San Fernando Valley State College

MR. GOLDBERG, THE JEWISH COWBOY
AND OTHER SONGS AND STORIES.

An Abstract
Submitted in Partial Satisfaction of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Drama

by
Phil Stevenson

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ABSTRACT

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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Goldberg, the Jewish Cowboy and Other Songs and Stories was the first sampling of storytelling theatre offered to the students of Valley State College as a master's production project. The reasons for doing it were: (1) It offered an opportunity to further develop and integrate vocal and imaginative skills. (2) It illustrated for other actors the art of storytelling, a rarely used performance medium. In addition, because of the show's highly improvisational nature, it could serve to educate an audience as to the value of improvisation as an art form. Finally, "Mr. Goldberg . . ." might provide an audience with an opportunity to see different performing skills such as acting, improvising, singing, integrated into a kind of theatrical performance that could provide them with a different kind
of theatrical experience.

"Mr. Goldberg, the Jewish Cowboy" offered a challenge to student performers and technicians not typical of plays from other theatrical traditions. For instance, the stories and songs reflected a wide variety of mood and characterization, calling for an equally wide variety and fluency of techniques on the part of storyteller and technician in order to achieve a theatrically unified, integrated program. Songs, stories, lights, sound and settings were designed to complement each other. These relationships called for careful pacing and handling of transitions from one selection to the next.

ANALYSIS

Mr. Goldberg, the Jewish Cowboy and Other Songs and Stories is a collection of materials reflecting the experiences, observations and feelings of the writer-performer. The author wishes the audience to accompany him on his "Odyssey" of time, place and event. Starting with a story of "walking down that old black line" as a young lad, the storyteller introduces the audience to a galaxy of characters encountered in his travels about the country. The material takes the audience forward and backward in virtual time; they are in the nineteen-forties at one moment and in the nineteen-seventies the next. The end of the first act of this two-act performance depicts the storyteller, now in his thirties, setting out across the
United States once again. In the beginning of the second act we are watching two men set out across a section of the same country, but their America is an America of the eighteen-eighties. The two men are buffalo trappers, one of whom is our storyteller, now representing himself as Coke, the old buffalo skinner.

The primary thematic intention is this: to explore the individuality of man and to show how this search for individuality is affected by his relationships with other men. In this respect, the storyteller-narrator offers himself as the "questing, searching man" and his songs and stories reflect his own, personal reaction to the people and events he encounters.

PREPARATION

Materials for the "Goldberg" presentation were selected over a period of weeks before formal rehearsal time. Once selected, the songs and stories were then arranged to form a balanced, diversified evening of theatre in thematic and emotional terms. Because only one performing talent was involved, the performer was able to rehearse materials at times and places of his own choosing. Rehearsal time, in terms of stage blocking, setting of furniture and lights, and timing of sound effects to stage movement lasted for five consecutive evenings.
ASSESSMENT

Audience response was quite favorable. In a pre­sentational program of this nature, set intervals between stories and songs allowed for moment-to-moment audience reaction to the materials being presented. However, while the production did evidence a reasonable degree of artistic achievement, it also suffered from some shortcomings, most of which lay in the areas of diction and pace. In some cases, the lines of the characters in the stories were delivered too rapidly to be readily understood. Character dialects were also too hastily rendered at times. These lapses of technique, however, did not interfere with general audience communication.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

One of the reasons for the success of the performances lay in pre-production planning. All members of the crew worked well together. They quickly established a sense of trust and artistic cameraderie that was ultimately reflected in the presentation itself. The rehearsal sequence was scheduled to allow time to experiment with sets and lights and, above all, to make a final selection of stories and songs.

"Mr. Goldberg" allowed students of educational theatre to take some theatrical risks and search for new methods and techniques of production. Hopefully, we now
know something further about storytelling techniques and how they can be employed and adjusted to the demands of a theatrical environment.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


