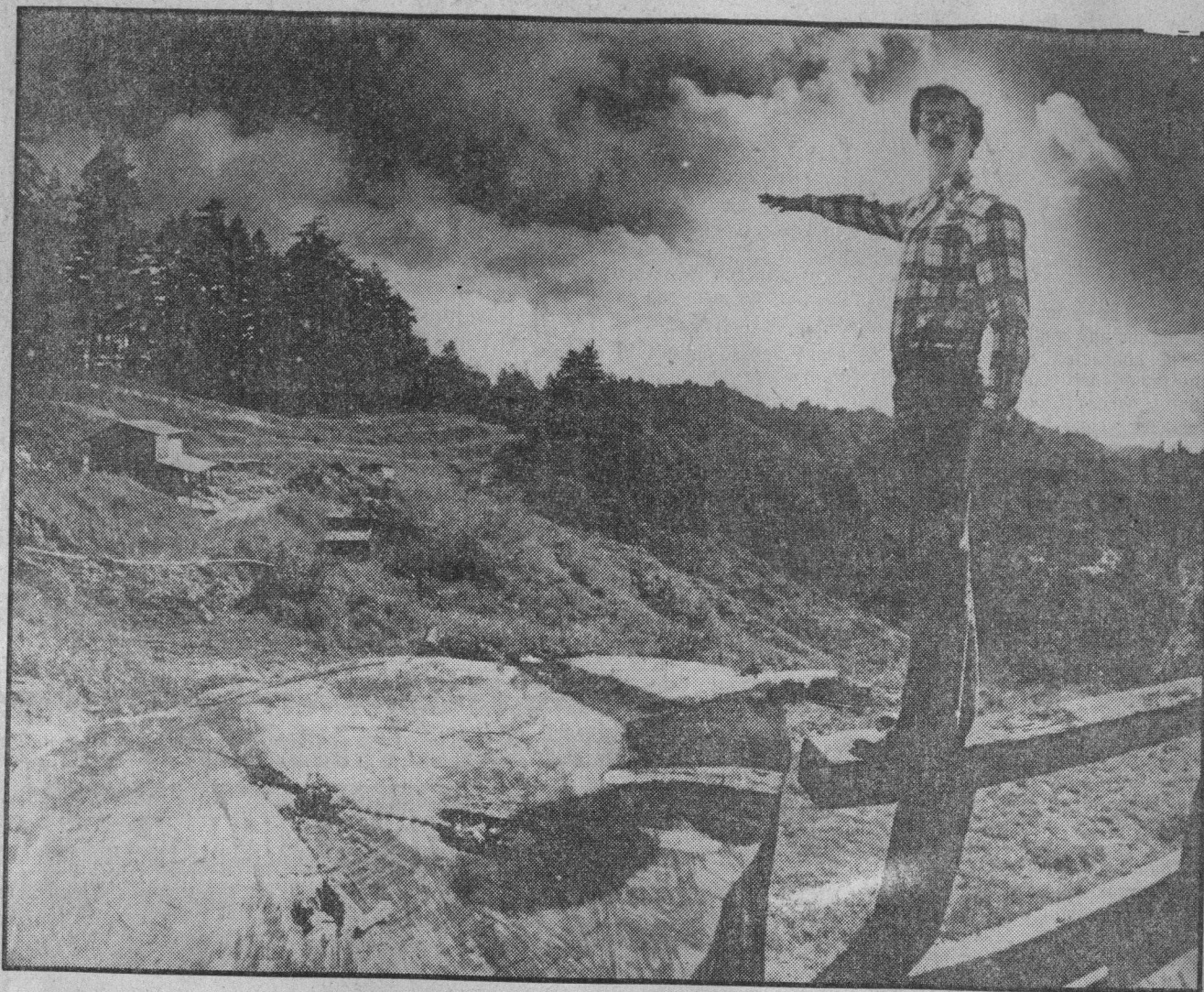


Wine & winemaking Spotlight

Friday, March 14, 1980 — Santa Cruz Sentinel — 15



PULL OUT
in this section



Dick Smothers scans his sprawling Vine Hill vineyards.



