

fare," said Mr. Leach soothingly. "But that doesn't help much, because the applause you get when you come in always covers up part of the cadenza."

"Well, if there's stunned silence tonight I'll go right on," Miss Ronstadt said, with a smile.

"There may be a better way to get you on," said Mr. Leach, "and let the audience applaud when you've finished singing."

As Mr. Leach turned his attention to the acoustical problems posed by a rapidly moving female chorus, we asked Miss Ronstadt how she had changed her vocal technique to handle a different kind of music.

"It's not altogether a new way of singing for me," she said. "I've al-

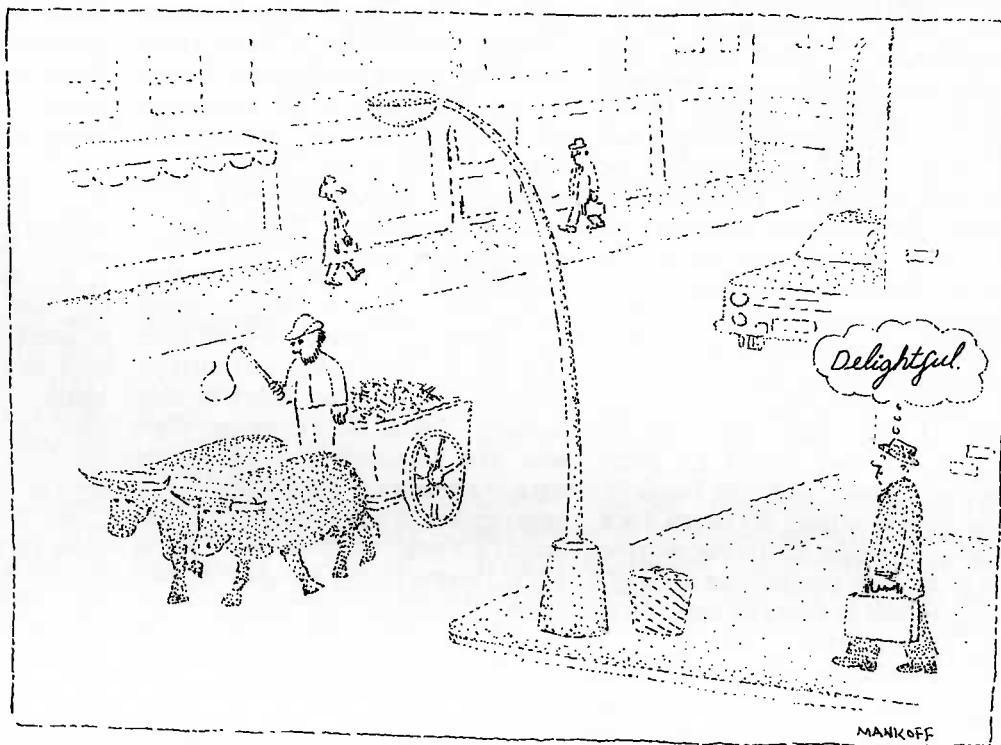
ways had pretty good diction; in pop work you emphasize consonants and sibilants. Here, too, I have to hit the consonants very hard. Acoustically, there's no problem, because I'm used to microphones and very large sports stadiums, and I'm used to singing by braille—by the feel in my throat—with the deafening din of a rock band behind me. I always knew I had a soprano, but pop stuff uses mainly texture and chest tones, and the thing I'm working on at the moment is the technical organization that moves your voice from one register to another. Actually, I have two—or maybe even three—voices: a pop one, which comes from the chest; an in-between one; and a soprano, which goes up to high F."

A few minutes later, the orchestra hit a muted fanfare and Miss Ronstadt made her first-act entrance, singing a florid coloratura cadenza that sounded like Rossini and ended with the words " 'Tis Mabel." Then she stopped to allow for applause and asked the conductor to give her a downbeat for the next line.

"Linda," said Mr. Leach, "will you try it again, holding off your entrance until the 'bel'? Let me see what it looks like."

Miss Ronstadt repeated her entrance, singing the entire cadenza off-

Suddenly a delightful Continental custom is sweeping America!



stage and appearing through some painted trees on the last syllable. The effect was instant theatrical magic, and everyone in the theatre applauded. "That eliminates the problem of applause covering the cadenza," said Mr. Leach. "Let's try it tonight."

