

## Yuck it up

Need a laugh to brighten your day? Yes? Then turned to Page 5D. Street Cracks' gets up close and personal with the masters of laughs, Richard Belzer and Chas Eilsner.

The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers

Monday, February 20, 1989 O&E

★1D



ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

The Ghoul, who is Ron Sweed, 40, was the self-declared king of Detroit Saturday night television for more than 10 years.

## The Ghoul and other things that go bump?

By Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

In most cities, a guy with a fright wig, wearing a pair of sunglasses with one lens poked out and a blue lab coat would draw stares.

In Cleveland, they ask for an autograph. "How about a 'Slay Sick,'" said the man in the get-up, dutifully signing his name for a teenager on Euclid Avenue. "All right, overday."

A crowd swells around the person known as The Ghoul. He has been off the air in his hometown of Cleveland for two years and since 1983 in Detroit. Yet in his heyday, The Ghoul was synonymous with Saturday night television in Detroit. In the 1970s and early 1980s, he was a horror movie host on UHF stations WKBD-TV Channel 50, WXON-TV Channel 20 and WGPR-TV Channel 62.

His show was pure madcap slapstick. There was no script. His zaniness often stretched the boundaries of acceptable standard television like gooey taffy.

Basting watermelons with a sledgehammer? The Ghoul was blowing up pumpkins (not to mention model cars) with M-80 firecrackers before Gallagher's hairline went south.

And David Letterman's stunts as a human bowl of Rice Krispees? The Ghoul once was a human hamburger — covered with ketchup and mustard (actually red and yellow paint) along with onions — when Letterman was probably still a weatherman in Indianapolis.

AND THAT Mr. Bill character on "Saturday Night Live"? The Ghoul was terrorizing a toy frog named "Froggie" before Chase, Belushi and Ackroyd were making it big on TV.

"Does Johnny Carson grab a bottle of Cheez Whiz and put gobs of it under his arms?" asked Dave Ivey of Ferndale, an art director on The Ghoul's show. "You don't see that everyday on TV."

The Ghoul's stunts reaped in the ratings, but didn't endear him to station managers along the way. He said one station had the show removed after two letters complained he was making fun of Polish people and the mentally retarded.

In light of today's trash TV, Ron Sweed can only laugh at the irony of it all.

Sweed, 40, is a Ghoul without a show. He attends Cleveland State University, finishing his degree in English, TV and film. He does occasional personal appearances and writes a column for an alternative newspaper in Cleveland.

Sweed is busily trying to get The Ghoul back on the air. There is talk of him returning to Cleveland TV by the fall. He hasn't pitched the show in Detroit for awhile.

Even he appears to have some doubts. And this is a person who, during his height in popularity, received three and four bags of mail a day and sold 400 to 500 Ghoul T-shirts and sweat shirts in one week in Detroit alone.

"IT'S BEEN awhile," said Sweed, gluing on his phony beard near a stairwell in a Cleveland shopping arcade. "Many people don't remember."

Apparently, they do. As The Ghoul poses for some photos, shoppers walk by and point to him and whisper to one another. A few people call out his name. A man who looked in his 30s shouts, "Still crazy after all these years."

Please turn to Page 4

### Warp Factor

Karlos Barney



A sticker for authenticity, Zeke the farm dog captures the true spirit of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony.

## Cleveland: More than Cheez Whiz, architecture

By Larry O'Connor  
staff writer

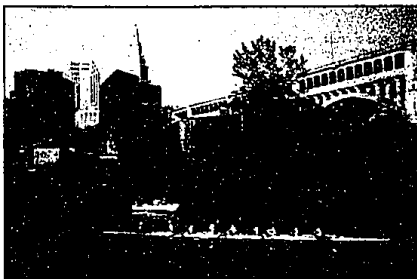
Cleveland in February? Surely, you jest.

But, hey, would we pull your leg? Don't let that post-Depression architecture fool you. Behind those cold, gray buildings is a happening city.

When we asked The Ghoul to be our Cleveland tour guide, we thought he'd take us to the Cheez Whiz factory.

Then he led us inside The Arcade. Outside it appears to be just another old building. But inside it is an ornate masterpiece of brass and copper, not to mention shops and restaurants.

The Arcade was built in the 1890s and looks as sharp now as it probably did then. Which sums up



MARK SCHWARTZ/Cleveland Convention Bureau

The Flats, a development of 30 riverfront restaurants and lounges in Cleveland, provides the backdrop for rowers along the Cuyahoga River.

present-day Cleveland, making the old look new again.

And this stuff about Cleveland being a mistake on the lake. Well, somebody must've had a big crash.

"That's ancient history," said Bob Ulas, communications director for the Convention and Visitors

Bureau of Greater Cleveland. "People are shocked when they come here for this first time."

ONE OF the main stops is The Flats, a development area near the Cuyahoga River with 30 riverfront restaurants and lounges. Warehouses have been trans-

formed into a slew of hot nightspots, including the rock and roll venue of Peabody's.

Hey, need a place to eat? Well, The Ghoul himself took us into one of his favorite haunts, Shorty's.

Shorty's is a nostalgia trip. A vintage Coca-Cola machine sits in the corner, a black and white TV broadcasts shows from the 1950s, and the waitresses dress in high school sock hop garb and dance on the tables to the hits of that era. The food, your basic fare of hamburgers and fries, is quite reasonable.

Across the way is Nautica, featuring even more clubs on the west bank (of the Cuyahoga River), such as Shooters, Club Cocomita, Nautica Slugs and the Boardwalk.

BUT THE Cleveland agenda is not all eat and drink. This city has culture, 500 square miles of it, in fact. University Circle features both the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, both highly rated in the country for their exhibits.

Of course, another exhibit hall in the works is the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame and Museum.

For information, call the Convention and Visitors Bureau of Greater Cleveland at (216) 621-4110.