

Dionysus Busted in A2

Exposing His Privates

Ken Kelley

1969

ANN ARBOR, Jan. 26—Euripides was so pissed after the Ann Arbor pigs busted the Performance Group's performance of "Dionysus in '69"—an updated and realistic version of his "Bacchae"—that the city was covered with a slick icy glaze for three days afterwards.

It all started when word leaked out that a nude performance was going to take place on the chaste floor of the Michigan Union Ballroom, as a part of the University of Michigan's annual Creative Arts Festival.

Only a month before, The Living Theatre had conducted a glorious orgy on the same floor, but the pigs didn't know about it. But this was different. This was a chance for them to prevent anyone from "standing naked uncovered with your privates naked and uncovered to the great scandal of those present and to the manifest corruption of their morals,"—the state law the group was finally charged with violating.

During an afternoon meeting the day of the performance, the company's director Richard Schechner, Ann Arbor pig chief Walter Krasny—a meek, apologetic looking man who is the tool of Prosecutor William Delhey—and other city officials huddled in secret corners, discussing all kinds of stuff.

Schechner said after the bust that Krasny told him that if they presented the play with any nude scenes, he'd be busted. Schechner told Krasny to do anything he wanted and that the Group was not going to diminish the play's artistic value through cheap intimidation.

Schechner explained that the reason they did the play fully clothed in Detroit the night before at the See Theatre was that there were 35 pigs menacing around, the theatre was a sty, and the group got in Detroit only a half hour before show-time and didn't have time to get their heads together, let alone rehearse.

So the show happened. The "birth" and "death" scenes were performed with a beautiful, stark nakedness, as well as a wild breast-flopping, feet-stomping, dance immediately after the birth.

After actor Bill Finley (Dionysus) threw 500 "Dionysus in '69" buttons on the floor, the actors were rounded up by 7 Ann Arbor plainclothesmen (they fooled everyone with their turtlenecks and crewcuts and cowboy boots) and were led off into the dressing room.

Meanwhile, 500 students gathered outside in support of the group and were literally at the disposal of the actors. "Whatever they want us to do, we'll do" said one chick, and everybody's eyes echoed the same commitment.

But Schechner told everyone that things were okay, and to go over to a local coffeehouse and wait for the group's reappearance.

Well, up came the technocrats with their fingerprint ink, cameras and strobes and stalked into the dressing room emerging victorious some half hour later with all sorts of identification of the criminals. The Group was let go, but had to appear at District Court Monday morning at 9:30 to face the charges. Everyone went over to the coffeehouse and rapped and set up a defense fund for the court costs.

After a lot of hassles in the morning, bail was finally set at \$75 apiece, and the Group paid it and tried to get a plane back to New York, but Euripides was just starting his revenge.

Schechner said a representative of the group would definitely come back on the March 12 trial date, and that, if he could raise \$10,000, he would carry it as far as necessary to have the conviction which is sure to come in the lower courts reversed.

The only problem is that Delhey accused the Group of indecent exposure, a high misdemeanor, instead of obscenity where a real test case could have been fought.

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