

Mid-Peninsula Performance of
the San Francisco Mime Troupe's
"Showdown at Crawford Gulch"
Wednesday, Sept 1, 7pm (music begins at 6:30)
MENLO COLLEGE QUAD
(1000 El Camino Real, Atherton)

Free Performance; suggested donation: the cost of a movie ticket
Bring a blanket or chairs to sit on

"Mime has a broader definition than just the silent pantomime. The Greek definition of it is the exaggeration of everyday life in story and song. So it's not silent."

Velina Brown, actor, SFMT

What's the San Francisco Mime Troupe? What's the show about? Check out the notes below, collected from the SFMT's web site: www.sfmt.org (415) 285-1717:

About the Show: "SHOWDOWN AT CRAWFORD GULCH"

Showdown at Crawford Gulch is an original fable about lies, greed, and dirty double-crossing in a dusty old Texas town where the Good go bad, the Bad ain't pretty, and the Ugly get uglier. Tumbleweeds fly as peace-loving citizens of 1886 Crawford Gulch, Texas, face perpetual war with the neighboring Comanche, and townfolk fight to protect their liberties as they are whipped into a frenzy of fear over reported Arrows of Mass Destruction.

Writer Michael Gene Sullivan sets the stage for the story-

It is 1886, and a rust red sun rises on the sleepy frontier town of Crawford Gulch, Texas, as its peaceloving citizens start a new day. A silent tumbleweed rolls lazily across the prairie. A coyote cries out. And then...in the distance...the sound of...Drums! Comanche drums, announcing...danger! Crawford Gulch is in danger! Bloodthirsty savages are on the warpath, and this innocent, isolated island of civilization is threatened with horrible annihilation!

Or is it?

Well that's what Cyrus T. Bogspavin wants everyone to believe! He's the robber baron from back east who already owns most of the county, leaving only the Town of Crawford Gulch, and the nearby Comanche tribal lands out of his grasp. ... once the Comanche have been pacified out of existence Bogspavin will make a generous offer for their worthless patch of prairie. What in tarnation could it be about this out-of-the-way piece of land that caught the eye of a wealthy man like Bogspavin? What could be on it? Or is it something under it...

Meanwhile, in town, Mayor Canem is the only protection the citizens have from the savage hordes and their constant attacks. Sure, there were some questions back when he was elected, but all that blew over once he and the heroic Sheriff alerted the citizens of Crawford Gulch to the Red threat! Yessiree, since then no one has questioned his legitimacy. Why, he's even introduced a "Home Range Security" program....

But somehow things ain't workin' as smoothly as the Mayor and Bogspavin would like. The townspeople are complaining: Is all this security necessary? ...





ABOUT THE SAN FRANCISCO MIME TROUPE (from the website www.sfmt.org):

The San Francisco Mime Troupe does not do pantomime. We mean 'mime' in the ancient sense: to mimic. We are satirists, seeking to make you laugh at the absurdities of contemporary life and at the same time, see their causes. We've done shows about most of the burning issues of our time, generally shows that debunked the official story. We perform everywhere from public parks to palaces of culture, aiming to reach the broadest possible audience.

Our artistic history has been a series of experiments with popular theater forms. Founding director R.G. Davis began in 1959 with avant-garde performance events in lofts and basements; when he discovered commedia dell'arte (Italian Renaissance marketplace comedy) he began a nearly 40-year tradition of free shows in the parks. Since becoming a collective in 1970, we have done melodramas, spy thrillers, musical comedies, epic histories, sitcoms, cartoon epics. Our trademark style draws from all these genres and is based on their common elements: strong story line, avowed point of view, larger-than-life characters, fantasy, live music.

These are the universal elements of popular theater, understood by everyone from academics gathered on a Midwestern U.S. campus, to a captive audience of prisoners or high school students, to a crowd of working women on a plaza in Bogotá. The SFMT delights in savaging the norms of mainstream American theater, with its naturalistic values, its emphasis on personal (or at most family) psychology, its settings confined to living rooms and patios. We admire the depths reached by 20th-century realism, but we also think it sanctions social inaction. Our characters are individuals but they are also members of social classes: conscious or unconscious participants in the unending wars over land and power and wealth which drive human history.

Before the word "multicultural" entered the language, the SFMT was a multiracial company. We made this choice and maintain it to reflect the complexity of America's present reality, and to state our hope for a multicultural future. Many of our shows are cross-cultural collaborations, created on the principle of "Seeing Double" (title of our Obie-winning 1989 show about Israel and Palestine): showing people on each side of a cultural divide what the world looks like from the other. We've applied the same idea on international projects: in the Mideast, Canada, Latin America and Asia.

In the 1970's and 1980's, we toured the U.S. twice a year and Europe every other year. In the 1990's, as touring subsidies disappeared under the rightwing attack on the National Endowment for the Arts, we replaced one touring season with an annual Youth Theater Project: helping at-risk youth create and perform shows about their lives. Our youth work goes hand-in-hand with a new affirmative action policy which is making us multigenerational. We seek out young performers; middle-aged writers and composers collaborate with artists in their twenties to reflect the very different experiences of the 60's and the 90's generations.

