

# Why Mort Sahl Quit

By John L. Wasserman

Mort Sahl, comedian and social critic, told the San Francisco press yesterday why he "walked out" on the opening of his off-Broadway satirical revue last week.

He was immediately contradicted by the other two principals — Production supervisor Elaine May and producer when they were contacted by telephone.

The facts are simple: The show — entitled "An Evening with Mort Sahl" or "Modestly, Mort Sahl," depending on whom you listen to — was scheduled to open preview performances at the East 74th street Theater last Friday. Sahl left New York for Los Angeles on Wednesday. The show did not open.

Earlier, in June of last year, Sahl withdrew prior to the opening of "A Thousand Clowns" at Berkeley's Melodyland "for personal reasons."

Sahl, wearing his sweater trademark and speaking from the hungry i, opened the press conference by stating, "I think you ought to be enlightened about what happened in New York, as contrasted to what you've heard. I did not walk out on any show, there was no show ready to open. The sets were not ready, the material was not ready, the actors were unrehearsed, there were no contracts, the union was planning to picket . . . and then the producer asked me to go on with monologues, a one-man show, until the full show (involving three other actors, including the Committee's John Brent) was ready. This is not what I went to New York to do, this is not what the audience was paying for.

Sahl laid most of the blame



MORT SAHL  
Show wasn't ready he said

at the feet of Brandman, who is also a producer for the Establishment Theater.

According to Sahl, Brandman did not pay bills, censored material, did not answer Sahl's letters, did not hold rehearsals, hired and fired actors capriciously, refused to accept money to buy more preparation time and threatened to ruin Sahl if he did not open the show on schedule. Miss May, the brilliant satirist, writer and actress, turned down all of Sahl's material for the show, a galling rejection in light of the fact that it was Sahl's show. She did this, according to Sahl, from her position as the revue's director.

Brandman, reached at the Establishment Theater, categorically denied the bulk of Sahl's contentions.

"You know where the truth will be arrived at?" he asked

rhetorically, "in court, which is where we're heading." He then read part of a telegram he sent Sahl on Friday: "Your conduct, from the beginning, culminating in your last telegram from California (received by Brandman on Friday morning), indicates a wilful disregard of your obligations undertaken in writing with advice of counsel. Your unexplained disappearance left us with no alternative but to disband the company, give up the theater and abandon the production. We shall, of course, advise your union about this and commence an action against you in New York for substantial damages and costs which we have suffered and incurred."

While Brandman denied many of Sahl's accusations, the crucial dispute centers around what Sahl was obligated to deliver to the pro-

duction, who was to do the hiring and firing, and who had artistic control of the material.

According to Brandman, the minimum rehearsal time allotted before previews was due to Brandman's understanding that Sahl would arrive with a show more or less intact, and the actors would be prepared to deliver it. Sahl in fact arrived with a great deal of material in his head, but no scripts, and the performers previously had not worked together.

"Elaine was not the director," Brandman emphasized, "she was the production supervisor. She did not have the right to hire or fire, nor did she have the right to select or reject material. Those rights were vested solely with Mr. Sahl."

Enrico Banducci, hungry i's owner and Sahl's friend and employer, backed Sahl's contention that Banducci had offered to bankroll a postponement of the show's

Brandman confirmed that Banducci had offered the emergency funds, "but when I decided to accept it, he reversed himself.

## FIRING

Sahl declared that Brandman fired the three actors Sahl had brought to New York, then re-hired two

The producer countered with "We never spelled out in the contract who had the power to hire and fire, but it was his thing. I did the actual firing of the three actors, but only after Mort had asked me to do so. It was his decision."

Miss May, reached in New York, said she preferred to stay out of the cross-fire except to confirm that she was hired, contractually, as a production supervisor with the understanding that a show existed and needed only to be polished. This was eight days before the originally scheduled opening date, November 21.

Sahl concluded that "there is an obligation to the backers and I am ready to go through with this production with Brandman and Miss May. I feel it can be worked out if we have the time. I don't want another year to go by without some political satire in America, just because of some quarrels."


Sahl opens tonight at the i. For an indefinite engagement.


# DATEBOOK

## Opening Today

- THEATER** — The American Conservatory Theatre presents "Tartuffe," starring Rene Auberjonois, at 8:30 p.m., Geary.
- CONCERT** — The California Trio plays the world premiere of an untitled work by Easley Blackwood and works by Haydn and Tchaikovsky, 8:30 p.m., Little Theater, California Palace of the Legion of Honor, Lincoln Park.
- CONCERT** — Rabbi Schlomo Carlebach sings Hassidic folk songs at 8 p.m., Gallery Lounge, San Francisco State College.
- GALLERY LOUNGE** — "The Collection of Dr. and Mrs. T. Edward Hanley," through February 11, at the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum, Golden Gate Park.
- GALLERY** — Photographs by Sister Noemi, color photographs by Don Beatly, through January 6, at the Focus Gallery, 2146 Union street.
- GALLERY** — Graphics by F. van Batenburg, through December 31, at Lesser's Gallery, 685 Sutter street.
- GALLERY** — Crafts for a child's room, through January 14, at Museum West, 906 North Point street.
- CONCERT** — The Oakland Symphony, Szymon Goldberg, violin; Zara Nelsova, cello; Gerhard Samuel conducting; in Brahms' Double Concerto, Ives' Symphony No. 4 (West Coast premiere) and Vivaldi's Violin Concerto, Op. 8, No. 4, 8:30 p.m., Oakland Auditorium Theater, Oakland.

OPENING TONIGHT



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