

Classic comedian recalled for his gift to a teen-ager

Without question, comedian Peter Sellers will be revered as the famous Inspector Clouseau. But I will fondly remember the less known Sellers, the Sellers who entertained a young teen-ager in the strange and mysterious art theaters.

A while back, like around 1960, there existed in Detroit real art theaters. Unlike later art theaters which specialized in X-rated films, these featured the best of European cinema.

Sure, there was an occasional Brigitte Bardot movie, but for the most part, they showed the kind of films which today are seen at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

They were my father's favorite haunts. Many a weekend, he would peruse the movie guide and pick out one of these films to broaden our horizons.

My older brother and I weren't always as delighted about these cultural excursions as was my father, but when you're young, an adventure is adventure, no matter.

Besides, art theaters were different. They all seemed to be located in some strange part of town where we never went during daylight hours. And in those days of the elaborate Fox and Michigan theaters, these small movie houses were a novelty.

brightly lit popcorn machine, the art theaters just had a small card table in the lobby with a few chocolate candy bars and a coffee urn.

The cramped lobbies were full of strange looking characters with beards and berets. They huddled in corners talking over the most recent offerings at Wayne State or the latest literature.

Beyond the lobby doors could be heard the echo of foreign voices. Quietly, the crowd would meander into the theater proper. The movie had started.

This was quite a contrast for a young teen-ager growing up in a time when Mamie Eisenhower's pillow hats were considered all the rage.

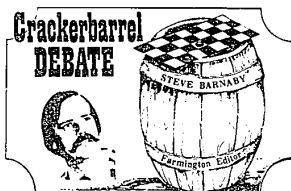
Needless to say, I became somewhat of an expert at reading subtitles, which wasn't always an easy task, especially when the white letters were cast against an equally white background.

I distinctly remember hunching down in my seat, squinting my eyes so I couldn't see the subtitles. The diversion of trying to guess what the foreign-speaking actors were saying was a welcome relief.

But one week, I had a pleasant surprise. As the movie screen lit up, I noted that the actors were speaking English.

To be sure, it was difficult to understand. It was real English, the kind spoken in the British Isles. But I was soon to find the words mattered little.

FOR THE MAN on the screen was - ne Peter



Sellers, an English actor virtually unknown to American audiences.

And the movies were the funniest I had ever seen or was to ever see.

Over the next two decades, Sellers was to go on to become world-renowned for his portrayals of Inspector Clouseau, the mad Dr. Strangelove, and Chance, the gardener in "Being There."

And while I enjoyed these later films, I'll always remember Sellers in those early black and white films with the scratchy sound tracks which the ma-

jority of America has never seen and most likely never will.

I couldn't tell you the name of even one of these films. But they were vintage Sellers — strange characters, mostly old men, coping with a world that was less than willing to cooperate.

For this teen-ager, the Seller's films were a welcome relief from some of the more dark and dismal foreign movies.

In coming years, we'll have to suffer through countless Seller film festivals with accompanying dissertations of each film's true meaning.

But that's a bunch of hogwash.

Seller's enjoyed comedy for its own sake. He created dozens of characters for two simple reasons — he wanted to make his audience laugh, and he relished the creative challenge it took to do it.

HE WAS A MASTER of the comedic art. He was one of the best ever — better than Chaplin.

Through the years, his fans realized that Sellers would die at an early age because of his heart problems. We feared that end, because few could make us laugh like he did.

We will miss him — especially the teen-ager who met him in those mysterious art theaters that no longer exist.

Jackie Klein writes

Suffering through a cultural shock

Art and artists have always held an awesome fascination for me.

Having taken one art class — in which I drew three out-of-proportion bottles and a dubious-looking apple — I saw the light. I felt like pieces of broken charcoal and drawing paper in a world of vibrant oil paintings and subtle water colors.

Those who can paint. Those who can't are often art buffs like me. So you can imagine how impressed I was when on a recent trip to New York I got tickets to see "Pablo Picasso: A Retrospective." It's the culminating exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art's 50th anniversary celebration.

Standing in line to get in to see 900 works of the prolific Picasso, I felt as though I was dripping with culture. But it might have been the 99 degree heat.

My culture shock set in when a bearded, balding artist-junkie standing in the street handed me a leaflet. It said, "Dear Picasso Fan, I

am sorry that I have to tell you that you have fallen victim to one of the greatest con artists of our time — Picasso.

"HE AND his reactionary promoters really pulled a job on you. They convinced you that Picasso is the final solution in modern art. The vast number of art historians universities spit out every year don't want to admit they wasted a lot of time on Picasso's junk."

The letter goes on, calling Picasso the biggest opportunist in the art world who changed his style and form language more freely than most people change their clothes. The message is from a young German-born Brooklyn artist who identifies himself only as Paul.

Although my faith in Picasso and art in general was slightly shaken, my reporter's curiosity compelled me to talk to Paul who was still handing out leaflets to art lovers outside the museum.

Paul told me he burned a lithograph, described as a hand-signed Picasso, in a public protest because he thought it was a piece of junk. He declined to estimate its value and said, "To sell it would corrupt me, although, believe me, I could use the money."

THE APPARENTLY self-styled, impoverished artist maintained Picasso hadn't been an influence on modern art since his 1907-1914 period. Paul railed at museum officials who, he contended, wield a tremendous power to influence people and tell them what is modern.

The museum should be named "The Museum of Remote Art," Paul said.

"I'm going to file suit to force this institution either to show modern art or change its name," he said. "This place should be concentrating on art of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s."