In 1987, the nation's theater critics honored the SFMT with a special Tony Award for Excellence in Regional Theater. Our other most cherished honor is the San Francisco Bay Area Media Alliance Golden Gadget Award. We intend to go on bringing joy and energy to audiences, and annoying the powerful, well into the 21st century.

San Francisco Mime Troupe: (415) 285-1717

Web: www.sfmt.org

ABOUT THE "FREE" SHOW

While the performance is listed as free, in reality arts groups such as the SF Mime Troupe survive on donations from the audience. So, after the performance, performers stand around with buckets for contributions. Personal support for the arts is not widely accepted in contemporary American culture – unless we are forced to pay, such as at the movie theater – and this attitude hurts non-profit groups such as public radio, public television . . . and arts groups including the Mime Troupe. So, be ready to cough up a donation of at least \$5 for the performance (much cheaper than a movie ticket).

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE STYLE

The Mime Troupe's performance is based on burlesque, vaudeville, and Commedia dell'arte styles – all of which rely a great deal on audience participation. Cheering for the "good guys," booing and hissing the "bad guys" – all are accepted and needed to help the performance. Notice also the number of costume changes, as each actor plays at least 2 characters. Also note the use of allegory and metaphor, where what's being said often stands for something else. So, in "Showdown at Crawford Gulch," who is represented by Cyrus T. Bogspavin? The Mayor?

The performance also draws from old time serials that once were common in movie theaters and old radio dramas . . . that had a great deal of influence on movies like George Lucas's *Star Wars*.

ABOUT THE TOPICS/ISSUES ADDRESSED IN "SHOWDOWN AT CRAWFORD GULCH"

As with any show based in political satire, the performance makes the most sense to an audience that is aware of current events. Below are a few of the global and national topics/issues addressed by the Mime Troupe performance, with some questions to consider regarding the show:

- What is the significance of the name of the town, "Crawford"?
- What is the significance of the term "pre-emptive strike"?
- "Natural gas swindlers in Houston" is probably a reference to what company?
- What company met in secret with VP Dick Cheney and helped formulate the Bush administration's energy policy?
- The method of interrogating prisoners refers to what scandal from the past Spring/Summer?
- "It's a fight between savages and civilization" connects the play to what public official regarding what global issue? What is the result of "framing" the issue in simple terms of black and white?
- What is the significance of the line, "The only way to teach them respect for the law is to arrest them before they can break it!" ?
- A major theme of the play is that the townsfolk are sold the idea that Indians are a danger – terrorizing them. In the play, this is done by the government to help corporations, with the help of the media. How does this relate to situations in the U.S. today?
- Note the references to media in the show (below). Which of these have a resonance with issues regarding the media in the U.S. today?
 - The townsfolk believe they are well informed by their paper. "We're lucky we're so well informed."
 - "A real reporter confirms the facts, even if the President says it."
 - The media do not have the ability or motivation to check the accuracy/facts of allegations of incidents of "Injun terror," as reported by the Government, so the media just end up repeating the unfounded allegations/propaganda.
 - The complicity of the press/media in constructing the climate of fear. "We couldn't have won the war on terror without the press."
 - From false newspaper reports:
 - Office of Home Range Security: Attacks likely
 - "Eagles Drop Biological Weapons on U.S. Troops"
 - The Indians left blankets behind that carried smallpox – infected our soldiers. From where did the Indians get the blankets? What historical reference is this drawn from?

- Minister's wife broke her arm, but the paper said she got infected from Indians poisoning her well.
- Indians Possess Arrows of Mass Destruction
- "The French do not support our war: so use *Freedom Hair Cream*" What global situation does this refer to?
- Note that Bogspavin is after water, gas, coal on Indian land and has a "no-bid contract" on development of Indian lands after the war. What is a "no-bid contract"? What company received "no-bid" contracts with the U.S. Government to help rebuild Iraq?
- What company is Vice President Dick Cheney closely identified with?
- What is the significance of the line, "Corporate domination is our manifest destiny!" ?
- What is the significance of the line, "If this is how Christians act in time of crisis, he wants to get as far away as he can from Jesus." ?
- What solutions are proposed for the problems presented in the play?
- The basic theme of the play might be read as: We're being hoodwinked about the war on terror. Doing crazy things because of the climate of fear (e.g., cutting down trees because of reports of the "tree Injuns"). We're signing away property (representing individual rights and liberties?) because the government says it is necessary, that "freedom has its price."
 - "No one would believe a war on terror could be made up."
 - How does the play relate to the current situation in the U.S.?
- Things or ideas I agreed with in the play were: _____
- Things or ideas I disagreed with in the play were: _____
- The thing that most got me to thinking in the play was: _____
- What did you find enjoyable about the performance?
- What did you find problematic about the performance?
- Do you consider yourself well-informed about current affairs and issues locally, nationally, and globally?
- From where or what media outlet do you get your information about current affairs and issues?
- In what social, cultural, or political activities are you engaged to try and change the world in which you live?
- As a citizen in our global society, what duties and responsibilities do you have to stay current on important issues and events, and try to create a better world?



Photos from San Francisco Mime Troupe performance at Menlo College September 2003