



THOSE Rollicking



Frolics

House lights go down. The music starts. The Savitar Frolics — a student-produced variety show bursting with competition, festivity and rowdy, collegiate antics — is born.

From its very beginning in 1938, the Frolics was “a grand occasion” that drew an enthusiastic audience of students and “parents who came in from all over the state and out of state,” says former dean of students Jack Matthews.

“We had 20 groups participate in the original show — more than 200 students,” says Don Galamba, “father” of the Frolics, now an attorney who lives in Shawnee Mission, Kan.

The Frolics evolved through various incarnations in the years that followed, but the spirit and the sparkle remained. “It had all the things that thrill you about doing theater — getting a show on stage at the highest quality level you can,” recalls John Blakemore, a Columbia advertising executive. Judged best actor for the Phi Gamma Delta-Kappa Alpha Theta skit in 1961, Blakemore says, “Among Greeks at that time it was the most important show on Campus.”

Skits generally were takeoffs on musicals, operas, operettas or plays — everything from “Hellzapoppin” and “Damn Yankees” to “The Importance of Being Ernest” and “The Mikado.” Scriptwriters added local color, inside jokes, spoofed professors and administrators. Matthews says that his nickname was popularized through use in many skits and emcee routines.

In 1957, emcees John Shultz, J. Brendan Ryan and Tom Dimitriades sang to the tune, “That Old Black Magic”:

*That old Black Jack has me in his spell,
That old Dean Matthews that we know so well.
We're on social pro again, because that
Dean of Men
Has us in a spin, hating the spin we're in
Under that old Black Jack's social pro.*

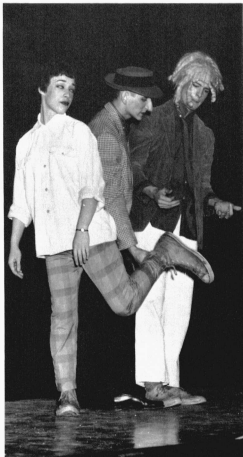
The emcees were the glue that held this memorable pastiche together. Their job was introducing skits and filling the time needed to change scenery between skits. But the talented comics recruited to emcee made their bits so lively — and sometimes risqué — that they became a highlight of the proceedings. Springfield, Mo., attorney Rex Titus, emcee in the 1939 Frolics, recalls, “They chose me because I was an extroverted loudmouth then. Now, I’m a sedate old man.”

IT BECAME A CONTEST for the emcees to top each other in outrageous humor year after year. “One of our most popular routines,” says Art Poger, an emcee in 1955 and '56 and now a lawyer in St. Louis, “was



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"Man on two—eeeeek!"
Alpha Epsilon Phi
practice their 1955 skit,
"Relatively Speaking,"
a takeoff on parents
weekend at a Mizzou
residence hall.



"Raspberry Sneakers,"
according to the 1959
Savitar, were an
ingredient in an emcee
skit by Emily Goetz,
Harvey Levine, and
Matt Flynn, "the
stunning blond."

done by John Russey and Frank Conley. Conley was an Edward R. Murrow type interviewer confronting a classic Southern plantation owner. The colonel tells about his grandfather who 'went North for more guns and ammunition' at the height of the Civil War. 'You didn't believe that?' asked Conley-Murrow. 'Well, one morning as I was plowing the north 40, I saw, away far off through the morning mists . . . is it grandpappy? Could it be . . .?' Russey went on and on, building the suspense until he had the audience on its feet shouting along, 'Come on, Grandpappy!' and then . . . 'It ain't him.' The interview proceeded, 'Years went by,' said Colonel-Russey 'and then one morning, as I was plowing the north 40 . . .?' Russey [now doing public relations in Stockton, Calif.] and Conley [now circuit court judge in Columbia] repeated the sequence three times, getting more and more crowd reaction each time. Frank never lost his poker face."

