

Lenny's words say it better than any biographer

Review by Michael Zangari

It was a haggard Lenny Bruce who stopped in the middle of his act in 1965, looked through the haze of a San Francisco bar and slowly apologized to his audience for not being funny that night.

"Sometimes I'm not a comic, I'm Lenny Bruce," he said.

The legal pressures and constant police harassment would wound him until his death from an overdose of morphine a year later.

In that rare moment in 1965, Bruce seemed to have a notion of what was to come. Bruce's own search for identity, as he became an unwilling martyr, was just another in a long series of battles he was to lose.

It has been more than 10 years since his death. Leafing through the Bruce legacy, and the post humorous resurrections, I'm left with the same questions that must have faced those who loved him the most.

Irony

"It's ironic that a man like Bruce has been the subject of at least eight money-making books and three movies, from the same people who wouldn't even answer the phone calls from him when he needed help the most. Bruce died penniless.

What has resulted is the most vicious grave robbing in this country for years.

The books, and there are plenty of them, are rush jobs, and for the most part poorly written and turned out in order to get the greatest possible profits.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Lenny Bruce, for example, a comprehensive biography by Albert Goldman from the journalism of Lawrence Shiller, is so full of factual inaccuracies and innuendo it could pass as fiction.

Bruce is pictured as a drug-crazed madman, munching handfuls of mesacaline and going off personal vendettas of insane proportions.

The mammoth volume does not have an index, and in most places no attribution.

Goldman's analysis of Bruce's pain is intolerable. If taken with a larger than normal dose of salt, a glimmer of what Bruce's life must have been like might come through some of the rambling. For that, the book is worth reading.

Better than most

Lenny the Broadway play that was later developed into the movie starring Dustin Hoffman, was written by Julian Barry.

Because most of the material for the text comes from Bruce's own material, it fares better than most.

The play and the movie intersperse scenes from his nightclub act with scenes from his personal life.

Although there is not always a direct relationship between his art and his life, this works well. The play is satisfying, but not entirely so.

It bolsters the Lenny-as-saint train of thought, and leaves you with little insight into the man's pain or power.

Bruce was human. His weaknesses are as important as his strengths. No work has successfully shown this.

No relief

If excerpts from the upcoming book by Bruce's wife, Honey, are an example of what is to come, then no relief is in sight.

While Honey's facts may be accurate, it is the worst piece of garbage written about Bruce to date.

We are subjected to the most graphic and least sensitive descriptions of Honey's many affairs.

We know what every hair on her body is doing, and every sound her stomach makes. It seems exploitative coming from just about the last place you would expect it—Bruce's wife.

This taken aside, as we finally may get to some badly needed insight into the marriage of the two intense persons. The book will be published later this month.

Frank Kofsky's *Lenny Bruce: The Comedian As Social Critic and Secular Moralist*, is as heavy handed as its title.

What makes it better than most books is that it is an

undisguised analysis in the form of a thesis.

It is well thought out and surprisingly cohesive. The small book has its share of mistakes, but for the most part, is good.

Bruce himself published an autobiography, which at least gives an impression of what Bruce himself had to say about himself.

Grain of salt

Although it too has to be taken with a grain of salt, moments of intense emotional outpourings say much.

It is also a good sampling of Bruce's form of comedy.

The *Essential Lenny Bruce*, edited by John Cohen, is an uneven collection of Bruce monologues.

There are problems with this because Bruce worked in a stream of consciousness, flowing from one subject to another. He never did two shows alike.

The best approach for those interested in Lenny Bruce is to listen to him.

There are a variety of recorded materials available. Although the early recordings are listenable for a die-hard Bruce fanatic, most seem dated.

The later concert recordings fare better.

Carnegie Hall, The Curran Theatre, The Berkeley Concert (if you can wade through the legal references) and *Lenny Bruce, What I Was Arrested For*, are all exceptional.

In the end, Bruce will be the only one to speak for himself, and not surprisingly, he does the best job of all.

Time changes...

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Although this has been typical of the Eagles' production in the past, it was done because of the group's reliance on vocal melody and harmony.

With such talented guitarists as Felder and Walsh, it would be more profitable to forge a synthesis between vocals and guitars by enlarging the guitars' role in the music.

Taken as a whole, *Hop! California* is another in a long line of excellent Eagles albums. Its weak spots are more manifest than other Eagles' efforts, but it still provides a nice blend of soft-rock and simple progressive music.

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