

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SATURDAY, AUGUST 31, 1968

## Sahl (He's Not All Sunshine) Digressing at the Village Gate

**His Rambling Monologues  
Still Focus on Politics,  
With Even Less Hope**

By VINCENT CANBY

Mort Sahl can't understand why anyone might worry about a Republican victory in November. "It's like I got cancer and somebody tells me I may catch bronchitis."

The audience roared. Mr. Sahl laughed nervously and added: "I'll have more to say about this later. . . . Now where was I?"

Where he was is where he's been for most of his 15 or so years as one of this country's most bristly political and social satirists. He was in the midst of one of his typically long, rambling monologues, those digressions - within - digressions that make up the show he will be doing twice nightly at the Village Gate for the next two and a half weeks.

**Like an Aged Student**

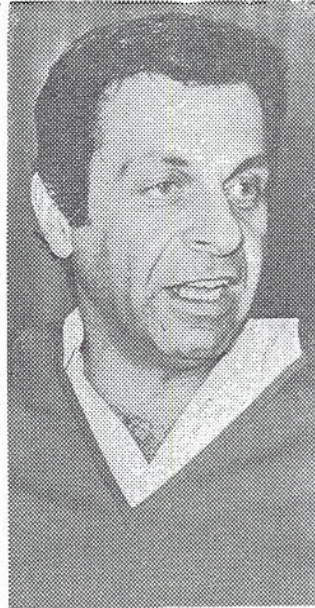
Dressed in tan slacks a red V-neck sweater and a blue shirt open at the neck, the 40-year-old California comedian looked rather like a prematurely aged college student. That is, he seemed a little tired, as if the rapid, often maddeningly logical twists and turns of his mind would not let him rest.

Speaking about the political spectacle in Chicago, he was somehow reminded of the time Jack Kennedy chastised him for saying that the Kennedy family, with \$400-million, was rich. "The three Rockefeller brothers," said Jack, "are you worth \$8-billion — now that's money!"

This, in turn, brought up the subjects of the New Testament ("It's rather like the Warren Report—there are a lot of quotes from Paul—he was Jewish"), Mayor Richard Daley, Hubert Humphrey, Marlon Brando and a culture in which it's possible to spend one's entire day watching talk shows on television. ("I was on one recently with this girl in an ostrich dress. When she sat down it looked like she was nesting. . . .")

Mr. Sahl, however, doesn't often resort to gags about girls in ostrich dresses. His point of view remains primarily political, as it was 10 years ago.

He has always sought a position that is beyond the gravitational pull of any political party, but since the liberal Establishment has replaced the conservative Establishment, the



The New York Times  
Mort Sahl

alternatives for salvation seem to have dwindled alarmingly.

Today there is about Mr. Sahl's humor a sense of wild dislocation. It's impossible to tell exactly when fantasy overtakes reality. In his performance the other night, the audience was convulsed when he read from volume 9, page 262, of The Warren Commission Report, a section dealing with the questioning of a janitor who once worked in Jack Ruby's nightclub.

**Barbs for the Democrats**

The janitor, asked to describe a dance called the Dirty Dog, which was performed at the club, answers something to the effect that "It's sickening and disgusting, especially if you do it right."

What the Eisenhower Republicans once were for him, the liberal Democrats have now become. "You know why the liberals say we should get out of Vietnam, why it's 'a senseless war'? Because we're losing." His view on race riots: "I don't condemn those who steal color TV sets, nor do I condone them. I'm a liberal that way."

On Hollywood's race consciousness: "In 'In the Heat of the Night,' Rod Steiger played a bigot, and Sidney Poitier played a Negro—to the best of his ability."

Mr. Sahl is giving a performance of nervous, fitful brilliance. If the point of view occasionally seems vitriolic to the point of paranoia, it's probably because the times may seem even more hopeless to the middle-aged than to the young.