Making Laughs Or Wine, Smothers Does It Better

By RICK CHATENEVER
Sentinel Staff Writer

Dick Smothers looked out over the staked, gnarled grape vines and down the lush green valley which seemed to roll all the way to the ocean before agreeing that yes, running a winery was an "amazing contrast" to show business. "But in some ways they're similar," he added as he showed his guests around the 30-acre Vine Hill Winery, where he also makes his home in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

"The apprehension is constant. There's always the question, what do I do next?"

There was no apprehension in the voice. Although Dick is just past 40, the voice is as young and cheery as ever. It is the voice of sweet optimism, fragile logic and stability — the down-to-earthness that kept his big brother Tommy, "the funny one" from bouncing entirely off the wall for the almost two decades that they were "doing their act."

Now both adamantly refer to themselves as "ex-Smothers Brothers," although they are enjoying a professional reunion in the musical comedy "I Love My Wife." The show is fresh from a hit run on Broadway and now getting howls at San Francisco's Curran Theater where it plays until the first week of May.

The Smothers Brothers "bit" — the fractured folk songs on guitar and bass, the "mom always liked you best" playground-style arguments — is a thing of the past. But "I Love My Wife" is just the beginning of further collaborations between the brothers — both on-stage and in wine-making.

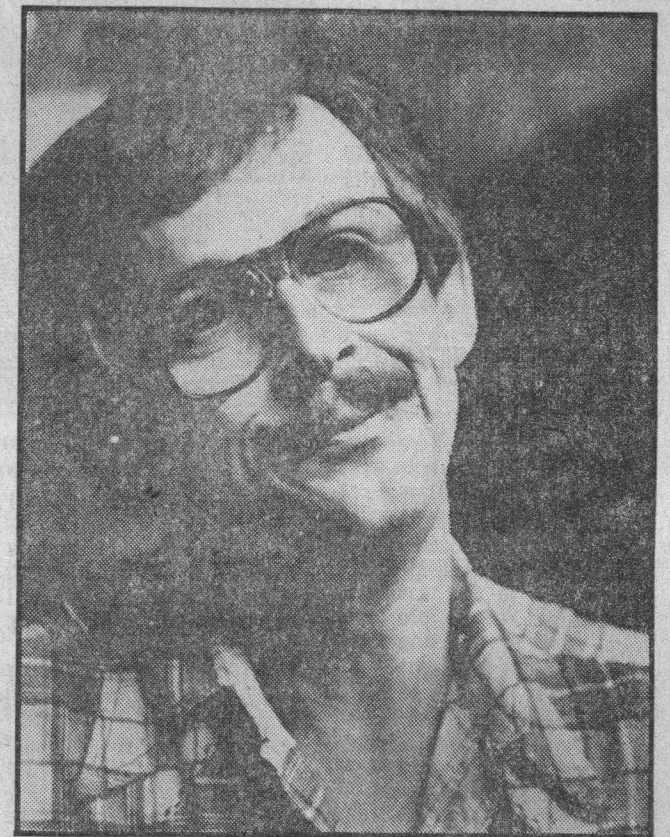
"We love each other more now than ever before in our lives," Dick explained.

The winery tour continued, as Dick made his way through the wooden barrels and stainless steel tanks, demonstrating the gleaming machinery and equipment used in the artful, scientific, magical process of creating the wine.

Dick, his wife Linda and their three children moved onto the vineyard property in 1975. Since that time he has been a sporadic county resident — but "it doesn't matter where I live since I've been working so much."

