

Alan Abel: 'Court jester out of step with time'



By WILLIAM A. RAIDY
Newhouse News Service

NEW YORK — An invitation to an entertainment known as "Alan Abel, Jester at Large," arrived with some advice on what to do if one is attacked or robbed on the way to or from the theater.

It suggested the following precautions:

— "Smile at the mugger and try not to make any ethnic slurs that might upset him. Soft whistling or humming are OK while you are being stripped of your valuables.

— "Always carry three or four extra, cheap wrist watches and lots of one-dollar bills in a wad to make it seem like you are loaded.

— "Keep your eyes closed during the holdup so you can't identify the perpetrator. (This act will save your life, as 87 percent of all criminals plan to execute witnesses.)

— "When the attacker finishes with you, pretend to faint for 10 minutes. Then go to your nearest church or synagogue and give thanks for your survival. (If house of worship is locked for protection against thieves, call Dial-a-Prayer.)

— "Don't ever enter an elevator with a stranger. Nor should you be fooled by midget crooks who look like children. If a criminal grabs you, bark like a dog and talk to yourself incoherently. Muggers are afraid of dogs and crazies.

— "If a pervert exposes himself-herself at you, laugh loudly and point a shameful finger. Flashers can't stand to be humiliated in public.

— "Don't ever walk to and from the theater. Always run zig-zag. It is very difficult for a sniper to hit a moving target.

— "Do not be alarmed by the extraordinary number of seedy-looking characters leering at you around Times Square. Many are actually decoy policemen just doing their duty."

The theater is the New Little Broadway, a rehabilitated porno showcase smack in the middle of what used to be called "The Great White Way." Inside, a young woman serenely plays the harp as a spotlight shines upon some floral wreaths and a funeral urn.

A courtly undertaker greets customers, asking solicitously, "Are you a friend or a relative of the deceased?"

The "funeral" is for Alan Abel, the star of the evening who describes himself as "a court jester out of step



Alan Abel, 'The Rembrandt of put-on artists'

with time." It was just another charade in a long line of madness in which humorist and arch-prankster Abel has been involved during the last two decades of poking fun at American pomposity and what he calls our "moral maniacs."

"Jester at Large," with Abel rising from the ashes, then goes on to reprise his outrageous career, much of which has been devoted to teasing the communications media.

Funerals are nothing new to hoaxster Abel, the producer of the film "Is There Sex After Death." Several years ago, he reported his own demise as a publicity stunt. Obituaries announced he had died of a heart attack at Robert Redford's Sundance Ski Resort in Utah while scouting locations for his new whimsical horror film, "Who's Going to Bite Your Neck, Dear, When All of My Teeth Are Gone?" It ran in newspapers across the country, including a lengthy one in the New York

Times. (When a Times reporter later telephoned, the prankster identified himself and said, "What can I do for you?" The newsman replied, "Drop dead.")

"Jester at Large" hilariously reminds us that Abel was the man who founded that noble organization known as the Society for the Prevention of Indecency to Naked Animals, which waged a nationwide campaign to see that cats, dogs, horses and other animals were clothed for decency's sake.

"Members feel," says Abel, cigar and tongue in cheek, "that unclad animals are a public disgrace, especially to children, and that seeing them along a road may distract drivers and cause accidents."

When Abel first organized the society, thousands took the idea seriously and applied to join, volunteering to start local chapters throughout the nation. The professional prankster hired an actor to

picket zoos and staged a White House demonstration demanding a federal law against walking naked dogs in public.

During his show's would-be memorial service, he passes out circulars announcing the formation of the Committee to Elect Alan Abel Mayor of New York City. His platform includes raising subway and bus fares to \$2 "to attract a better class of passenger," low-cost life insurance for suicides, "the establishment of New York City as a separate welfare state" and the ingenious idea of requiring all doctors to publish their medical school grade averages in the telephone book after their names. (The last idea might be invaluable, notes "the Rembrandt of put-on artists," especially "if you're driving through the desert with a headache and need brain surgery.")

After a serious discussion about pantaloons for ponies and goose bloomers, Abel's show moves on to an interview with an Arab oil potentate who wants to buy Cleveland. Later there is a brief question-and-answer period after which "almost complimentary" refreshments are served.

Lighting for "The Great Jester" is by Con Edison, the scenery is by the Salvation Army.

One learns a great deal coming in off the street to the New Little Broadway Theater. There's Abel's little lecture on "Toenology," or how to make your big toe more useful. And one can't miss his book... "The Fallacy of Creative Thinking."

Alan Abel, a master spoofer with incredibly perceptive insights into the human comedy, is the world's funniest phony.

Art classes offered

The Town Gallery, Ltd. of East Longmeadow is offering art classes that will begin after the first of the year. Beginning Jan. 5, there will be classes for teenagers after school, for children on Saturdays and for adults in the evenings.

For adults, watercolor will be taught by Alice McCarthy, basic drawing by Marilyn Pratt, oil painting by Fran McCarthy and printing by Nanci Costanzo.

Further information may be obtained by calling 525-1292.

The children's classes will be taught by Candy Jose. Teenagers' classes will be on Tuesdays and will be taught by different instructors.

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