

## Eclectic Lectures Bounce from Topic to Topic

**GARYSHAPIRO** gshapiro@nysun.com

On Tuesday evening, a crowd went to the Slipper Room for an evening sponsored by "Trampoline Hall NYC," an offbeat amateur lecture series where non-experts discuss eclectic subjects in which they have a personal interest. The speakers are prohibited from lecturing from a position of professional authority.

The program handed out that evening was a spoof of the Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" album cover with a crowd of famous figures such as W.C. Fields, Bob Dylan, and Mae West. Interspersed among their names were the speakers and organizers of the evening.



**YOUNG AT HEART** Steve Young with an album from his collection. **SUN STAFF**

Founded by author Sheila Heti and hosted by Misha Glouberman, the series's unusual name was inspired by cartoonist Ben Katchor.

The casual Mr. Glouberman is a kind of anti-host. He told the audience that the series began in Canada "which is a country much like America, with differences."

He continued that a question-and-answer period would follow each talk. "It's been said 'There's no bad question.' But there are certainly less good questions. I'll go that far." He added "if you have an agenda" and if you already had the question before hearing the lecture — a question such as "How does this relate to Marxism?" — then it probably qualifies as a bad question.

He also reminded the audience that questions should be phrased in the grammatical form of a question and should not begin, "I have this to say..." That's why it is called "question-and-answer" period and not "paragraph-and-answer" period, he said. The audience laughed when Mr. Glouberman added, "If you think you have a two-part question. You don't. You have two questions. Ask the good one."

Prior lecture subjects have included female poisoners of 18th-century France; "all the girls I loved before high school"; Levinas and the waiter-server relationship; making a kung-fu film; dirigibles; hidden messages in record grooves; about the name Julia in art; and parking-garage design. At the Slipper Room, Steve Young spoke first. His topic was his collection of souvenir records of industrial shows, consisting of original musicals written for conventions and sales meetings. Some of these albums, mostly from the 1950s through 1970s, could manage to put a "binder full of technical information" into a single song's lyrics. The album "Diesel

Dazzle,” was produced for diesel engine salesmen. “Go Fly A Kite” was produced for a group of electric power executives and had a song whose lyrics included:

Can you tell me kilowatt hour consumption and demand?

Can do! Can do!

Can you look and tell me where the voltage level stands?

Can do! Can do!

The audience laughed when Mr. Young called up a composer before and asked, “You don’t know me, but I’m a big fan of your 1962 J.C. Penney Show.” He said that stars such as Valerie Harper, David Hartman, and Hal Linden appeared on such albums — before they became famous, naturally. “Once people get a toehold in the real Broadway world, they leave the industrials behind,” he told the Knickerbocker. Sheldon Harnick and Jerry Bock of “Fiddler on the Roof” fame wrote music for a 1959 Ford tractor show album called “Ford-i-fy Your Future.”

Mr. Young played a song from the Arrow Shirt company that parodied the hit song “The Impossible Dream” from “Man of La Mancha,” which went: “To dream the impossible dream/ to increase sales by 20%.”

Mr. Young said that since the records were never intended for the public, once in a while he could pick up “sinister” multinational corporate chatter, such as a song on the album of the 1979 Coca Cola bottlers show in which heaven is imagined for the bottlers. In the song, “the guys from O.S.H.A.” were sent “straight to hell.”

The audience laughed when Mr. Young said he sometimes learns about additional albums from reading his own album covers, which might say, “You remember Jim from the 1969 air conditioning show.”

The next speaker was a Columbia M.F.A. student, Doretta Lau, who spoke on “the Flight of Canadian Immigrants in America.”

She brought a woman onstage who went by the pseudonym “Betty” and was overstaying her visa in New York City. “Betty” was disguised wearing an “Incredible Hulk” mask and spoke through a vocal distortion machine that made her voice sound as though she was James Earl Jones’s “Darth Vader” — with a sore throat and speaking from the other end of a boat during a squall.

The third speaker, Jesse Cohen, discussed the world’s greatest female ping pong player, Angelica Rozeanu. He came upon the subject while aimlessly thumbing through a book on Jews and sports.

He said that Ms. Rozeanu was born in 1921. He said he assumed her family was assimilated because her brother was named “Gaston.” She lived under Eastern Bloc rule in Romania, and won six straight world titles but was awarded four “Orders of Work,” “which, I’m assuming, was some kind of Communist thing, which meant a lot.”

He said in the late 1950s, the Romanian government sidelined her as part of a Jewish table-tennis-player purge. Mr. Cohen said that the person conducting the purge was himself purged. She later defected to Israel, and the Romanian government recalled all her prizes.

In the audience was Marty Reisman, a former American table tennis champion, who assisted Mr. Cohen with his research. Mr. Reisman has won bets playing opponents using, instead of a paddle, a shoe, eyeglasses, book, frying pan, and electrical conduit cover. He once owned seven tons of table tennis balls that he later sold to a bingo company. He is writing a memoir called “The Ping Pong Hustler: From Broadway to Bombay.”

Mr. Reisman, who favors the original hard rubber over sponge rubber, said he had been “bitter about ping pong rubber.” The host, Mr. Glouberman, replied, “But who hasn’t been?”