The winery began, literally, from the ground up, after the brothers decided to disband in the mid-'70s. That was after they had risen to the top of the TV pyramid during the late-'60s, putting their comedy to work in the service of controversial causes — chiefly opposition to the war in Vietnam. They struck the nation's nerves and got dropped by the CBS network — a decision that Dick is sure was prompted "by pressure from the White House."

The well publicized incident resulted in a settlement of \$916,000 for the brothers from the network for breach of



(Sentinel Photos by Bill Lovejoy)

Vine Hill resident Dick Smothers.

room now housing some of the wooden storage barrels.

"We had a barrel room raising. It all went up in one day." The party afterwards went on for several more, he added.

During those early years Dick became knowledgeable about wines "by doing all the work — being the grunt. But in this business even the grunt has to have scientific knowledge. It's tricky."

Tricky. In the program for "I Love My Wife," Dick lists some of his interests as "skiing, acrobatic flying, sailing, racquet ball and racing cars." They're all tricky, matters of precise, split-second timing — like comedy.

Doing comedy on-stage, as opposed to in nightclubs, "is the most precise, arbitrary form. We're learning the craft at 40 years old. You have to do it precisely. It's like ballet — it's very intricate. It's not supposed to look like there's any effort, but behind the scenes there's a lot of stress and strain. At the end of a week of doing the show,

The well-publicized incident resulted in a settlement of \$916,000 for the brothers from the network for breach of contract.

Dick didn't know anything about making wine then, but became interested after a friend gave him a prospectus of winery economics that he now recalls was "quite optimistic. From the prospectus it sounded like, jeez — anyone could get rich doing that."

He learned as he went along. A garage he had built for his collection of antique cars was expanded to become the

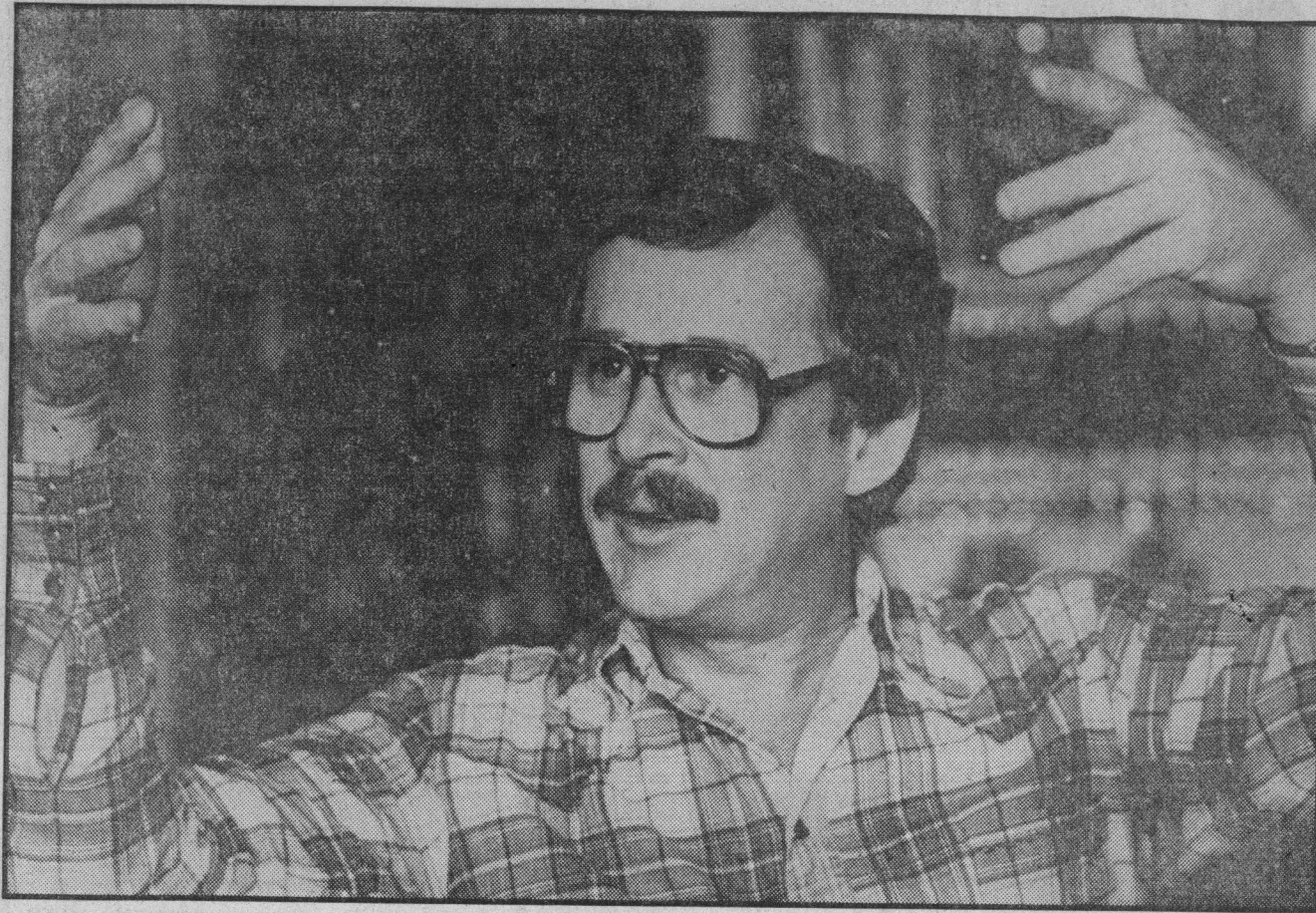
stress and strain. At the end of a week of doing the show, we're drained."

