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# Med Show on again

by Elaine Ostry

"Hey everybody, where's my damn ukelele?!" shouts a man in medieval costume in the middle of the stage. It's the dress rehearsal of the Med Show, which premieres Wednesday, January 28, and runs until Saturday night (followed by a 'can't miss' hall party at the Nurses Residence).

The Med Show first premiered in 1918, and became an annual event, featuring burlesque and risqué skits—until 1927, when critical opposition forced the tradition to end.

In 1950, the Med Show was revived and called "The Merry Meds", put on by the medicine and nursing students, later becoming exclusive to medical students.

Only once did the show submit to complaints of immorality: Med Show '55 was the first clean Med Show — and an utter flop.

It is easy enough to understand why someone would be offended by the Med Show. The humour is centered around sex and other bodily functions, as well as diseases.

The humour ranges from physical crudity to witty puns, sprinkled with medical terms. Each class performs a skit, usually a parody of a movie, interspersed with parodies of commercials.

For example, the Phase I show this year is called "King Dong". The Med Show also features the Flaming Ladies chorus line ("I'm a Flaming Lady, I'm in Medicine baby, and I'm hot") and the men's Cretin Choir ("Leprosy; I'm not half the man I used to be"), and an opening act of dance.

Each year a professor, whose identity is revealed only at the end of the show, is invited to act with the graduating class.

How do the medical students react to the traditional comments about the sexism of the Med Show? What are their reasons for putting on this risqué show? I interviewed three graduating students involved in the production of the show.

"The thing about the Med Show," says Student Intern Pete Olesen, "is that it brings up controversial issues, like bodily functions. But these things aren't gross, they're common . . . it's just that people don't want to talk about them — but we do!

"For instance, how many people do you know who enjoy talking about their stool? Well, the things that you think are crude or disgusting are part of our daily routine as med students. We hack on bodies, talk about bodily functions in lectures, ad nauseum, and we've stuck our fingers up everyone's orifices, therefore nothing is sacred anymore, and now we've got to let it all out on stage," said Olesen.

"Our intent in the Med Show is to have fun. We're just as moral as anyone else. By insulting everybody, we insult no one. Our intent is to insult everybody, but we just don't have time, and we apologize for leaving any minority, be it sex, faculty, race, religion, or profession, out of the Med Show."

Student Intern Carol Ostry agreed with the above comments, adding that "doctors are potentially bawdy people because we spend all day working with bodily functions, seriously asking people whether they've farted during the past twenty-four hours, therefore we have a high threshold of crudity. The things we discuss avidly over lunch would revolt most people . . . but you know, the Med Show is not all crudity! A lot of time and effort goes into its production, and we try to instill a lot of humour, not just shock effect, into the show. Anyway, med students work hard during the year, and we need a break . . . the Med Show is a good release after having to subscribe to the typical doctor image in the hospital."

The Master of Ceremonies, Student Intern Naved Ali, thinks that the complaints about the Med Show are unjustified: "The Med Show is not racist nor sexist: any degrading jokes about women are more than matched by degrading jokes about men."

All of the students I talked to agree that complaints about immorality are much ado about nothing, and that the Med Show should be viewed in the proper perspective.

As Ali says, "There is a lot of suffering in the world, and doctors see a lot of it . . . they do a lot of good, so why shouldn't they show a sense of humour once in a while? It's more offensive to me to know that there are drunks on 97th Street starving to death because the rich think they're inferior . . . that's far more offensive than watching some

guy on stage trying to be funny. Real problems in real life are always more important than anything on stage."

"It's not a big deal," says Olesen, "the audience knows what to expect from the Med Show and we deliver their expectations." To demonstrate the importance of the Med Show to campus, Olesen offered this analogy: "Only 10 per cent of the students on campus go to the Med Show. That's the same percentage that votes in the student union elections."

So it seems that the Med Show will continue its tradition of bawdy humour this week, and that the students behind the show see no reason to change it.

They share the attitude that if you don't appreciate such humour, then don't go to the show.



## From Centre Field

*"This ashtray is a  
smoke-free zone"*

by Alex Shetsen

If Franklin Delano Roosevelt were here today, he would shudder in his boots.

FDR, you will recall, is the US president who in 1940 enunciated the "Four Freedoms" that North America prides itself on having, and sneers at much of the rest of the world for not having.

The problem, unfortunately, is that even in North America, the four freedoms are not universal. Think about it. If you're a smoker, for instance: can you announce in polite company (freedom of speech) that you smoke?

No! Can you smoke publicly (worshipping the god of nicotine — freedom of religion)? Not too much nowadays, and possibly not at all very soon! Do you have freedom from the want of nicotine? Not very much, if you can't have any!

And finally, is there any freedom from fear for you when you've got goodie-goodies, reformed smokers, and other radicals constantly after your neck (or is that *your butt*? None whatsoever!).

The greatest problem of our society is that while harping constantly about our supposed freedoms, we are constantly making laws, ourselves, that defeat those freedoms. Consider the recent spate of anti-smoking bylaws and proposals. We claim that we have freedom of speech and action — to the point of electing a government freely that can then misrepresent us. But it is not our public freedoms, but our private ones, that we withhold from ourselves. Of these, the freedom to smoke, interestingly enough, is among the most fundamental.

Why, you may ask? Simply because, if properly controlled, it harms no one, and offers but a temporary pleasure to the smoker. And, of course, with the current propaganda everywhere against smoking, surely every smoker

knows exactly what he may or may not be doing to himself (or herself).

It is the smokers' basic private freedom to do with themselves whatever they want that these bylaws defeat.

We all realize, of course, that smoking often causes lung cancer and other illnesses to the smoker. But imagine a smoker who has been denied the right to smoke.

He or she suffers from something much more serious: nicotine withdrawal — which can lead to neurosis, bad moods, and at times violent behaviour. Which would you rather have: smokers (supposedly) killing themselves or (non-) smokers killing others?

The worst thing, of course, is that many of the most radical proposals are made by recent quitters. (Take for example the one publicised in yesterday's papers.) With a zeal typical of the recent converts to the cause, they set about to make life of their ex-comrades-in-misery even more miserable. This is highly unfortunate, except when we disallow smoking patients to smoke while recovering in the hospital from misfortunes which have nothing to do with smoking. Then, it's criminal.

Those who draw from all this that I am a smoker are sadly deluded. I am not. And I would not want to be. Aside from all else, smoking is a rather dirty habit — for what it does to the smoker, not what it does to the non-smoker. But I can identify with the smoker caught in the trap.

Nothing we do should result in anything other than in discouraging new smokers. But let's leave the smokers alone slowly to die in peace. And let's make sure that we set out special smoking rooms in public places.

The way things are going right now, of course, that might well happen. But on the ashtrays will be the inscription: "This ashtray has been declared a smoke free zone."

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