

# Actor portrays Mark Twain

By Jen Dell'Alba

Capitol Campus slipped backward in time last Thursday. On stage in the Olmsted Building auditorium, a man looked and sounded like Mark Twain.

The setting was "a lecture hall in 1905," and "Mark Twain" was a shaking, seventy-three-year-old man toking on a big cigar. His anecdotes touched on many contemporary controversies: smoking, religion, media reporters, politics and prejudice.

In reality, "Twain" was Will Stutts and the show was the nationally acclaimed "Mark Twain's America!"

The performance at Capitol lasted two hours; all of which held the audience captivated. The approximately 125-person crowd expressed a pleased satisfaction and admiration for Stutts' excellent show. There was amused chuckling instead of uproaring laughter. "Twain" was witty, rather than hilarious. Stutts commented afterward that he was pleased with the size and quality of the audience.

Will Stutts is an established actor. His productions range from television appearances to off-Broadway plays. However, in between jobs, Stutts tours the United States doing one-person characterizations of famous personalities. Stutts said he would rather continue acting, than bartend like his friends. Besides Twain, Stutts impersonates Walt Whitman, Edgar Allan Poe, John Wilkes Booth, Clarence Darrow, Lord Byron and Abraham Lincoln.

His one-man shows originated as an experiment while Stutts studied at the University of Alabama in 1968. Stutts needed a source of employment to pay for his schooling. The shows grew to a whopping success with sixty performances in two years. One-person plays have advantages and disadvantages, Stutts explained. He said each performance is like "walking on a tightrope without a net." The entire show rests on his shoulders alone. However, if a mistake occurs, no one knows except Stutts himself.

Talking to Stutts after the performance revealed his intense excitement for Mark Twain. Stutts appeared in awe of the humorist/writer Twain. "Mark Twain's America!" contains only Twain's original material with Stutts merely juxtaposing during a performance. The entire recital is made up of six hours of speech. Thus, Stutts may provide varying performances by "gauging the audience" and choosing the appropriate material.

Perhaps the best part of the show was when Stutts did an excerpt from "Huckleberry Finn." As Stutts enacted Huckleberry's decision not to reveal the identity of the runaway slave, you could hear a pin drop in the auditorium. Sitting near the front, one could see the tears welling in the Stutts' eyes. In addition, I believe everyone had a lump in their own throats. He ended the segment "with maturity and

education we begin to learn prejudice." Something for all of us to think about.

Stutts admitted that the "Huckleberry Finn" excerpt is his favorite also. He confided that he experiences an uncontrollable burst of emotion at the same moment each performance. Emotion must come somewhere from within the actor, Stutts explained. Going further to say that if he lost the source of emotion, it was time

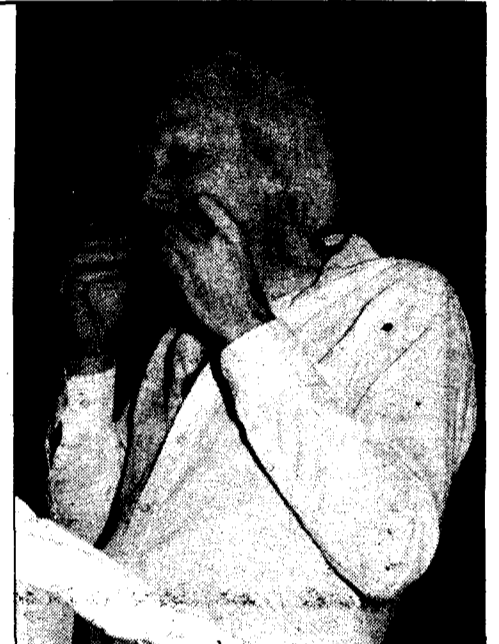
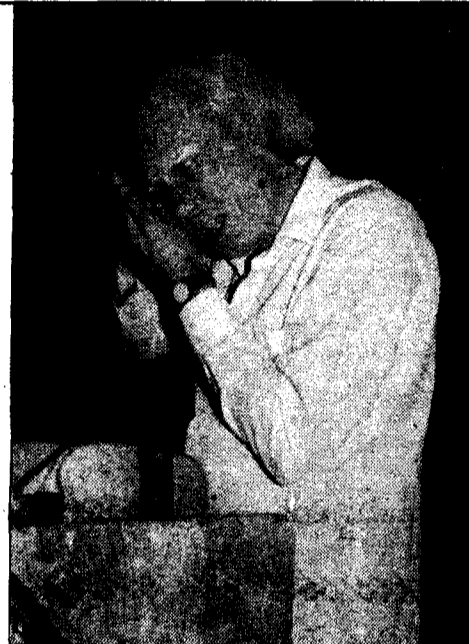
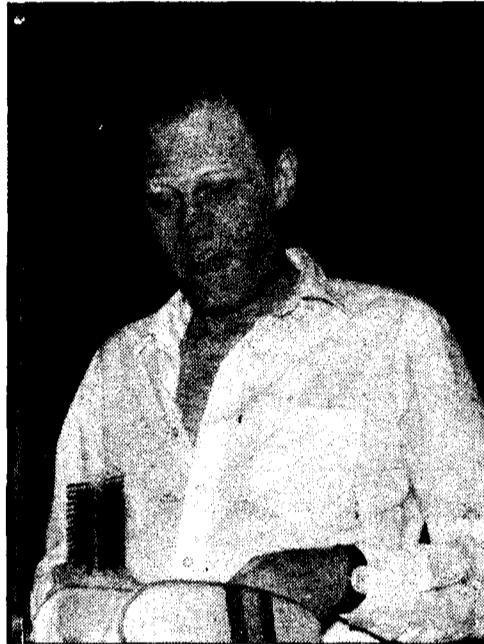
to quit the business.

