

Offbeat Martin Mull captivates his followers

By ETHEL SIMMONS

Review

Not being a devoted fan of Martin Mull or a regular viewer of the "America 2-Night" television show, I came to the Birmingham Theatre for his early show Saturday night with an eager curiosity.

In the audience I was surrounded by Mull's cult followers who are addicted to his show, his records, his humor. The curtain rose and there was Mull playing a baby grand piano in a traditional living room setting backdrop by a painted exterior of formal gardens. A roar of pleasure rose from the comedy concert-goers and they greeted their hero with a standing ovation.

Mull, in a white suit and with his longish, sun-streaked blond hair, looked angelic/devilish as he sang his opening number, a song "for alcohol abuse." His voice was somewhat hoarse but happy.

Although he has been billed as a satirist ("America 2-Night" is a tongue-in-cheek talk show with phony guests), Mull let loose a few real barbs at the Birmingham Theatre.

HE DID COMMENT, "The dressing rooms are beautiful. I didn't expect to find low-income housing, but these are really nice."

And Mull insisted that "I maybe don't understand the charisma of Birmingham," and gave the audience a comedy test, telling them first a joke

about Ralph Waldo Emerson visiting Henry Thoreau in prison and then suggesting a more coarse joke, which he didn't proceed to tell. The audience obviously passed the test and "Birmingham" was allowed to listen to Mull's preference of intellectual humor.

He professed amusement that couples had come to the theater on dates.

"I love to see people dating," Mull declared. "They're not going to believe it back in L.A. That's darling!"

He dedicated his final song, "Do the Nothing," "to the inner city of Detroit." In this dance tune he sings, pauses for long periods of time and just relaxes or tends to other business.

MULL'S NAME seems appropriate to his style, for he seems to be mulling things over, in a whimsical way, as he chats with the audience. But I swear it didn't seem \$15 worth (the top ticket).

Mull made a few jokes about the ticket prices, saying, "Did it cost each of you \$30 to get in? Oh, only \$15?" He indicated he wouldn't give his full show for these prices. Nobody seemed to think they got taken by Mull. Instead they loved it.

Composer Mull's songs included "What's Say You and I Got Normal for a Change" ("Let's quit rock-n-roll-ing."); "I Got the Polish Blues" ("I made the bed and then got up."); "Men" a sea chantey sung by Columbus' crew; the U.S.'s first folk song: "Everyone I Ever Loved" about an egotist in love with himself; and "That's Alright If You Just Want to Go to Sleep Tonight," about a husband whose wife has a headache.

The funniest song Mull sang he explained as too ribald to sing in front of a family audience. He promised to sing the nonoffensive parts and hum

the suggestive material.

What he hummed was not four-letter words but deliciously bold images, as he sang about an orgy. He went from a hum to "whips and chains;" more humming, then "Great Danes."

MULL SANG most of his songs seated on the sofa, strumming his guitar, smoking a cigarette and sipping from a glass.

He talked about his two ABC albums. At one point he pulled his new "record" out of a grocery bag and showed it to the audience. It was not in a jacket, and he helpfully explained

you should not put the needle on the paper circle because it wouldn't play. Mull also plugged Marty's record store, next door to the theater.

He indicated it prompted he would come back for an encore. At the end of the show, the audience gave him a standing ovation. He came back and sang another song, and the show closed with another standing ovation.

Mull was in town to perform two Saturday night concerts at the Birmingham Theatre. Both were sold out, and he has been subsequently booked for two more shows this Saturday. Mull also told the audience that

"America 2-Night" will continue. "Primarily because of the interest in Detroit. I think we're going to be renewed," he said.

DICK PURTAN, the WXYZ-Radio personality who has a few fans of his own, introduced the concert.

Mull's stint was preceded by the Brookside Jazz Ensemble, a brass big jazz band that originated at Brookside School Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills. The band, although terrific at P.Jazz and other outdoor concerts, overwhelmed the Birmingham Theatre stage.

Estelle Parsons opens fall season

Estelle Parsons will recreate the role that won her a Tony Award nomination for Best Actress on the stage of the Birmingham Theatre this fall.

"Miss Margarita's Way" is just one of the hit Broadway productions that will be featured in the theater's first season.

The Broadway season will open July 10, with a musical entitled "By Strouse." It features the music of three-time Tony Award Winner Charles Strouse, who has written the

score of the current smash hit "Annie," as well as "Applause," "Bye Bye Birdie" and many other successful shows.

Strouse is also known for "Those Were the Days," the theme song from "All in the Family."

OTHER PRODUCTIONS included in the first season's series include: "Les Girls, Les Girls" starring Tony Martin and Cyd Charisse, Sept. 12-23; "Miss Margarita's Way" starring Estelle Parsons, Oct. 9-21; The John House-

man Atting Company, Oct. 23-30; "The Passion of Dracula" starring Jean Pierre Aumont, Nov. 6-18, and "P.S. Your Cat Is Dead" starring Roddy McDowell in late January.

Theater owners Gary Deeb and Edward Fuller, commenting on sales on the new series subscription, said, "Preseason subscription sales have far exceeded our expectations. Our season series department is overwhelmed with mail orders. "Undoubtedly the first season of the

Birmingham Theatre is a total success."

The Birmingham Theatre opened as a legitimate theater May 18 this year, following extensive renovation. The theater will host the full spectrum of the performing arts, including Broadway plays, a jazz and dance series, children's theater and cabaret acts. Birmingham Theatre Season Subscriptions can be bought by mail or by calling the Season Subscription Department at 644-3535.

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