

sylvia fine

June 21, 1974

Professor Charles Davis  
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New Haven, Connecticut 06520

Dear Charles:

The multiple arts and crafts of creating and producing American Musical Comedy -- (there is no other) -- can no longer be empirically learned. The kind of theatre in which it flourished for about forty years has been outpriced on both sides of the footlights and is almost extinct. What remains are occasional personal triumphs, some tribal or folk rock festivals and opportunistic campy nostalgia, -- all with relentless super decibel sound.

The verve, the pace, the fun, -- that very fine and fragile art of blending all the performing arts into one shining bubble, -- in a word, the magic that was musical comedy at its best, is gone.

Nothing, of course, can take the place of going to the theatre to see it, hear it and feel it in your bones.

But given a qualified teacher, i.e., one who has actually worked in the creative and production ends of musical comedy, with adequate tools (tapes, records, libretti, knowledgeable books of commentary), enough

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can be recreated to come alive in a classroom. At the very least, standards born of knowledge can be set. Then, hopefully, with the crafts taught, some beginnings of art will emerge.

I put this theory into practice when I initiated a similar course at the University of Southern California two years ago. Although I approached it with some reservations and liberal dose of apprehension, it was wildly successful.

I propose to teach a seminar on the History and Analysis of Musical Comedy for one semester, followed by a musical comedy workshop the next. The workshop will function primarily for writers, who will be formed into teams of composer, lyricist and book writer. When one or more musicals are finished, we will, if they rate production, call in choreographers, arrangers, conductors, technical staff, and possibly outside professional directors.

I would prefer to teach two or three times a week for two weeks, and set up guidelines for T.A.'s to conduct lab sessions for the following three weeks. These lab sessions will include miles of taped music and lyrics, which must be heard several times to be absorbed, and those musical films and/or filmed musical comedy numbers which could conceivably have been done on a stage.

During the weeks in which I teach at least one lab session will be required, during the other weeks three formal lab sessions, and as many extra hours as the students can manage.

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I look forward to talented students, a lovely title  
and an exorbitant fee.