He stood over the gleaming wine press that processes more than 8,000 gallons of both reds and whites at the winery, which he called, "highly technical — on a mama and papa scale."

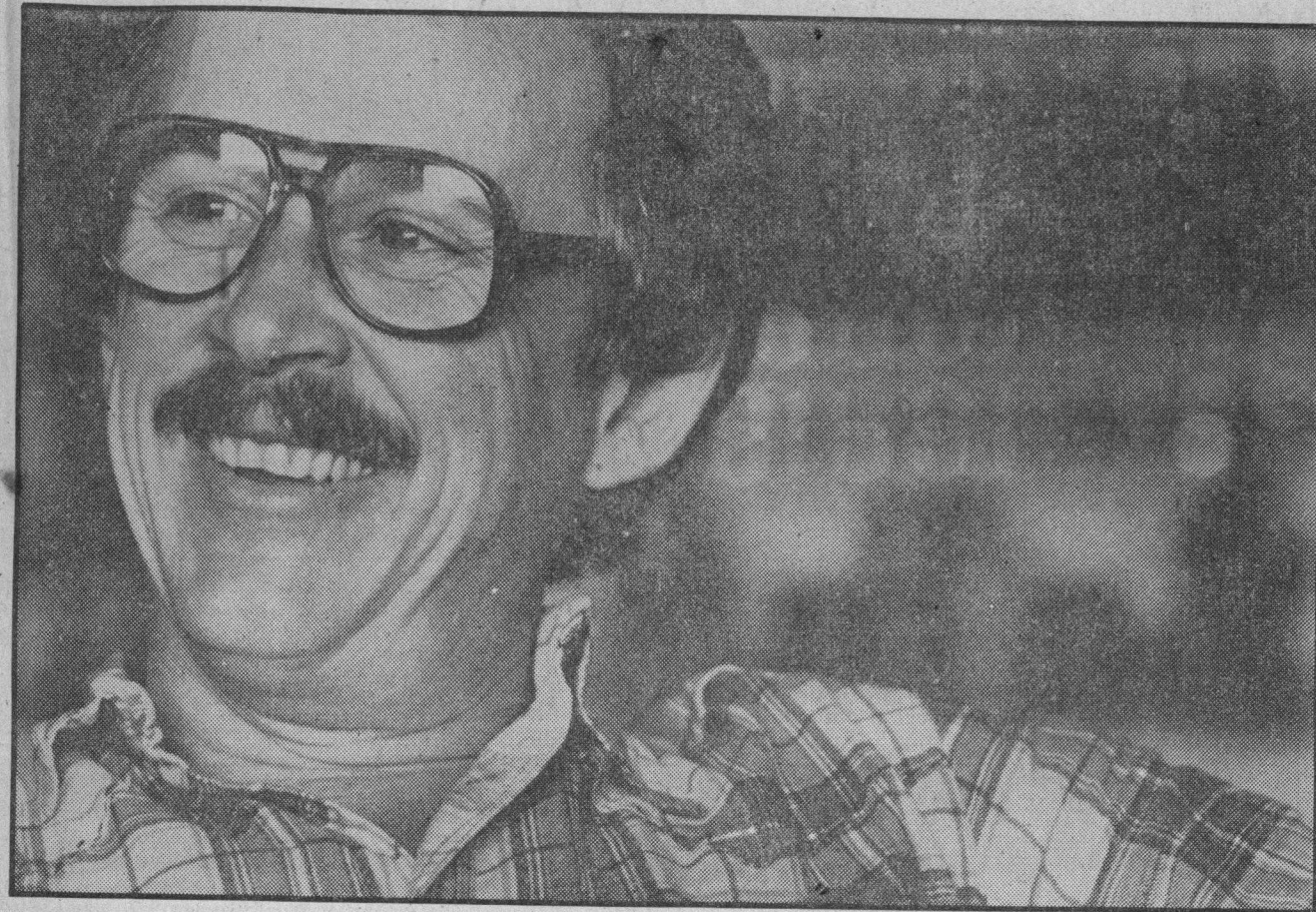
His relatively recent arrival in wine-making had an auspicious debut in 1978, when Smothers' late harvest

