

# Arrghh! Plotz! Don Martin Drops Dead at 68

Ex Austin Dispatches

No. 12

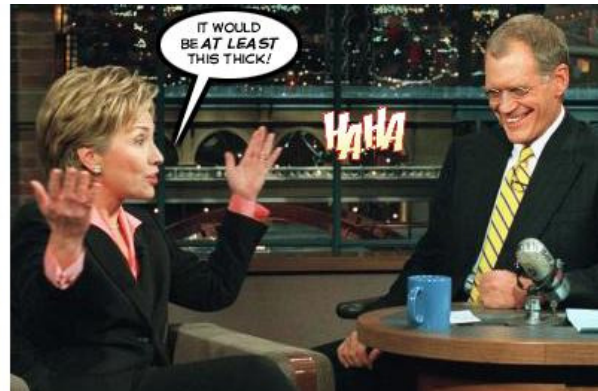
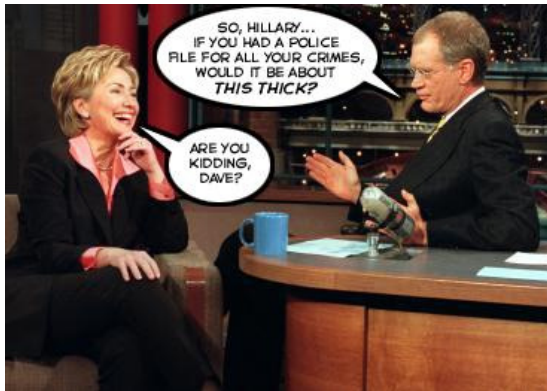
Jan. 16, 2000

Seriously, folks.



His work, which appeared in Mad Magazine for most of its history, is probably that publication's most recognizable motif, after mascot Alfred E. Neuman. My dad, a first-generation Mad fan, introduced me to Martin's work. Now yet another contributor to the milieu that created the warped, cynical author you read today (and inspired this issue's headline years in advance of the fact) is gone.<sup>1</sup>

Mad is still around, though it lost touch with the Zeitgeist in the early '80s, and hence lost much of its vitality. Many other cultural commentators shared that experience at that time. Coincidentally, I stopped reading Mad the same time Martin stopped contributing, over disagreement with Publisher Bill Gaines about ownership rights.<sup>2</sup>



## Not-to-Be-Believed Department

The Washington Times reports Jane Fonda has become a born-again Christian. Just remember, Jane, you take wafers and wine, not pita bread and Evian.<sup>3</sup>

Among other entertainment has-beens, late-night talk show host David Letterman received heart surgery<sup>4</sup> after removing a toffee-colored proboscis from the posterior of first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton on his show last week.<sup>5</sup> Letterman, a white-bread TV toady, set a new low in kowtowing to his corporatist masters. Where's his vaunted irreverence when a broad target presents itself? "American Splendor" creator Harvey Pekar had that condescending country clubber pegged years ago.<sup>6</sup>

## Jump, Jive an' Wail Department

David Kamp serves up a judicious reappraisal of the talents and career of musician/entertainer/paisan/bon vivant Louis Prima in ... Vanity Fair?<sup>7</sup> Before the Cocktail Nation/Swing revival of the last several years,<sup>8</sup> Prima seemed fated to be remembered for his work in the Disney "Jungle Book" flick,<sup>9</sup> which is a bit like remembering Harvey Keitel for his early work as a shoe salesman.<sup>10</sup> Dig it: Prima was good enough for Rhino Records to include one of his hits in its multivolume blues compilation, on the disc dealing with jump blues,<sup>11</sup> a style enjoying critical and popular re-evaluation after being swept aside by the conceits of '60s youth.<sup>12</sup>

Kamp has written elsewhere of the crushing drawbacks to the spread of nostalgia culture,<sup>13</sup> but the staff of the Phoenix New Times has no such inhibitions. The Jan. 13 issue favorably reviews Durant's, an old-school establishment in downtown Phoenix where I once had an enjoyable (and expensive) date.<sup>14</sup> In fact,

the whole issue is a delight to read, capped by the online edition's links to "Webb Page Confidential," which spotlights staffer Dewey Webb's morbid, cheesy, hepcat tabloid interests.<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, back at the ranch, I had the pleasure of catching another N'awlins<sup>16</sup> bluesman this weekend at Blue Cat Blues club in the Deep Ellum district<sup>17</sup> of Dallas. Walter "Wolfman" Washington<sup>18</sup> led his band through a gumbo of shifting styles, sometimes during the same song, even the ones that advocated booty shaking. But what the band really made me want to do was buy its CDs. Now that's talent.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Burgess, Steve. "Don Martin." Salon 15 Jan. 2000

<<http://www.salon.com/people/obit/2000/01/15/martin/index.html>>; Reidelbach, Maria. Completely Mad: A History of the Comic Book and Magazine. Boston: Little, Brown, 1991, passim.

