



This comedy number, featuring costumes in the Shakespearean mode, won a Scandals first prize two years in a row for Whitehand Hall, men's dorm.

# THE VARIETY SHOW

Frankly, this is a sentimental article. For anyone who has ever enjoyed the Sooner Scandals, or Soonerland Follies, these lines will bring back memories.

By EVE KIMBRELL

EVERYBODY LIKES to be entertained. And everybody likes entertainers whom he knows personally.

This is one idea which lies behind all amateur shows, and college campuses in general have long been a hotbed of grid-irons, stunt nights, carnivals, plays, singing contests and variety shows.

The University of Oklahoma certainly has its share. In 1958, campus entertainment includes plays, concerts and operas presented by the Schools of Drama and Music as experience for students in those departments. The Engineers Show, the Campus Chest Carnival, the Mothers' Day

Variety Show, and the Barber Shop Quartet Contest in connection with Dads' Day are among the annual events. Usually a few other groups give special shows, such as the Campus Jazz Festival sponsored by Sigma Delta Chi journalism men in December.

But the biggest show on campus is Sooner Scandals.

Its size is being felt in other campus performances.

About 500 people will be concerned with the 1958 Sooner Scandals, backstage and onstage. Forty-four acts tried out for the program. The show costs about \$5,000 to

produce and takes in between \$10,000 and \$15,000. The profit provides scholarships for O. U. Band members and helps support the activities sponsored by the Union Activities Board throughout the year.

The Scandals, it should be explained, is sponsored by U. A. B. and by Band alumni.

Winning acts in the show receive trophies at a recognition dinner after the final performance. The judging committee is made up of members of the faculty and administration, and trophies are awarded in five divisions.

Group acts are usually the most ambitious in scope; these are entered by organ-

ized houses and must have 20 or more participants.

Specialty acts were added as a category to encourage mixed groups to enter. There may be between 10 and 45 students in these.

The third category, classical, was the indirect result of a fad, explained Don Clark, associate professor of drama and faculty director of the Scandals.

"At one time," he said, "everybody started entering modern dance acts. The classical category is supposed to encourage more of the traditional variety show acts."

The only stipulations on classical acts are that they contain not less than five students and include some music. The other categories are individual acts and small acts, which may not contain more than five people.

There have always been variety shows at O. U. In 1898, the sixth year of the school's existence, noted Dean Roy Gittinger in his history of the institution, caps and gowns were worn for the first time at commencement activities; but a literary and musical entertainment was already an annual, established affair. So the tradition of amateur entertainment runs even longer than that of caps and gowns.

By the 1900's the shows, which came to be called the Soonerland Follies, had taken the form of satires on students and faculty members.

But in 1926 a new idea appeared. To quote the *Oklahoma Daily* student newspaper of February 24 of that year:

"For more than 20 years the annual show has been in the form of a burlesque which poked fun at students and members of the faculty. The Follies (this year) will con-

tain nothing personal, but the interest will be kept up by music, flashy specialties and dance numbers, attractive costumes and elaborate scenery."

The name of this musical play was "Under Water," and it was written by Frank Latimer, '31ba, and Leo Densmore, '26ba. The production gave performances in Norman, Tulsa, Ponca City and Oklahoma City, and it was a hit. The Norman performance was well liked, the *Daily* noted, in spite of the fact that the electric moon of the stage setting suddenly turned on a few minutes after the beginning of one act.

The show went on in spite of the death of the musical director, John Williams, during rehearsals.

Then, in 1930, the Soonerland Follies came to an end. University officials charged that it had become smutty, so it was discontinued. Off-color humor is a traditional problem of faculty sponsors of college shows.

Other variety shows filled the gap left by the Follies' demise, but none was as big a production. In 1938, however, the Sooner Revue appeared. Charles Suggs, '40fa, now associate professor of drama at the University; Claude Traverse, '39fa, and one Jack Swinford were instrumental in getting it started.

"We had to convince the powers-that-be that we could produce something clean," Suggs recalls. "They said it had to be closely supervised. It was sponsored by the School of Drama and was performed by a company. It played one night to standing-room-only crowds."

The show had no plot but consisted of production numbers and individual acts.

Most of the company was drawn from the ranks of Orchesis, women's dance group, from the University Glee Club and the School of Drama. The Boomers, campus band, provided the music, all of which was original.

Earnest Hoberecht, '41journ, who is now vice president of the United Press in the Far East, was promotion manager for the show. Gordon Berger, who later sang with Fred Waring, was the singing star.

At that time each organized women's house on the campus nominated a candidate for O. U.'s most beautiful girl. A vote went with every ticket sold to Sooner Revue, so that this girl was "chosen by the students," according to the *Daily*.

The high point of the production was reached as Berger sang "Oh, You O. U. Beauty," and a roving spotlight picked out the winner.

The following year Suggs and James Emery, '41fa, '57m.fa, collaborated on a musical comedy called "Serenade to an Heiress." This play won an American Society of Composers, Artists and Publishers award for the best original musical comedy produced in the Southwest. Both received a \$750 scholarship.

The 1941 musical comedy, "Socrates," also won the ASCAP award. But in December of that year Pearl Harbor was bombed, and what had become the major campus amateur show was one of the first of the casualties.

A carnival, begun as an annual event in 1939, did continue through the war years, and this helped to raise money for the war effort. The Sooner Carnival was on a fairly large scale. It was held next to the South

"Wheels of the West," an elaborate ballet with roller skates, was a breath-taker, drew raves.