When Paul described his own

work as kinetic art with light and mixed media, I was beginning to think he was loosely wrapped and didn't have both ears in the water. Kinetic means a branch of dynamics dealing with the effects of forces on the motions of material bodies. But what's light and mixed media?

PAUL SAID HIS art project 306 was publicly burning his hand-signed Picasso print. In his leaflets, he offers matches to owners of inferior Picassos so they can do the same.

He also offers a gift he claims will become a collector's item in appreciation of "your uniqueness." It's a certificate to sign. Mine says, "This is a certificate that Jackie Klein is a creation of art who is reflecting her century better than most other art — Paul."

I finally made the big time in the world of art. That's a real culture shock. And I bet you thought I was going to write about the Picasso exhibit.



Even the ol' editor has a bad day once in a while. Take last Thursday's editorial page, for instance. You remember that one. There was the Crackerbarrel Debate in all its glory, not once, but twice on the very same page. Oh well, like the editor said last Thursday, "We're not perfect, we still have to try harder." But Editor Steve Barnaby appreciates the fact that so many of you read his column and noticed.

Now that the Republican ball is over, decisions await

Now that the GOP ball is over, the convention anecdotes may flow endlessly for months.

Seems like everyone has something to reminisce about, one super celebrity encountered, some unique incident always to be remembered, and yes, the "one that just got away."

Mountains of red tape were cut through to get press credentials for media members to get into vital areas of coverage at the convention. Reporters also posed as photographers, delegates and even messengers to get onto the floor for a few precious moments.

Observer & Eccentric photographer John Stano,

who covers West Bloomfield and Troy, had the best luck borrowing credentials, getting into a pool for press passes and into prime press conferences.

For John, seeing Frank Sinatra and Elizabeth Taylor close up got to be ho-hum.

Yet a Southfield government teacher, Bea Sacks, may have had the best vantage point of all. She served as a runner for the UPI and for all four convention days was in the center of things delivering exposed film for development and such.

"It was a 'gopher' job but I thought as a government teacher it was a chance to see politics in action," she said.

IF MRS. BOB DOLE wasn't running to her ear for a radio interview, I might have gotten an interview myself at Northland Inn where the Kansas delegation stayed. But I did get to interview the senator's press secretary, Bob Waite.

He was distinguished by the crutches that surrounded him, souvenir of an injury incurred in the spring. Waite missed most of the sightseeing, not that his crutches deterred him — it was working from 6 a.m. to 2 a.m. most days that curtailed his fun.

But he gave Detroit an unqualified endorsement and vowed he'd be back — and with the Republican Party if he had his way.

If missing Mrs. Dole was a fleeting regret, my other "near miss" almost caused me to put my own husband, Jack, on my personal enemies list.

Driving home from work last Wednesday afternoon, I heard on the radio that Ronald Reagan and entourage had enjoyed lunch at a favorite watering spot in Hamtramck. And the beer and kielbasa flowed too.

Casually, I mentioned it to Jack when I got home. After all, Hamtramck is close to both our hearts, and his involvement through business is an intensive one.

"REAGAN, oh yeah, Mayor Kozerski called me Monday and invited me to have lunch with them. I turned him down," Jack answered unemotionally. Speechless (but just temporarily), I asked: "Didn't you think I might be interested in going? (Didn't you think I'd have killed to have gone, was what I was thinking?)"

And from Jack: "Never occurred to me."

Two or three times since, I have repeated my question and qualified it too. "You mean it never dawned on you I'd want to go?"

And from Jack: "Gee, the mayor would have loved to have you come whether or not I went. Really never thought of it."

Even though I didn't get to interview a presidential candidate, I once interviewed the wife of one.

Back in 1972, as a freelancer at the Democratic convention in Miami Beach, my hard-fought-for media tag got me into a press conference with Eleanor McGovern, whose husband was the man of the hour.



She promptly named Leonard Woodcock, then president of the UAW, as her favorite candidate for vice president, and I got a super Detroit story.

My presence at the conference went down in history when a picture of journalists interviewing the candidate's wife appeared on the front page of the Washington Star. I'd never have known but our daughter, Trivish, was working for HEW that summer and saw it in the paper.

There I was, sitting on the floor, leaning my notebook on a table where numerous tape recorders were pointed at the subject, playing my trade.

SOUTHFIELD ECCENTRIC photographer Mindy Saunders was playing her trade last Thursday in a super crush of photographers when her presence was recorded also.

If you look at last week's Time Magazine, you'll see a photo feature of convention coverage. In one picture you can see the blond hair, parted in the middle, and the eyes and nose of Ms. Saunders. She's at the bottom of the picture.

Her husband, Bill, found her at once.

And Eccentric reporter Alice Collins with photographer Dick Kelley got onto a train for a ride with the delegates and found themselves riding with several members of the Reagan family.

In another Miami incident, I had not a miss, but a hit. Striding through the lobby of the Doral Hotel (McGovern headquarters) one afternoon, nose buried in a press release, I walked right into a tall man.

Looking up (way up, he's well over six feet tall) to apologize, I stared into the blue eyes of a heavily made-up David Brinkley. He steadied me and walked on.

As for me, I was speechless and paralyzed for several minutes.

But that's the way it is. Just listen. Now that the GOP ball is over, there'll be lots of tales told.



George Bush and Ronald Reagan face the press on the final day of the GOP convention. While staff photographer Mindy Saunders was taking this shot, a

photographer for Time photographed her and lensmen at the press conference.