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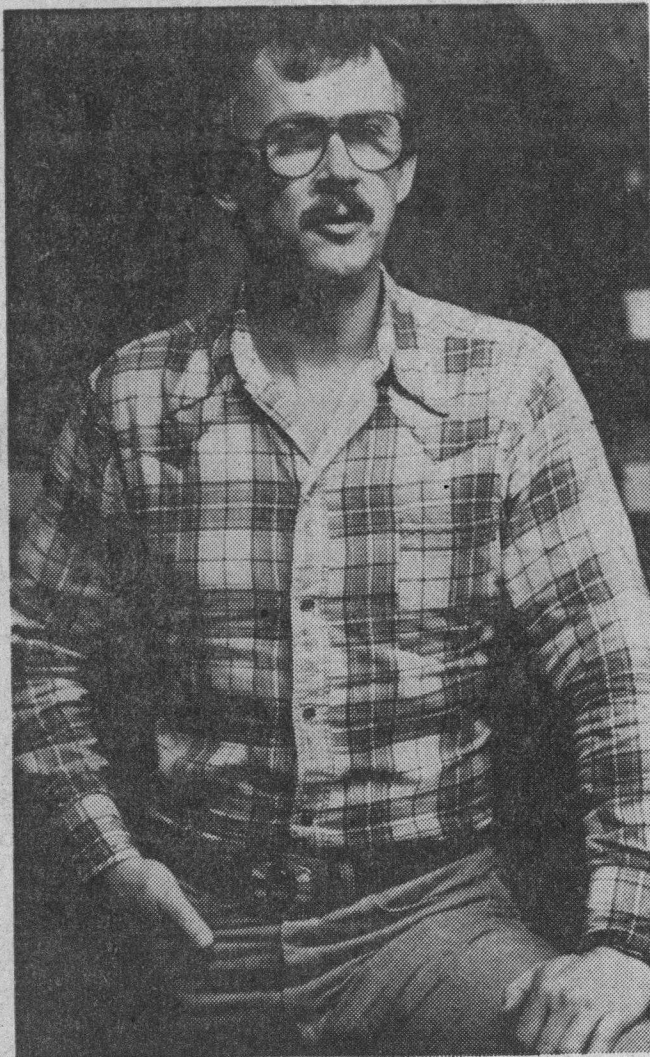
Smothers Relaxes between making wine and making people laugh.