When the rehearsal was over, we asked Mr. Leach how he had arrived at his unorthodox approach to Gilbert and Sullivan. "These musical pieces—like the plays of Shakespeare—have become encrusted with a lot of notions about how they ought to be played," he told us. "But the aesthetic factors are different now from what they were in the eighteen-eighties, and while you can restore the traditional way of doing a play, you can't restore the traditional audience that experienced it. 'Pirates' was popular theatre in its day, and I thought that it should be recreated to reach the same kind of popular audience. So we started by concentrating on the material and trying to respond directly to it, in order to recapture the kind of rough vitality that is characteristic of any new work of art. We have used the individuality of pop voices to duplicate the impact that the original work had on the original audience, and we thought it appropriate to use a kind of contemporary sound in the orchestration. But

most of the music is still sung in the original key, and all the actors have been told to play their roles with absolute sincerity, as if we were back in 1880 and this were a brand-new work. What I tell the cast *constantly* is 'If you just trust the material and don't comment on it, the effect will be much funnier.' Sincerity and innocence are the essence of comedy. What we're also trying to create, through the use of sound technology, is a new kind of theatrical intimacy, which exists only in this theatre at this moment in time. The technology is imperfect, but we do as much as we can to make it invisible yet expressive. Everything I've ever done in the theatre comes out of regarding problems not as limitations but as ways in which you are forced to come up with solutions that require ingenuity. A problem is not a problem. The problem is how to make it a virtue."

STILL WONDERFUL: Frank Capra, the gentleman and filmmaker, came to New York the other day, from his home in Southern California, to see a movie. The movie was "It's a Wonderful Life." Because Frank Capra directed this film in 1946, he had already seen it quite a few times. Never

before, however, had he seen it during one of Christopher Little's and David White's "It's a Wonderful Life" celebrations. In 1970, when Little, a photographer, and White, a writer, were still college students, they discovered "I.A.W.L." (Jimmy Stewart, Donna Reed, Lionel Barrymore, Henry Travers, comic climax) on the late show. Every year since then, around Christmastime, they have invited over a couple of dozen friends who believe that there is nothing wrong with unbridled sentimentality, and that "I.A.W.L.," therefore, is a wonderful movie. The most recent party was the tenth-anniversary showing, and, because Little and White had decided that this should be the final "I.A.W.L." party, they wrote a letter to Frank Capra inviting him to attend. He wrote back, "Nothing would make me happier than to be with you guys on the night when you will be running our favorite film. I will be there."

The party took place a couple of nights before Christmas in a loft in Chelsea, where Little lives with his wife, Betsy Kittredge. A large movie

screen had been set up in one area of the apartment, and a sixteen-millimetre projector was threaded with the first reel of Capra's own print of the film. A few inches of leader broke off the reel while it was being threaded, and Little and White seized this for their "I.A.W.L." memorabilia collection. These archives contain, among other things, two autographed copies of Frank Capra's autobiography; two autographed copies of "The Greatest Gift," the short story, by Philip Van Doren Stern, upon which "I.A.W.L." was based; testimonial letters from "I.A.W.L." aficionados; and surface-to-air photographs from Ralph Wolfe's wedding. Ralph Wolfe, an architect who lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is a veteran of eight "I.A.W.L." celebrations. When he and Betty Gilbreath got married, in Connecticut, in 1979, Patrick Curley and Jane Bayard (nine "I.A.W.L." parties each) arranged for a chartered airplane to fly over the wedding site trailing a banner that said "RALPH AND BETTY: IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE."

Frank Capra arrived ahead of most

of the guests, accompanied by his son Tom, a film producer who lives in New York. The elder Capra settled into a chair in the Littles' living room and immediately relaxed. He wore a white sports coat, a white V-neck sweater, a white turtleneck, and coffee-brown slacks. He is eighty-three years old now and has a thick white mustache, thick white eyebrows, and what appears to be a permanent suntan. In person, Frank Capra seems like most of his movies—soulful and optimistic—and he looked as if he were prepared to withstand two hours at the head of a receiving line. Christopher Little explained, however, that an effort had been made to keep the guest list down. "We have to limit this to the dependable hard-core," Little said. "You've got to be a little ruthless. You need people you can rely on. This afternoon, when we were setting up the projector, it was giving us all sorts of trouble. We need to feel confident that in the worst possible case—total mechanical failure—we have on hand a crowd of spectators who can act out the entire movie line for line."

Soon after nine o'clock, by which time twenty-five guests had arrived, everyone took a seat in the screening area of the loft, and David White made a brief speech. He ran through a capsule biography of Frank Capra (born in Palermo, Sicily, in 1897; grew up in Los Angeles; three Oscars, in 1934, 1936, and 1938, for "It Happened One Night," "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town," and "You Can't Take It with You," respectively), and then he said, "Frank Capra is a piece of American culture and therefore a piece of each one of us—a part of why we laugh when we laugh and why we weep when we weep. Personally, although I have just met him, he's a man who is very dear to me, because he's made some wonderful movies. And, on an even more personal note, I'd like to say that this party is proof that miracles do occur, because I've wanted to meet Frank Capra for a long time, and tonight



I've said hello and shaken his hand—and that's a miracle."

Frank Capra rose from his chair and said, "I'm just delighted to be here, just delighted. This is one of the proudest moments of my life. I can't tell you how pleased I am that you want to see something that I made. I won't say more than that."

The lights were turned out, and Tom Capra started the film projector. There is always quite a bit of crying during an "I.A.W.L." party; it's that sort of story. Because this evening was pitched in a particularly high emotional key, the sounds of muffled nose-blowing—originating in the vicinity of Ralph Wolfe—began during the first of the film's four reels. After each reel, the lights went on and Frank Capra graciously conducted an impromptu seminar. People wanted to know "How did you cast this?" and "Did you know when you were making it that you had something very special?" and "Was anyone else considered for the Lionel Barrymore role?" and "Did Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed actually fall in love during the filming?" and "How many takes did you need to get the telephone scene?"

