



MEDIA INFORMATION

STEVE MARTIN

Steve Martin has been a comedy writer for The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour (for which he won an Emmy), Sonny and Cher, Pat Paulsen, Van Dyke and Company (for which he was nominated for an Emmy), Ray Stevens, Glen Campbell and numerous others.

Ask Steve what made him funny and he says, "Orange County--Disneyland." Steve, who admits to having "done terrible things to my dog with a fork," "rolled a jelly bean up an incline," and "sat on a lemon meringue pie," is actually a very serious person.

In a brown cardboard box at Steve Martin's parents' house in Corona Del Mar ("Use the Orange County angle--we don't mind," his father advises), jumbled in with the trick ropes and card packs, magician's flesh paint and old fan letters, is a signed program from "It's Vaudeville Again--A Wally Boag Production." The Poodleairs were on the bill, doing "Putting on the Dog." So was sixteen-year-old Steve Martin, billed as "Mouth and Magic." Wally Boag, comedian at Disneyland's Golden Horseshoe Revue, was Steve Martin's god.

Steve Martin grew up in Disneyland. He started working there when he was ten, bicycling the couple of miles from his home in Garden Grove. He loved it all: dressing up as a little 1890's kid in a bow-tie, vest and straw hat, selling guidebooks or trick ropes in Frontierland, doing magic tricks at Merlin's on Main Street. But, most of all, he loved visiting the Golden Horseshoe Revue to watch Wally Boag. He memorized Boag's act, because there was something clean about it. Good jokes and delivery. And balloon animals. Serious balloon animals.

"There were just magical, mystical nights there in the summertime. Fireworks every night at nine o'clock, lights in the trees--and they had this dance band that played music from the forties. I had this friend, and we'd follow two girls around for hours and never even talk to them. At night, it was incredible. So real....but I don't know how seriously I took it."

"I was taken to church, but I hated it." He's sitting in an armchair in his bedroom at the new house. His friend, Vic, an antique dealer who lost a bundle to him playing poker, is staying with him and paying him back by helping him decorate. The house is open, airy. Blue Persian rug, puffy brown sofa, chrome blinds. A plump-cheeked tabby and a sleek calico nest in the beamed ceiling, using one of Steve's collection of nineteenth-century American paintings to gain footholds up to their bed. "Steve's never shown his emotions toward anything," someone says. "That's why he likes cats."

"Every Sunday, every Sunday, I'd have to dress up in wool pants that itched like crazy and put on a tie and sit and listen to things I never understood. I stopped going to that stupid church as soon as I could." He's an atheist now, though he thinks the church is good because it teaches poor people ethics. "In one sense, it would be enviable to hang your whole life on one thing....I could hang my whole life on show business, but I'd kill myself. I could hang my whole life on paintings...."

He's looking at his new painting: pure, ripe, perfect strawberries. "You desire something and you attain it, and it's not what you thought it was, or it's not what you wanted it to be. With paintings, you can be, sort of like, safe. You get them and they stay exactly the same. They don't bother you....they take the place of people, sometimes, too." That's why he wants money. To buy more paintings.

Of course, he's always made good money. Five hundred dollars a week when he was only twenty-one and writing for The Smothers Brothers. Then the fifteen hundred-a-week job with The Glen Campbell Good-Time Hour that he quit after two weeks on principle. Not because of censorship, but because he thought it was so dumb. Then the years of writing for Ray Stevens, Sonny and Cher, Pat Paulsen, John Denver and Dick Van Dyke.

His stint with The Smothers Brothers led to the other television assignments but his love affair with television comedy writing drew quickly to an end. "I did a couple of summer shows and then I realized....I gotta get back to performing."

Which of course wasn't a bad idea. It was at this time that comedy was becoming revitalized by a new genre of comics who were soon to become known as the "new young comedians." But Martin doesn't feel a part of the new crowd since the majority of the people working in this new idiom of comedy are essentially young and inexperienced.

"Like everybody else, I'd like to be considered outside that cult," he says with no reservation. Martin, however, will defend the new comedy and not shrug it off as effete snobbery.

"There IS a new comedy," he asserts, "and that is defined by the new comedians, but there's a difference between being professional and defining new comedy by a couple of routines."

While Martin will cite people like Jack Benny, Red Skelton, Jerry Lewis and Pat Paulsen as early influences, his material is so original it's hard to detect even the slightest similarity with any of them. Martin also takes pride in the fact that while he thought Lenny Bruce was intensely funny, he has not taken any of his material, which seems to be the key to success for many comedians of his genre. It is also Martin's authentic love of laughter which makes his act as enjoyable as it is.

Is there a certain reason why Martin avoids political humor? "Yeah, I hate politics," he says perfunctorily. "I think it's a depressing subject and it's futile to talk about it.

"My act is intentionally apolitical," he says. "It's about the way people are in the ten feet that surround them. It's about what people think, not about what businesses do, or what governments do. It's about individuals and how distorted their thoughts can get just being alive in the world, and how you have to completely become crazy in order to survive....Of course, it varies from that just to get laughs."