

arts / entertainment

Woody Allen's 'Side Effects' guarantees laughs

By Pat Higgins

Side Effects by Woody Allen, Random House NY 1980, 144 pg.

Side Effects is Woody Allen's third collection of short comic pieces to be released. It is probably the most amusing book published since his last one, *Without Feathers*.

Anyone worried about Allen's self-conscious change in direction over the last couple of years from his well-earned reputation as one of the funniest comics around to that of the serious filmmaker concerned about art and other weighty matters should be quite happy with this volume, as Allen writes strictly for laughs and succeeds.

book review

Most of these selections originally appeared in *The New Yorker* and Allen upholds that publication's tradition of quality writing and sharp wit. Allen's literary output does not operate on the same plane as his films; more than anyone else, it is similar to S.J. Perelman and George Kaufman, two veteran *New Yorker* contributors who also were the screenwriters for some of the Marx Brothers' finest films.

In *Side Effects*, Allen comes off as an intellectual Groucho Marx. It is widely perceived that compared to other comedians currently performing, Allen has the reputation as an intellectual (i.e., he uses words with more than two syllables).

Shedding limitations

His appeal is centered among literate young adults who made *Annie Hall* his commercial breakthrough. That allows Allen the freedom to make films like *Interiors* and *Stardust Memories*, where he is shedding the limitations imposed on comedy. Supposedly *Interiors* is his homage to Bergman, *Stardust Memories*

Side Effects, if anything, resembles *Love and Death*, where Allen began to consider more serious themes while still remaining in the realm of comedy. Allen

is concerned with the big issues: Philosophy, sex, death, religion, etc., and these comic stories are able to make telling points about these heavyweight subjects.

Allen has a wide variety of writing styles at play here. The most-frequently used is a blatantly-autobiographical character who mouths quick one-liners in between his various obsessions. This character is a frustrated, literate loser with which Allen began his career in stand-up comedy and his early films.

Certainly it is not credible for Allen to play this alleged loser after his mass acceptance and success. In these autobiographical pieces, Allen excels at the quick non sequitur, for instance, "How is it possible to find meaning in a finite world given my waist and shirt size?" Allen has a tendency to lead with a serious opening and then counter punch with his quick wit.

A la Socrates

Other styles include the form of a Greek play, complete with a nude chorus that insults Allen and his work and then orders his death a la Socrates. Another play has Abe Lincoln trying out a few jokes on his press secretary that knocked everybody out in a Cabinet Meeting.

"The Diet" is a Dostoyevsky parody about the serious moral and philosophical questions surrounding such an ordeal. A very similar story was included in "Getting Even," it's disappointing to see Allen repeat himself.

Giving more ammunition for an intellectual style of Allen include "Fabrizio's: Criticism and Response" a restaurant review similar to art criticism and "The Kugelmass Episode" (attention English majors) has an unhappy English professor who swings a deal with a magician to transport him to some of the more steamy portions of *Madame Bovary* say, around page 102. Also quite amusing is his version of a May graduation speech pontificated by a distinguished alum.

Despite the slender size of *Side Effects* (144 pages) it is a worthwhile investment as it contains more guaranteed laughs per page than anyone else can equal.



Photo courtesy of Brian Hamill/Photoreporters and Random House

Woody Allen

Nebraska landscape influences Seattle artist

By Penelope M. Smith

David Dahl's artistic maturity is evident in his first major showing at Sheldon Art Gallery. Dahl juxtaposes exquisite textured and planar geometric surfaces with sharp-edged lines to create a surprisingly organic whole.

Dahl, a 1979 UNL graduate, now lives and paints in Seattle.

Dahl spoke of leaving his native Lincoln 15 months ago and how he and his art have matured.

Dahl had originally planned to go to graduate school in Seattle, but came to the conclusion that it wasn't for him.

"I think I had definite ideas of what grad school is. It's a valuable experience, but once you've reaped from it all you have to give, you have to use it as a spring board into the rest of your life," he said. "It became clear to me that there were new tricks and new aspects of the University of Washington, but it was the same situation I had known at UNL. I did not want to teach and it was time for my art to go in its own individual direction."

Dahl said that after his decision, he went through a difficult three to six month period of adjustment to reality when his work suffered.

"When you find yourself on your own you have to realize your own motivations and rely on your own discipline. You are automatically more isolated; it's a new thing and you have to cope with it," he said.

One of the first things Dahl had to ad-

just to was working an eight-hour-a-day job that wasn't painting.

Have to be realistic

"So many people have this romantic idea of what an artist is: Hiding away and painting all night long. Times have changed. Our society and economy make it very difficult for somebody to strike out as a painter and maintain their values. You have to accept reality and pay the heating bills and the studio rent. It would be nice to quit my job and move off to the mountains to paint but it's not realistic," Dahl explained.

Dahl's job with a printer enabled him to buy a house and after spending more time painting "the walls white than a canvas," converted a garage to a studio.

Two approaches

"There are basically two ways of approaching a painting. One is a pre-thought, or predetermined idea and content of why or what; basically verbalizing the painting. The second is that you start muddling around in it. You do something and react to it. This is the approach I've had and probably always will have. It's a vague basic idea and a visual feeling.

"I can't predetermine what my next move will be. It's basically just dumping paint on there until I can sit back and say, 'It works.'" Dahl said. "It's like taking a test, you should answer according to your first idea. If I think something needs to be done, I do it and then that changes the way I look at another area.

"The roots of my art are geometric and textural interests and feelings for the Ne-

braska landscape. It's a mixture of accidents, mistakes and manipulated areas and textures and a certain transparent quality," Dahl said.

Guest reviewers bludgeon Michael in the solar plexus

Well, the plea for reviews went over like a lead balloon this week. Four people picked up the gauntlet and dropped it in their pockets by the end of the week, leaving me a tad bit reassured that reviewing is not high on the list of pleasant pastimes. Anyway, these brave souls gave it a go.

zangari

I had asked for feedback on columns, and got it square on the solar plexus. This from Michael T. Brogan: "Michael Zangari's writing style is not as unique as it appears. For instance, he apparently thinks he is being creative when he writes cute little phrases like 'Silly-Putty selectivity' or 'Jimmy Dean posture.' If this is creativity, it is all too easy to duplicate. One simply has to take the first three words that enter the mind (say, Anderson, disco-Seven-Up) and throw them into an otherwise mundane sentence. To wit: 'Marie displayed Anderson indifference towards the disco-flavored running shorts, although Jason exhibited Seven-Up enthusiasm.'"

"Now I'm going in the direction I want to go and I'm doing what I want to do," Dahl said. "At first my work suffered, but now I have a new direction."

Well, as Old Lodge Skins says in *Little Big Man*, "Sometimes the magic works, and sometimes it doesn't."

Rich Weber also hits me square in the solar plexus, but more in empathy than anything else. We've been sitting in the same chair he writes, "For those music fans who enjoy a little emotion with their music, Tom Waits' *Heartattack and Vine* is a grimly emotional trek through all the rhythm and blues of a lonely 5 a.m. L.A. drunk. Waits is one of the only true romantics in modern music. If you can't feel the pain in 'Ruby's Arms' you must be a rock."

Personally, I've been humming "Jersey Girl" all week—can't seem to shake it. Reviews have a language all their own. That makes reviews journalese easy to send up for the rabid cliché it can become. Natalie (with the phantom last name) does this royally.

"The Mueller Bell's second album, *Bell Tower Blues* may be somewhat of a disappointment to any Bells fans who have heard the group in concert. The album lacks a certain energy which was ever-present during their last effort. *Live in Lincoln*."

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