

Joyce Haber

THE Arte Johnsons and President Nixon have a mutual fondness for one another. It started last weekend in Washington where Arte performed as a "special invited guest" for the White House correspondents' dinner honoring the President.

Mr. Nixon, like the other statesmen and correspondents, was fractured by Arte's "speech." It described the flight on the first German SST. It had, for example, Spiro Agnew as the plane's chief cook, with a dinner of "cold shoulder on hot tongue."



Arte Johnson

Arte devoted much of his act to swinging presidential adviser Henry Kissinger. Dr. Kissinger wasn't there that night; he was swinging with me and my husband and Frank Sinatra and his houseguest Governor Ronald Reagan down in Palm Springs. But I spoke to Henry next morning before he caught his flight back to Washington and he'd heard about Arte's jokes.

The jokes included Arte, using an American accent as the SST's flight steward, asking his audience for any questions they had about the trip. "Oh yeah, Mr. Kissinger," said Arte. "No, there will be no bunnies on this flight. Sorry . . . Mr. Kissinger, where are you going? Mr. Kissinger, Mr. Kissinger . . ."

"I'd love to meet Mr. Johnson some time," Dr. Kissinger told me. I told him he would, on his very next trip to the Western White House. Henry, moreover, will also meet Gisela, Arte's lovely, German-born wife. "Meeting the President," she says, "was the greatest thing that's happened to me except for marrying Arte. Ron Ziegler took us into his office and there was the President behind his desk. My knees were shaking, I was so frightened. Then he got up and it was like he shed the President. He became Mr. Nixon, a warm, charming man.

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HE said he was so happy to meet Arte because he enjoyed him on Laugh-In," said Gisela. (Arte isn't returning to Laugh-In this fall.) "He asked me if I wasn't proud of my husband because people loved him, and I said 'Mostly, Mr. President, I love my husband. Even if others stop loving him. I always will.'"

Gisela said that two nights later the President told her, "I have been thinking of what you said to me about Arte. I think that probably no one has ever said those words before in the President's office. If more people felt that way, I think many of our problems would be solved.



Dr. Kissinger

"Mrs. Johnson, I know you want to become an American citizen, but to me you are the most American person I've ever met."

"He was holding my hand," said Gisela. "The President held my hand. I asked, 'Mr. President, may I kiss you?' and I did."