

FEATURES

Chas & Suzette

Elliott Lefko

"It's fate the way it happened," recalls Suzette Couture of what happened to her partner Chas Lawther almost one year ago to this date.

"We were both working on pilots for television shows at the same time. Mine was for the CBC and had all the appearance of going. They had flown me to Vancouver and things looked good," she explains.

"Chas's project, on the other hand, looked like a distant possibility at best. I mean a one camera, All-Night Show? Yet look what happened."

What happened was immense popularity for one half of Toronto's best comedy cabaret team. Chuck the Security Guard, a character Chas played, became last year's cult hero. Even at ole York, a small society would gang up in resident common rooms for early morning Chuck watching.

"Stage is a luxury"

The All Night Show was canned during the summer, replaced by reruns without the host, and without the one camera.

Chas and Suzette, partners in comedy for the last few years, will continue to perform their *Joined At The Hip* Show, which they first ran at the Blue Angel and which they'll be bringing to York this Wednesday night for their Vanier Concert.

"Our show will include three different sets; it's an evening with Chas and Suzette," says Couture, the more outgoing of the two. "We'll be weaving bits of *Joined At The Hip* in with some new stuff. We also have an experimental set."

The two have decided not to write a "new show." "Stage to us is a luxury," says Suzette. "At one point we were going to, but why throw away good material. There's this pressure on comedians, and comedy writers to turn over their material constantly where a musician say will keep the stuff he likes and build sets from them."

During the Toronto Theatre Festival last spring Chas and Suzette produced *Joined At The Hip* at The Blue Angel, subtitled it, "Comedy You Can Dance To". The tag had apparently come from an actual experience.

Joined At The Hip—comedy cabaret that you can dance to



"We were playing this place in Mississauga called Chuckles ('a little song, a little dance, a little seltzer down your pants') which is now defunct," says Chas. "They had strippers downstairs, and where we played they had this big dance floor in front of

the stage. The people you were playing to were eating their dinners along the sides, and lining up at the buffet for ribs. The chef would walk right across the floor in front of us."

"We're our own band," adds Suzette. "We like the idea of sets. We want to take our 'hits' and re-shape them or add an electric instrument. Taking a character for us is like taking an instrument which you're playing in a song a certain way, and you like that so you extent that."

"And the fantasy goes further. You've got someone in your band who is on accents, someone who is on shtick. It's a whole idea we've got."

The *Joined At The Hip* show and the new material are the result of four hours a day practising that the two try to maintain. The amount of time was decreased to two, when Chas was doing Chuck, and it had to be cut down at present while Suzette plays Pierre Burton's mother in a dramatic series for the CBC.

The way they work is to sit down and discuss the newspaper, and what each has found

amusing of late.

The two began together when they found that their humour was intertwined and they both enjoyed playing characters. Chas had been working as a comedian at Yuk Yuk's Komedy Kabaret (both the old and the new ones), while Suzette had been working in theatre "doing mostly drama, Pinter, Brecht.

"I didn't like being myself in front of them," Suzette says explaining the beginning of the relationship. "It was difficult to decide on the version of yourself on stage. I watch the old comic teams, and how they get along. It's not the timing that's good, but the style."

The seamless part happens occasionally with the Toronto team too. "Sometimes you lose yourself in the character," marvels Chas. "When that happens you're really doing well."

The key ingredient to improvisation according to the two is trust. "Sometimes I don't know where Suzette is taking an idea. She'll surprise me, and force me to take my character further," says Chas.

They don't plan to work together exclusively. "We need to do other things," says Suzette. "It's like a marriage and the people are having an affair. My working with other people makes me grateful to work with Chas."

Both feel that they can accomplish what they want in Toronto. Although according to Suzette they're looking to video rather than playing live too often.

"In all our time at The Black Cat, we had maybe one-twentieth the audience of the All-Night Show. And the irony is that the Black Cat was where we had our strongest-most interesting ideas. A whole variety of concepts and characters and only about 4000 people saw us."

And says Chas, there just aren't that many comedy venues. "At one point it looked like every small town in Canada was going to open a comedy club, but now it seems there's only Yuk Yuk's," he observes.

Suzette believes that they're only a year away from doing a conceptual show for the CBC.

So they'll continue to play away until their number is called.

"When you're young you have a five year plan for the future. 'If I'm not in L.A., and not in a series...' but as you survive," Suzette says. "You think I'm not a household name, but my work is tremendously satisfying. That's important."

U.S. and France: international human rights gangsters

Marc Epprecht

This is the conclusion of a two-part series.

The subtitle of Noam Chomsky's and Edward Herman's *After the Cataclysm* is "Post-War Indochina and the Reconstruction of Imperial Ideology." It picks up the general theme introduced in *The Washington Connection*, that is, that the U.S. is engaged in systematic empire-building and that this subversive, anti-democratic activity is veiled behind a curtain of propaganda drawn by the government with the full cooperation of the so-called Free Press. In this, volume two of *The Political Economy of Human Rights*, the authors subject their thesis to an in-depth analysis of a single case in point — post-

1975 Western treatment of the three Indochinese nations which felt the brunt of the American military assault on the Southeast Asia.

Chomsky and Herman are clearly not apologists for communist rule in those countries. They deplore crimes against humanity whatever the cause and do not shy from recognizing that serious abuses of human rights unquestionably have taken place in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. But, they say, it is not enough to simply decry these without first understanding the historical background of the region, nor to limit oneself — purely for the purposes of national ideology — to denouncing and denying aid to only these countries.

First of all, the authors present historical precedents to

effectively illustrate the depth of Western hypocrisy regarding concern for human rights.

They compare numbers of political refugees (the American Revolution created proportionately more than have fled from Vietnam) and post-war behaviour of Western countries (for instance, the number of reprisal killings of Nazi collaborators in France is proportionately far higher, with far less justification, than killings in Vietnam and possibly even Cambodia). They point out with great irony that it is the U.S. and France — the two imperial powers with the most abysmal record of human rights violations in Southeast Asia ("the biggest international gangsters since World War Two")

— which have the most self-righteous foreign policies today.

The authors then briefly examine the recent history of Indochina, reminding us of the extent of American and French brutality there and that the physical legacy of their destruction is still acutely felt. For instance, large areas have been rendered into virtual desert by defoliation and craterization. Most of the infrastructure was destroyed. There are villages that suffer nearly 100% mortality rates due to the chemicals that were dumped on them. Unexploded bombs litter the countryside which continue to go off, exacting a heavy toll in lives. As for the psychological legacy of more than 30 years of colonial, genocidal warfare, the authors leave that to our own speculation.

With these irrefutable facts in mind, a systematic examination of media coverage of Indochina since 1975 is made.

On the issue of Indochina, conformity in the media is especially desired in order to 1) exculpate the West for its pre-1975 role, 2) justify the withholding of aid and 3) to show

the rest of the Third World that it doesn't pay to reject the capitalist mode of development. To instill these ideological lessons, facts are often dispensed with, regardless of whether they overwhelmingly contradict the basic propaganda line. Likewise is common decency discarded, as witnessed by our continuing efforts to punish the wreckage left by the most devastating imperialist attack in history.