Using his hands to emphasize a crucial point.



The 40-year-old Smothers has already had an eventful show-biz career.



(Sentinel Photo by Bill Lovejoy)

Winemaker-comedian Dick Smothers.

ABC-TV Schedules Late-Night News

NEW YORK (AP) — ABC's precedent-setting late-night newscast will premiere March 24 with Ted Koppel as anchor-man, the network announced Thursday.

The 20-minute news broadcast will air nightly, Monday through Thursday at 11:30 p.m.. It is the first major development in network news since the evening broadcasts were expanded from 15 to 30 minutes in the mid-1960s.

ABC actually broke ground for the late-night newscast in November, with its continuing 11:30 p.m. coverage of the crisis in Iran.

The new program will include a capsule report on the day's events, but the main emphasis will be on development of a major story, ABC said.

William Lord, executive producer of news for ABC's "Good Morning America" show, will produce the late-night newscast.

Alda Burnett

Whether Making Wine Or Laughs, Smothers Does It Better

FROM PAGE 15

Gewurztraminer took the grand prize in a field of 950 entries in the Los Angeles County Fair's wine competition. The feat was "like winning an Academy Award your first time out," said Dick.

That tasting was done "blind," but Dick recognized that the Smothers name is "very identifiable. People will try it — but only once. You know you're successful when there's still a demand in your second and third year."

Happy to be a member of this new fraternity — "wine people are lovely, they'll help you and give you anything...except telling you their secrets" — Dick and Tommy have plans to extend their professional collaboration, into the grape fields and into the bottle.

Tom owns a larger vineyard outside of Sonoma, "where we hope to get 100 tons of Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc grapes." There is also talk of consolidating the wine-making operation on Tom's land in the years to come.

The collaboration that is now extending to enology began at a tender age for the two brothers.

"Our dad was killed in the second World War, and our mother couldn't bring us up by herself — so we bounced around from relative to relative."

Tommy was "22 months older — bigger, stronger and faster," said Dick. He remembered the first time — in junior high school — when he beat Tom in the 50-yard dash.

Dick was "little Smothers" then. "That rivalry was healthy," he went on. That the two have turned the universal fears of sibling rivalry — the honest concern that "mom always liked you best" — into a laughing matter reflects the depth and security of their bond.

The two began paying their dues as performers at the tail end of the '50s, when they were still students at San Jose State. The \$2-a-night San Jose beer hall led to San Francisco's famous Purple Onion, and to "The Tonight Show," where then-host Jack Paar introduced them with the confession that he himself didn't like folk music — "but their dad was killed

in World War II."

"We were singing the fox song, then Tommy started quacking. The audience loved us. It all happened real fast. We didn't know what we were doing."

The inimitable formula — with Dick as straight man and Tommy getting the bellylaughs out of their simple hootenanny repertoire — eventually led to the brilliant and soon controversial "Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour," which changed the shape of prime time variety show television for three exciting and troubled seasons.

"They edited the first show and they edited the last," commented Dick, pointing out that CBS-TV had given the brothers creative control since they were coming on as a mid-season replacement with a short life-expectancy against the top-rated "Bonanza."

"I always thought of our act as being whimsical," said Dick. "We became politically active because of the times."

Looking like choir boys who had wandered into the '40s by mistake, Dick and Tom wound up taking on the Goliaths of the era, beginning with the War in Vietnam. Their targets included smoking — although the American Tobacco Company was one of their sponsors — and censorship, in a bit with Elaine May that got censored.