When the last reel ended, by which time the sounds of weeping had become choruslike, there was applause, more sincerely grateful remarks by Frank Capra, and more questions from the floor. Once, to illustrate a point, Frank Capra said, "I must tell you one story about Lionel Barrymore. Have I got time?"

Christopher Little said, "You've got all night long."

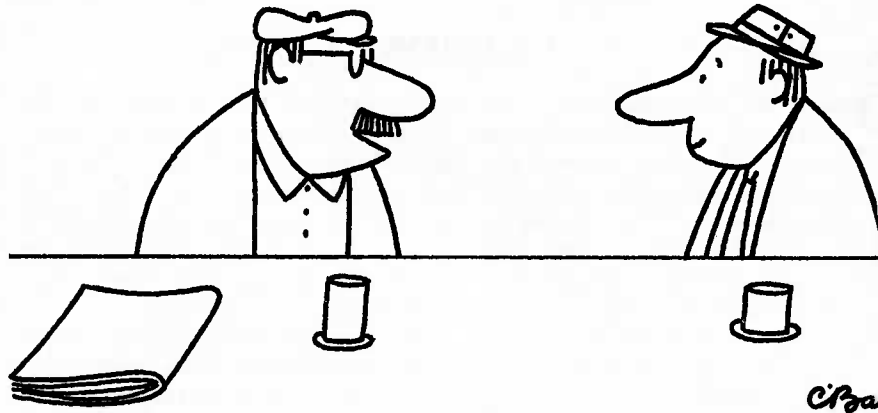
The Exercise

PART ONE: It was noon, it was in the Terrace Room of the Plaza Hotel, there was Chris Evert Lloyd, the world-class women's tennis champion, there were some executives of an Italian sportswear company who had just flown in from Italy, there were lots of sports reporters from the electronic and print media, there was food (a buffet of beef bourguignonne, seafood crêpes, shrimps, rice, cold stringbeans, asparagus in prosciutto, and various French-related desserts), there were some tables, round, with white tablecloths, and on these tables there were some half-dead yellow mums.

"Chris," a man said.

"Hi," Chris said.

"I am sure these questions will be



"I'm a fixture here."

rather redundant to you," said a news-woman. "But I am going to ask them anyway."

"Will this five-year-exclusive contract interfere with your career?" a man asked.

"I am not doing much," Chris answered.

"Do you foresee gradual retirement?" a man asked.

"I envision a family one day," Chris answered.

"What were the factors involved in this decision for your career?" a man asked.

"How do you feel about Tracy Austin?" a woman asked.

"It's an Italian company," Chris said. "I think those Italians really know what they are doing. I really have a good feel for things."

A large, middle-aged, overweight man who had lost most of the hair on his head but had a nice bushy mustache played with the ends of his mustache as he asked the bartender for a Bloody Mary. Then, turning to his friends, four men who looked more or less like him, he said, "I think Oakland will beat the Giants." Then he reached into a bowl that was filled with salted nuts and, taking a handful, put them all into his mouth at once.

A man—a man not referred to above—went up to a lectern and said a few words about welcome, sportswear, a sportswear company, and Chris Evert Lloyd, in Italian-accented English. Another man—a man also not referred to above—then joined him and said more words about welcome, a sportswear company, and Chris Evert Lloyd, in Italian, and the other man translated what he said into Italian-accented English.

Chris Evert Lloyd then joined the

two men at the lectern. One of the gave her a dozen red roses. "I am really excited about wearing Elles clothes, because they are really beautiful," she said. "I don't know you've seen the line. They're No. 1 Europe, and I hope they'll be No. 1 the U.S. It's the best. It deserves to be the best."

PART TWO: After reading the above, can you tell (a) that Chris Evert Lloyd, the world-class women's tennis champion, has just endorsed a line of sportswear manufactured by an Italian sportswear manufacturer? (b) how Chris Evert Lloyd feels about Tracy Austin? (c) whether most Italians speak English with an Italian accent or don't speak English at all? (d) if, according to United States government statistics, the large, middle-aged, overweight man will have a health problem soon? (e) if Chris Evert Lloyd can have visions? (f) what Chris Evert Lloyd means when she says, "I have a really good feel for things"? (g) if Chris Evert Lloyd trusts only Italian sportswear manufacturers, and not the average Italian walking down a street in Milan?

Would you have liked Chris Evert Lloyd more or less if she had been a geophysicist, a water tower, or an elephant hunted mercilessly for its valuable ivory tusks?

After reading the first paragraph did you say to yourself, quietly or out loud, "Gee, wish I'd been there"?

If you were offered a large amount of money, would you refuse to endorse sportswear made in Italy?

If you were offered a large amount of money, would you refuse to endorse anything?