The glitter and glamour of the Frolics was an attraction for the emcees as well. Harvey Levine recalls as a fraternity pledge getting up at three or four in the morning to stand in line for tickets. "All the pledges sat in line all night long to get

seats for the whole house. I remember saying to myself, 'Gee, wouldn't it be fun to do this, to be in the Frolics.'" Levine was in the Frolics — as an emcee in 1959, '60 and '61, and in '63 came back as a Frolics judge. He credits his activity in dramatics on Campus for his career — acting in commercials, movies and TV and acting in and managing dinner theaters. "And I'm not the only ex-Frolicker to go on in show business," says Levine. "One of my fellow emcees, David Levinson, is now a freelance television writer and producer.

"Dave and I wrote a routine once and submitted it to the committee for censorship. Dr. Donovan Rhynsburger [professor emeritus of speech and dramatic art and long-time Frolics adviser] wrote a note back saying that one word was 'too anatomical.' We had to go to the dictionary to find out what he meant. Dave complained but Dr. Rhynsburger had the final say. He knew the audiences, the school administration and his guidelines. We changed the routine, and it was still funny."

Learning what was and was not beyond the bounds of good taste was probably an unintentional byproduct of the Frolics. But students found the limits quickly. There was no show in 1942, the administration's reaction to the 1941 Frolics. As Rhynsburger says, "Some of the stuff in it was just so distasteful that even the students objected."

In the 1950s a faculty censorship committee took over to try to keep the lid on the bubbling pot of emcee sight gags, off-color puns in skits, and raunchy humor. Rhynsburger, a perennial committee member, says the goal of the committee was to improve the content and clarity of the skits. Another member, William [Mack] Jones, an English professor who arrived at Mizzou in the late '50s, says, "They hit me with this committee thing right off. You can imagine an eager young thing like me coming down here and immediately put to censoring these massive high jinks."

RHYSBURGER and Jones agree that the Frolics were a way for students to let off steam in a more or less acceptable fashion. "I remember one skit by the SAE's [Sigma Alpha Epsilon]," says Rhynsburger, "in which they satirized a contraceptive salesman named Shapiro who was well known around Campus. In the skit, they had a salesman named V.D. Shapiro coming around to the dorms selling 'slickers.' Another name for raincoats, slickers was

also a code word among the students for contraceptives. He came into the room with a big trunk and extolled all the various virtues of his slickers. Well, of course we all knew exactly what was meant."

"Many times," Jones says, "I remember one of us turning to the other and saying, with a twinkle in our eye, 'I don't see anything wrong with that, do you?'"

FROLICKERS — stars, directors and emcees — all insist, in the words of Cindy Palmer Chesher, best actress in 1967, "We were clean." But they protest too much. Blakemore, now vice president of a non-profit community theatre group in Columbia, says his 1961 skit was "too intellectual," but admits, "Hey, we were all still pretty young, still students. Sure there were some things that weren't in good taste."

For all the concern about censorship and good taste, everyone agrees it wasn't scandal that caused the end of the Frolics after the 1967 show. What the cause was is a little more difficult to pin down. Both Rhynsburger and Jones feel it was the advent of independent participation that toppled the tradition. Although the 1939 *Savitar* pictures "Independent Women's tap dancing Hazel B. Cho," the Frolics was a Greek event for most of its history. In 1966, however, Greek domination ended as an independent skit won. Gladys Pihlblad, former director of student affairs for women, says, "The last two times the independents won and the Greeks began to feel that they couldn't compete. The independents could draw from such a vast group."

But there were other factors. Carl Voss, former *Savitar* editor and now picture editor for *The Des Moines Register*, says, "It just got to be too much time for too little return." Former dean Matthews agrees, "It was related to the academic situation. The paramount issue was the long hours of practice involved."

And the times were changing. "Looking back, the main reason for the decline was probably the turbulent times," says Chesher, a speech therapist in Kansas City. Jones agrees, "During all the unrest of the '60s, you know, the Frolics represented such an innocence. I think they came to be regarded with scorn."

And so . . . the music fades and the house lights come up. After 30 years of singing, dancing, bawdy jokes and student satire — it's curtains for the *Savitar* Frolics. But for Frolics alumni, the memories live happily ever after. □