What adds to Stutts' performance is his childhood experience: Stutts was born in Alabama in 1949. He lived not only five hours from Hannibal, Mo., but also along a river. His father was a riverboat captain. Stutts said that he can actually feel the emotions of Huckleberry Finn because he knows what such a life is like.

While Stutts is an actor, he strives not merely to entertain

with his one-person plays. He wants the audience to be interested enough "to go back and re-read the book." He emphasizes that "Huckleberry Finn" is "actually an adult book." In addition, Stutts finds it "pathetic that we are fighting the same [social] wars today as a hundred years ago."

The event was sponsored by the Olmsted Recreation Board and was part of the Capitol Campus Cultural Events Series.



## One...two...three

Will Stutts, a nationally known actor, transforms himself into a striking image of Mark Twain before his performance of "Mark Twain's America!" last Thursday in the Olmsted Building Auditorium. The show was part of the Capitol Campus Cultural Events Series.

Photos by Lisa Mauss

## Winter movies: which to see

By Don Strausburger

Eddie Murphy doomed his film career by an all-too-brief performance in "Best Defense" with Dudley Moore. In his appearance as guest host on "Saturday Night Live," he announced that the film reeked and that he needed to mend his injured quest for stardom.

It was for that reason that Murphy accepted the offer to make "Beverly Hills Cop."

And with "Beverly Hills Cop," Murphy's career is once again on the rise, if not at its peak.

In a Christmas season which offered many self-proclaimed blockbusters -- "Dune," for example -- "Beverly Hills Cop" emerged as the top-grossing film of the holiday period.

The film stars Murphy as a Detroit cop who goes on "vacation," but is actually investigating the murder of an old friend while off duty. His search for his friend's murderer(s) leads him into many altercations with both the man who ordered the murder and the always polite, often bumbling Beverly Hills police

force.

"Beverly Hills Cop" is best described as a pleasant surprise for its effective combination of comedy, drama and suspense. Unlike Murphy's earlier movies, like "Trading Places," this film gives him a chance to show his acting talent in addition to his comic ability.

Beside Murphy's credible performance, the film also takes the lead of films from earlier this year, like "Purple Rain" and "Footloose," and offers a good soundtrack featuring "Neutron Dance" by the Pointer Sisters and "The Heat Is On" by Glenn Frey -- both of which are currently in Billboard's Top 20 singles chart.

Unfortunately, not all of the Christmas films were as interesting as "Beverly Hills Cop." The long-awaited dream of science-fiction fans -- a movie based on "Dune" -- has already placed itself on the list of all-time great flops.

While purchasing my ticket. I was given a definition sheet in order to understand the terminology of the film. You'd

think for \$4, everything would be explained in the movie (which it was, repeatedly), so was it necessary to force the viewer to learn (or even study) this information? The paper did, however, make good airplanes for the many boring parts of the film.

The film, once it finally started, was very captivating for about the first 30 minutes. From that point, it was all downhill.

"Dune" basically breaks all of the recent standards of modern, science fiction filmmaking with its characters. Not only are the characters stereotypical of the good-guy vs. bad-guy concept, but also the actors portraying these meaningless characters are equally expendable. None of the actors seem interested in the parts they play or in what way they affect the film's ridiculous climax.

The second major flaw in "Dune" is the set design. The sets are extremely good; in fact, too good for this film. The acting is so boring that I spent more time looking at the intricate sets than paying atten-

tion to what the actors attempted.

If you have not yet gotten the hint, "Dune" is my choice for runner-up as worst film of the year to "Bolero" and wins my vote for biggest let-down of the year and possibly the decade.

Similar to "Dune" in production costs only was the latest film from super-director Francis Ford Coppola, "The Cotton Club." The film was made at an estimated cost of \$47 million, but was worth every penny.

"The Cotton Club" stars two of Hollywood's shining stars -- Richard Gere and Diane Lane -- and several who entered the movie scene more recently like Gregory Hines and Fred Gwynne.

Richard Gere, in his best performance since "An Officer and a Gentleman," is a cornet player who is hired to play for and entertain the mistress of one of New York's mob leaders. Diane Lane, best known for "Streets of Fire," plays the mistress whom Gere entertains.

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