They addressed civil rights and had a weekly "drug column."

"People always thought we were drug people — but you can't be if you're working 50-60 hours a week. There was tremendous pressure," Dick went

on. "For 72 weeks we had pressure."

The comedy hour "closed the door on variety shows," as far as Dick is concerned. While such new TV faces as Archie Bunker may make their material look pale by comparison, Archie Bunker isn't real.

"When we were doing our stuff, we were always Tom and Dick."

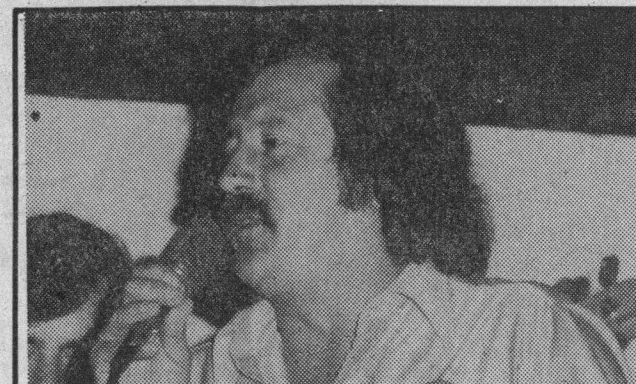
The brothers are back in the '60s in "I Love My Wife," which Dick likened to a "West End sexual farce, the kind that promises you everything and shows you nothing." But this

Chamber Music Featured Sunday

The music of Bartok and Beethoven will be featured when the UCSC chamber music students of instructor Lucy Stoltzman present a free concert Sunday at 2:30 p.m. in the Crown College Dining Hall on the UCSC campus.

Fantuzzi Fusion At UCSC Tonight

Fantuzzi and his band will make the music tonight for a spirited dance in UCSC's Town Hall. The 8 p.m. performance will feature the Fantuzzi fusion of rock, latin, salsa and reggae, with special guests slated to appear between sets. For more information call 425-5211.



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time around they are on the trailing — rather than "the cutting edge" — of that era's uncertain ventures into drugs, communal living and sexual freedom.

Tommy plays Alvin, a Trenton, N.J. moving man who wants to give group sex a fling — "but the thing that makes it beautiful is that you don't believe he can do it" — while Dick is Wally, "the sheep in wolf's clothing" leading him on.

"People say the play is written for us, which is a compliment," said Dick, alluding to the fact the play had been on Broadway long before the Smothers decided to redo it.

"Doing the show with our names above the title means that we're learning this new craft in a very visual space," Dick observed. "But the play is good for us — we didn't have to learn to be anyone else."

Whether they capitalize the "B" in brother or not, Tom and Dick seem to be having little trouble making their ways around the legitimate stage. A recent matinee saw TV's one-

time bad boys winning non-stop laughs from an older, "blue-haired" crowd, undeterred by the risqué tone in recognizing that the Smothers are as funny as ever.

"The show has substance — musical comedy doesn't have to have a lot. People come out of the theater holding hands. The show says that heterosexuality and monogamy are okay."

"We feel good about it," he concluded.

Sitting in his living room, Dick recalled the words of Mason Williams, chief writer during their TV days.

"Mason said, 'First you do it. Then you do it for fun. Then you seriously do it. Then you're done.'"

"If you do it one more time, you're redundant," he went on. "One of the reasons we quit before was that we weren't inventing."

But here comes a new decade — after the '70s, which Dick refers to as "R-and-R, a decade without direction." And he sees the cycle coming around again. "With Tommy and I, every-

thing we do is preparation for something else." They may no longer be the Smothers Brothers — "now we're just brothers who like working together."

Hopefully it will be a good year for wine. The crowds are roaring at their on-stage antics. The network brass is back on their doorstep with offers.

"I don't know what the next 20 years are going to be like," concluded Dick Smothers.

"But they're going to be exciting."

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