

DATELINE: DES MOINES, IOWA

By Mac King

Friday night, second show — traditionally the hell show of the week. The general theory as to why this is so is that people are tired. They've been working all week at their jobs. They have been out to dinner already. They've been drinking before they get to the club.

Tonight was no exception. All through Jay Scot Hollman's show, two drunk guys were giving him hell. He is generally a very loose performer, not afraid of slipping off into tangents and then finding a way to weave his thoughts back toward his prepared material. This show he was sort of speeding through his act, sticking to his tried and true, trying not to let these guys get a foothold from which to hurl their heckles at him. And when they did get off an annoying remark, he was blasting them down with extremely viscous rejoinders. Normally the doormen, who double as ersatz bouncers, keep a pretty tight reign on the room here, but tonight seemed a bit lax. I was not looking forward to going up in front of this crowd.

Jay Scot came off. "Those boys is a bit unruly over there," he told me in his slow Arkansas twang. I was *really* not looking forward to going up in front of this crowd.

As the emcee made some announcements before introducing me, I went over my heckler tactics in my mind. As a rule I get very few hecklers. I don't really know why that is. When I'm asked about it, I always joke that it's because they feel sorry for me. I don't think that's exactly the case, but I don't think it's 100% wrong either. I think audiences sense I'm a nice guy and, ordinarily, if you're nice to people, then people are nice to you. Generally, people who yell out at you just want attention and once you acknowledge them they will shut up. Usually I simply say, "What's your name?" "Well Bill, you've been very nice to me so far, so I have a gift for you." I dig down into my pocket and come out with a cookie. "Here, you can have this Fig Newton." Then I toss him the cookie. This generally gets a small laugh. The guy has made contact with me and been acknowledged, and that's usually the end of it.

If the same person says something else

later in the show, I will take out another cookie and this time, without saying a word, I'll walk right out into the audience and hand it to him. This not only gets another modest laugh, but also gives me the opportunity to say — so only he can hear me, "Hey, it's not funny any more. The next time you yell out, they're going to make you leave." That is the latest version of what I say. The first few times I did this I said something a bit more raw, but soon learned that this only served to further antagonize him. I've since toned it down, but I still go out and speak personally to the troublemaker. I have a very clear picture of myself on stage, and it doesn't include using the typical comedian's heckler slams: "Hey, let me work here, I don't come to McDonald's and tell you how to cook the fries!" "Ladies and gentlemen that's why some animals eat their young!" etc. That just doesn't fit me. By talking directly to the bad guy, I don't have to spoil my nice-boy bumpkin image for the whole audience. I am then free to go on with my show as I normally would.

Of course, I've tried other methods of dealing with hecklers. In a bar where there was no crowd control from the management, I sat down on a stool and said to the offender, "The show doesn't go on until you go out." And then I just sat there waiting. Waiting and sweating. Sweating and waiting. It seemed like I sat there forever, but the bonehead finally did leave. The problem was it then took me about ten minutes to get my first laugh after this little incident.

"Put your hands together for Mac King!" The emcee was introducing me. I ran onto the stage, set my case down, and paused. Before I said a word, they were on me. I don't even remember what they said, but I remember the entire audience going "Awwh" in sympathy for me. These people were tired of putting up with the two jerks. I went right into the Fig Newton bit. I leaned out into the audience so the light wouldn't blind me and I could see where the guys were sitting in order to toss the cookie to them. I couldn't spot them. I decided to skip the preliminary toss and go right to the part where I walk out and talk directly to the culprit. Not really knowing what to expect but eager to see a confrontation, the people near the hecklers enthu-

siastically pointed them out to me. As I came up to the guy I thought was the more vocal of the two, I could tell from the look in his eyes that he was plastered. He swatted at the Fig Newton saying, "I don't want your damn cookie. Get away from me."

I snapped. The blood left my brain and the adrenaline poured into my belly. I grabbed the jerk by the wrist and pulled him up out of his chair. He was screaming, "What are you doing? What are you doing?"

I didn't know what I was doing, but I said, "I'm tossing you out of here." I was dragging him toward the doorway into the lobby, the audience was laughing, the guy was calling me nasty names, and fighting to stay in the room. It was certainly not like anything I've ever done before. Finally I got him into the lobby. The club owner was standing at the ticket window talking to the ticket seller. As he looked up at me with that "Hey, you're supposed to be on stage" look I said, "Mark, this guy needs to pay his tab and get kicked out of here." I let go of the guy and ran back into the room. The audience cheered. I ran back on stage and took a big exaggerated circus bow. I was breathing so hard I could not speak. But it didn't matter, the audience was still cheering so loudly that they would not have heard me anyway.

I must tell you, it was amazingly exhilarating, but I wouldn't recommend that you try this in your show. I certainly don't think I'll ever do it again in mine. I really don't know what came over me. I was simply doing this incredibly bold and stupid thing before I even realized it. I don't know if he was too drunk to react in time, or if he sensed that the entire audience was against him. Looking back on it now, I can't believe the guy didn't just deck me with a sharp jab to the jaw. Perhaps he was as surprised as I was by my actions or, who knows, maybe he merely felt sorry for me. ●