<sup>2</sup> Burgess, op. cit.; Reidelbach, op. cit., 172-173.

<sup>3</sup> McCain, Robert Stacy. "Jane Fonda Has Become a Born-Again Christian." Washington Times 14 Jan. 2000: A2.

<sup>4</sup> Starr, Michael. "Letterman Rushed in For Heart OP." NYPO 15 Jan. 2000: 3.

<sup>5</sup> Barrett, Wayne. "Millennial Matchup." Village Voice 11 Jan. 2000: 1+; Byrne, Robert. "Death, Taxes and Hillary." ATM Feb. 2000: 18; Starr, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> Pekar, Harvey, et. al. The New American Splendor Anthology. New York City: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1991: passim.; Pekar. "A Tale of Two Comics." AC 21 Mar. 1997: 28+.

<sup>7</sup> Kamp, David. "They Made Vegas Swing." VF Dec. 1999: 348-353+.

<sup>8</sup> "Mr. P-Body." "Devil's Triangle." PNT 6 May 1999: 110; Rothenberg, Randall. "The Swank Life." Esquire April 1997: 70-79.

<sup>9</sup> Holliss, Richard, and Brian Sibley. The Disney Studio Story. New York City: Crown, 1988: 89.

<sup>10</sup> Fine, Marshall. Harvey Keitel: The Art of Darkness. New York City: Fromm International, 1998: 35; Tosches, Nick. "Heaven, Hell, Harvey Keitel." Esquire Sep. 1993: 118-123+.

<sup>11</sup> Grendysa, Peter. Liner notes to Blues Masters, Vol. 5: Jump Blues Classics. Rhino R2 71125, 1992; Cub Koda. "Blues Styles." All Music Guide: The Experts' Guide to the Best Recordings From Thousands of Artists in All Types of Music, 3rd ed. Ed. Michael Erlewine et. al. San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 1997: 475.

<sup>12</sup> Bayles, Martha. Hole in Our Soul: The Loss of Beauty and Meaning in American Popular Music. New York City: Free Press, 1994: passim; Birnbaum, Larry. "Waxing on: Blues in B&W." DB Sep. 1986: 39-40+; Early, Gerald. "One Nation Under a Groove." TNR 15 July 1991: 30-44; Menand, Louis. "Life in the Stone Age." TNR 7 Jan. 1991: 38-44.

For a corrective to Bayles, see Carnegie, M.D. Review. TAS Jun. 1994; Doherty, Brian. "Taking the Popular out of Popular Music." Reason Dec. 1994: 63.

<sup>13</sup> Kamp. "Crushed by Nostalgia." GQ Jan. 1993: 82-89.

<sup>14</sup> Broder, Andy. "Blast From Repast." PNT 13 Jan. 2000: 75; Proffitt, David. "Rat Packing 'em in: Classy Digs, Classic Drinks Give Durant's Enduring Allure." The Rep 10 Jun. 1999: 56.

<sup>15</sup> "The Flash." "Dewey-Eyed." PNT 23 Sep. 1999: 8.

<sup>16</sup> "New Orleans." Pronouncing Dictionary of Proper Names, 2nd ed. Ed. John K. Nolland. Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1998: 722.

<sup>17</sup> Babitz, Eve. "Down and Dirty in Deep Ellum." Esquire Gentleman Spring 1993: 74-78+; Hodge, Larry D. Good Times in Texas: A Pretty Complete Guide to Where the Fun Is. Plano, Texas: Republic of Texas Press, 1999: 14-15.

<sup>18</sup> The Met music listings, 12 Jan. 2000: 38; Roberts, Jim; and Ben Sandmel. "Waxing On: New Blues." DB May 1987: 34-37.