

by Adam Quest

What is the entertainer's agenda in an often cold, anonymous urban milieu where initial meetings and interpersonal mire is often little more than a parade of style, a poseur promenade? Within this social dynamic, willful or accidental obliteration of personal history and personal pathology (filthy little secrets show only in traces if at all) is common. In this nebulous

space, the momentary fragment counts for much but usually means next to nothing and begs to be forgotten; trashed in the psychic dumpster; liquidated in a graveyard of the heart and mind. The entertainer's imperative is to fill dead air, keep them laughing, and retain a spot in lazy, cavernous memory banks: "You may not like me, but at least you'll remember me." A mantra infused with regret and despair. Imploded misery, solitude, emptiness, and despair explodes outward as a mushroom cloud of yuk yuk frenzy.

To "slay" the room, the term professional funny men use to refer to a hugely successful, rolling-on-the-floor show, is to feel like the conquering king that all performers wish to feel like when they ascend the stage—the would-be throne, the height, the seat of power in the room. Sometimes, though very rarely, the stage is the throne of an era and spawns a trans-showbiz mythology: Lenny Bruce, Sammy Davis Jr., Sinatra, Beatles, Rolling Stones. The stage then becomes the castle of the cult hero.

The rhetoric of performance unfolds in a realm of nonverbal, mass ecstasy—the elevated stage, the "captive" audience—and is rooted in power and passivity (audience). To slay is to conquer; to slay is to render speechless, followed by fulsome applause and rapt, cheering approval. There is no feeling even similar.

A few years ago I worked as a volunteer at the Open Center in Soho, a hotbed of new (w)age cant. One time a windbag guru, a raconteur with a holistic-mystic bent was delayed at the airport so I filled in and did some impromptu schtick: a rogue shaman whose "path" included stops in Hollywood, Vegas, Bombay, Nepal, Tibet, a short stint writing copy on Madison Ave, a few weeks wiping cum from the floors of Show World; knocking around the East Village too, trying my luck as a trendsetter. "They used to ask what's your sign, now it's how many channels do you get." Bow before the satellite dish. Say hello to your new god. Turn on to uplink ecstasy. Scroll me baby, toggle my mind. I do believe the new transcendence is in effect. I yearn for the arena, but you will have to do. Every man a fist flying horde unto himself, a throng of one, a hyper fan to whom I will give my best, my all, and then a little more for I

am the Judy Garland of the underground, rife with pathos and all a quiver: "I love you all" . . . Yes, the shaman was a showman. American Mysticism: commerce intertwined with worship, that pseudo

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hoodoo voodoo vibe, the spirit rises from the spleen.

The Tao of Voice class at new age central: Karaoke detritus and rock'n'roll wannabes. Joey Heatherton was there in her anorexic glory. She was bold and brassy and savagely sassy. Showbiz emanated from her every pore and I couldn't concentrate on the breathing exercises. I kept singing the song from the Serta Perfect Sleeper commercial in my head. I thought she would make me her star. The ultimate message of the class: automate the details of technique in the heat of performance.