Shirley Howard, '56fa, stops the show with her individual act, a clown playing with fleas.



One of the best recent acts is the Four Lams, popular quartet which has now made recording.







Rehearsals are long—in some cases spanning nearly a year—and tiring for the University's variety show. Here four students work over rhythm act.

Oval, on the site of what is now the Geology Building. It featured a ferris wheel and a merry-go-round as well as fund-raising booths built and manned by sororities, fraternities and other organized houses.

Then, in 1947, Sooner Scandals came into being.

At first the shows were presented at the Sooner Theater, a Norman movie house, and they were a little different from the Scandals of today. They consisted of large group acts and a master of ceremonies who told jokes. Other categories of acts were added within a few years.

The show was next moved to Holmberg Hall, on the campus. When Holmberg was remodeled and made smaller in 1951, the show was moved again—this time to an auditorium at the Norman Naval Air Technical Training Center south of the city.

And, starting in 1955, the addition of an Oklahoma City performance to the regular Norman shows was made.

One of the first problems of these relatively recent editions of Sooner Scandals was the master of ceremonies. A variety show obviously must have one, as Clark explains it, but witty young men who have in the past tried to be funny have also raised the traditional problem of college amateur shows—humor in all shades of blue.

"In these attempts, these young men offended many people," Clark recalls. "What is funny to college boys is frequently not funny off campus."

The next emcees were two girls wearing shorts, high heels, cutaways and top hats, and carrying walking sticks. They announced the acts in rhyming couplets.

The most ambitious method was the Soonerettes. This was a chorus of dancing

girls who opened and closed the show with dance routines. When it came time to announce the acts, they appeared on stage by two's and spoke rhyming couplets.

One experiment which Clark described as "not too successful" was the use of slides. Then they tried an offstage voice as an announcer. Starting in 1957 the young, male, onstage emcee came back.

"But now," Clark added firmly, "it's just straight announcement."

Another important addition has been an orchestra. For several years orchestras were hired to accompany acts, but this year a special Sooner Scandals orchestra has been formed. Franklin Williams, assistant conductor of University Bands, will direct it.

These differences are of course relatively minor: the important change has been in the audience of the show. For, as the show got bigger and the numbers grew more elaborate, the audience grew in size and scope. The move to Oklahoma City in 1955 helped to enlarge this audience even more.

So the Sooner Scandals of 1958 must necessarily be a very different show from the Sooner Follies of 1928. The Follies could contain burlesques of students and faculty members; everybody knew the story behind the jokes then. But in a school the enrollment of which runs to about 11,000, many students wouldn't understand the burlesques. To the Oklahoma City people who would come to see them, the lampoons would mean nothing at all.

The performances still contain satire, but more likely satire on the state of Oklahoma or the world.

Apart from the content of the acts, the competitive setup of Scandals has encouraged more elaborate shows. Every year the

acts have more people in them, and the costumes and settings are more lavish.

"More people have tried out," said Clark. "Oklahoma City adds impetus."

The move complicates matters, he said. The settings have become more complicated and elaborate, yet they must "go out one door and in another." All this building and transportation, by the way, is the responsibility of the individual or group entering the act.

After nine years as Scandals faculty director, Clark claimed only one big regret—that more independent students don't enter. A group act by independents, he feels, "requires tremendous leadership by some person."

"Greeks can depend upon regimentation. They have group pressure fines—the regimentation on which the house depends. When an independent comes up with an act, it means more than a fraternity act."

But the Greek groups remain the main participants in Scandals. The prestige value of being in Scandals, and especially of winning it, is tremendous. Many houses have their acts planned by summer, and rehearsals begin in early September for a December tryout date. Only about one-third of the acts which have tried out in 1958 will be selected for the final production.

"It's a mystery to me why they enter," Clark said. "It's so expensive to produce the house acts; they make their own costumes, scenery and everything. The spirit of competition probably is the only thing that makes them do it. They compete for an inconsequential trophy—which they can show to rushees."

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"There is also the element of tradition," he added. "Since I've been working on the show, many people who were in Scandals—or whose friend was in it, or whose house entered an act, or who were connected with some performance in some way—have graduated. There are lots of them in Oklahoma City, and they want to see what's being done."

Unusual acts which Clark recalled included a square dance on roller skates by Gamma Phi Beta sorority; a modern dance to the accompaniment of a voice choir, presented by Delta Gamma, and a combination of ballet and tap dancing by Chi Omega sorority. Another unusual act was presented by Whitehand Hall, independent men's dormitory; it won two years in a row.

The diversity of acts points up the difficulty of judging just which is the best year after year. The judges may be comparing a dancer, a singer, and a boy playing the accordion. Consequently, the reaction of the audience plays a large part.

Clark admitted that he has frequently disagreed with the verdict of the judges. In general, though, he said, the verdict depends on three things. The first is skill and artistry of performance. Next is audience appeal; viewers must like the performance and respond to it readily. Third is novelty or uniqueness, which may cause the audience to respond.

"Well done satire is always good," he said. "Poor satire is awful."

The acts in the 1957 Sooner Scandals range in variety from a circus to Dixieland to a story of how England went "dry." The variety show at O. U. has changed a great deal through the years, but many attitudes toward it follow that of Bob Case, Oklahoma City junior and student director of this year's show: It's better than ever.

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