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Los Angeles Free Press

# 'They are trying to bury me...'

On Saturday, Dec. 9 Free Press reporter Tony Anthony interviewed Mort Sahl at San Francisco's Hungry "i" to find out first hand why the New York revue, "An Evening With Mort Sahl," did not open as advertised.

Although on the surface the issues involved seem to be a business disagreement, it is noticeable that Mort Sahl has been blacklisted in many places—after beginning his vigorous discussion of the Kennedy Assassination.

F.P.: Tonight you used a great amount of material we've never heard before.

M.S.: Yes, Enrico (Enrico Banducci, owner of the Hungry "i") and I just took a deep "bite" and decided we have to get going.

F.P.: What's been happening?

M.S.: They are trying to bury me! You should see the way they TURNED in New York.

F.P.: Johnny Carson too?

M.S.: No. Now you see what happened, I was in New York for the entire month of November. At the end of 3 weeks the rehearsal had still not been held, and so on the night of Nov. 25, which was 5 days ahead of the opening (and the opening had been postponed 10 days, per the suggestion of Elaine May, the director), I wrote a letter to the producer in which I said you are in dire straits because your show is not prepared; there has not been a rehearsal; and you have no actors. You need time.

He said "Time costs money." And I said I have a backer, Enrico Banducci, who will give you the additional monies, but I don't see how the show can go on. And I also would like to be paid, as I have received approximately 10 per cent of my expenses since August, and have received no salary as we enter into the 4th week.

Now I have received no response to that letter, and on Monday Elaine May still had hired no actors, nor had Michael Brandman, the producer. The opening was supposed to be Friday, and on Tuesday they announced they had hired actors and replaced one of them on Wednesday. Imagine—for a Friday opening!

I asked how they were rehearsing since I was not there, and was told "Well, you are not in any of the sketches." And I asked "Which of my sketches have been retained?" Elaine May said "There isn't time to prepare your sketches, we've thrown them ALL out except one." THAT is the show I took to New York, which originally had NINE!

So, I had spent 3 weeks, well anyway, I wrote a letter on Tuesday, the 28, to Brandman in which I stated: As you know, this charade must end. This show cannot open Friday for the following reasons:

1. You fired the actors I brought from California and didn't replace them. If you have replaced my four actors—I've never met the new four!

2. You continually tell me to compensate with a monologue if the actors are not ready!

3. Elaine May has thrown out all of our material we presented to her, probably 35 sketches and 58 hours of material; all of which she has rejected. Either she didn't think it was funny, or she states, "We do not have enough time to rehearse it." And, at one point, I brought in a sketch on the Warren Commission, and she said; "I don't have enough time or stenographic help to make up scripts!"

4. Two unions were threatening to put picket lines around the theatre, (AND I WILL NOT CROSS A PICKET LINE), because they felt their jurisdiction didn't hold with this theatre and were in disputes with the producer. (Brandman again).

5. I had submitted in writing two demands for my pay, (I'd never been paid), but the director was paid, and the actors who

were hired and fired were paid, and also paid for their transportation costs from California and back.

6. No sets were built 44 hours before the opening!!!

7. Well, I set forth 11 points in the letter; there was no advertising the last 10 days, in the New York Press, about this show's opening.

8. At one of the rehearsals on Thanksgiving, four hours were spent in rehearsing the opening song, at which time the producer said, "No piano player can be made available for this production under any circumstances!"

9. On Thanksgiving night, the producer asked me for an additional \$5,000!

And there were 11 points like that in the letter. I sent him the letter, and also said, "For all of these reasons—you can't open on Friday. BUT I am willing to help you." "I will give you the money, I'll give you the extra rehearsal

and we will open the show CORRECTLY." He stated "What's the difference if it's ragged or whether you have any help, you can go on alone."

"This is New York, it's only a preview audience."

And I maintained that the audience should NOT be jived because they are a preview audience. They should get the best performance possible once the curtain goes up. He and I differed on that, to say the least.

So, he knew there would be no show as of Wednesday, but they went ahead with this charade, and opened up the theatre!! I still stand ready to go back and work with those same people and put that show together, but it needs a rehearsal.

You must understand that no one had rehearsed the day before it was open!! There was no rehearsal! I'd been in New York for a month, but I still stand willing to go back.