

Comic Exit

When he who loves levity leaves at last, laughter is lost

I have always had this peculiar notion: my friends can leave Milwaukee for greater challenges at any time as long as I have already left. I have this great, unnatural fear of being left behind.

And now, Bobby Rivers has gone and done it. As you read this, he has already become a regular fixture of New York television news, just as the fabled Delta Washerless faucet has become a regular fixture of Zsa Zsa Gabor's bathroom.

And I am depressed.

Not because I have been left behind so much as simply left. There is a great void in my calendar of friends. There is a great hole in my sense of humor.

You can lose jobs. You can lose keys. You can lose minds. You can lose all sorts of things and continue to muddle through in pretty good shape.

But lose a true friend and you walk squarely into the snake pit, a cold, dark, forbidding place where the only bright spot is Olivia de Havilland.

I do, however, understand the reason behind it all.

To quote the famous Captain Jeffrey T. Spaulding: "He went into the jungle — where all the monkeys throw nuts."

"If I stay here, I'll go nuts!"

"Hooray, hooray, hooray!"

Bobby Rivers had to get out of Milwaukee.

He ran out of comic space here. It became a matter of creative survival. This guy was, is, and always shall be a comic explosive waiting to be dropped on an unwary population. And I think the majority of the unwary population of Milwaukee accepted that — quite happily.

Greg Moody is a reporter and movie critic for WITI-TV.



Bobby Rivers: The last laugh.

I know of no other person who could call for a job interview, be put off any number of times, then get through by claiming to be the man's butler and where, oh, where, for the love of God, was the fire extinguisher? (This is, in fact, how he managed to swing an interview at NBC.) Nor do I know of any other person who

could make Shopping Spree on the "More" show not only interesting, but a major comic bit.

Who else, within the easily bruised ego-mania that is the media, could take it as a true compliment, a measure of his worth and success, that Mike Drew just couldn't stand the sight of him?

He didn't care. He had fun. The viewers had fun. He took on everything and everyone with a biting sarcasm that left no marks on the victims. It's just that a lot of people who were looking on and signing the checks couldn't seem to catch the joke. The talent burned a bit too hot for their taste and understanding.

Bobby Rivers has the fastest creative comic mind I have ever encountered. He ran on pure, incandescent wit. Comic invention spewed forth unleashed, unsullied, unexpected and unimpeded. He created comedy out of the ozone rather than waiting for an event or a situation to provide his comic catalyst. And he did it all, continually, at the very real risk of being labeled juvenile and obnoxious — an occupational hazard.

Energy such as this frightens a lot of people. They prefer ripples over waves.

But I, for one, just couldn't get enough of him.

And now, he's taken off for New York City.

And soon, all the folks who wouldn't give him the room here will be slapping themselves on the back at parties and telling each other what a great talent he was and gosh, it was sad to see him go and gee, they knew he'd make it big and wow, they knew him when and boy, what a funny fellow he was.

Now it's all said and done. The bags are packed, the plane has left and all the friends have long ago wrapped up the going-away parties and wandered off into their other lives.

Bobby, it has gotten awfully quiet around here without you. The laughter springs more from ground level than from the stratosphere. Saturday breakfast is a dull affair. My view of the city is slowly returning to sanity. Quiet and slow. A big city with a small-town feel. A nice place to raise kids. A great place on a great lake.

And one heck of a lousy place to find a good, cheap laugh. Awfully quiet.

So, how do you say goodbye? (After cancellation of the "More" show, Bobby Rivers was told his services were no longer needed after his contract expired. He is now a news feature reporter for independent station WPIX in New York.) ■