The Sound Of My Own Voice
AND OTHER NOISES

Severn Darden
AT THE SECOND CITY
Severn Darden

AT THE SECOND CITY

THE SOUND OF MY OWN VOICE

AND OTHER NOISES
NOTES ON "THE SOUND OF MY OWN VOICE AND OTHER NOISES"

"I am allergic to only two things," Severn Darden says, "kitty-litter and a species of common fern called 'maidenhair.'" I hasten to add a third: He is very allergic to Gloom. Most of Severn Darden's days and nights, in fact, have been devoted to discovering cures for Gloom. His best remedies—these luminous, original, funny, baroque monologues and skits you are about to hear—have banished Gloom in audiences in Chicago, St. Louis, New York, Virginia, San Francisco and Hamtramck, Michigan.

The first time I saw Severn Teackle Darden was from the window of a streetcar jogging down Lake Park Avenue near the campus of the University of Chicago. Sartorial in applegreen waistcoat, cane, English tweeds and white tennis shoes, Severn was emerging from a dilapidated mansion complete with Charles Addams' cupolas, festoons and forbidding shuttered windows. He was all of 19. Later I heard that Severn shared this home with a mad ballerina in her early 60s and a cowboy poet named Buck Rosen. At the College of the University of Chicago, which Severn attended in the late 1940s, he was a campus legend, one who brought felicity and Dada freedom into the intense, sober, medieval atmosphere of the College in those days. Only a month or so ago I heard an undergraduate retell (probably for the 1,000,000th time) one of the choicest of the Darden legends: One evening in great, gloomy, deserted Rockefeller Chapel, Severn was giving an organ recital for the edification and delight of some young lady. Suddenly an irate campus watchman appeared, brandishing flashlight and oaths. Black Mexican cape flapping, Severn fled like the Phantom of the Opera to various parts of the Chapel, the watchman hot on his heels. Finally he stopped dead where the altar should have been (Rockefeller Chapel being nondenominational, has no altar) and his arms spreadeagled Severn boomed: "Sanctuary! Sanctuary!" The startled watchman gaped; and not knowing what to do, he retreated sheepishly.

Who is Severn Darden? He is that canny, astonished, ebullient child in all of us whom we have almost forgotten. He is the child who knows that the Emperor is really naked. Instead of saying so immediately, Severn weaves out of words an imaginary suit more fabulous than the Emperor's new, invisible clothes. He might begin, for example, an extemporaneous lecture on the subtle changes of fashion from the days of the loincloth of St. Simon Stylitus to the tuxedo of Daddy Warbucks. Or he might with infinite variety recite a thirty minute Dada poem consisting entirely of the word "bare." Gradually the Emperor and subjects get the drift and, relieved, laugh away their pomposity.
Severn Darden’s humor is a potpourri of heady, surrealistic humor—New Orleans, where he was born, and tough, caustic “Chicago Style” comedy. New Orleans (where his father was District Attorney) has left its imprint deep in his imagination—the ghosts of that city, its intricate, whimsical, aristocratic charm, its odd, European juxtapositions. But the Darden humor is also “Chicago Style”—pungent concrete, satirical, informed, very involved with everyday politics and folkways and business. Darden was one of the backbones of Paul Sills’ Compass Players who in the middle 1950s acted in taverns and clubs around the University of Chicago. Mike Nichols, Elaine May and Shelley Berman cut their comic teeth as Compass Players. The others (who appear with Severn on this record) went on to establish Chicago’s famous Second City in which Severn, under Sills’ fine direction, acts today.

And there is a third, rich ingredient in the Darden humor. A peculiar kind of erudition runs through these monologues and skits. I do not mean egghead. Mort Sahl is our classic egghead comic: political, topical, a Hip Will Rogers of the USA earth, earthy. Severn, on the other hand, is the only American comic of the first rank who can incorporate in his act something like the wit and scholarly, wry, scurrilous, outrageous puns and jokes of James Joyce. One can imagine Severn Darden—especially when he speaks as the Mad German Professor—saying something like this celebrated pun in Ulysses: Stephen Dedalus, delineating his theory that all of Shakespeare was inspired by his wife Ann Hathaway, quips: “If others have a will Ann hath a way. By cock, she was to blame.”

Darden’s Herr Professor Valter von der Vogelweide has a similar streak of poignant, Rabelaisian humor. His erudition is an erudition gone haywire. The only dramatic scene I know that is comparable to the Mad Professor’s “A Short Talk on the Universe” is the famous metaphysical spiel given by Lucky in Waiting for Godot. It is a “‘mad, bad, sad, glad’” lecture. “Now, the Universe we examine through what Spinoza called the Lens of Philosophy,” the Professor begins—and then goes right off his trolley. The Professor is as crazy as life itself. This is the lecture we secretly longed to hear during all the dreary classes we had to sit through. We are left at the end laughing in the Void. Professor Vogelweide is, in fact, the Mad Professor of the troubled, hopeful dreams of our schooldays who lectures forever in a classroom located somewhere between Iowa City and the platonic schools of ancient Alexandria.

("A Short Talk on the Universe" was originally developed when Severn was with the Compass Players; the first time it was performed as a solo act was in 1959 Chicago when he appeared at Alan Ribback’s Gate of Horn.)

All of the ingredients of the Darden humor—whimsical surrealistic, concrete and caustic, loony erudition—give charm, edge and wit to the “Vienna: 1885” burlesque in which Severn plays Dr. Siegfried Fafrn, head of the Imperial Medical Society, and Howard Alk is straight man as Sigmund Freud. Only Darden could pull off the fantastic bits which make the skit great: The little girl swinging back and forth with her long, white beard at the tip of which is a tiny, tinkly bell; the doughnut factory; the Jules Vern trip to the moon which isn’t the moon but—(I don’t want to spoil your fun by giving away this bizarre punch line).

Talk about Severn Darden always seems to end with everybody telling one or another of the Darden legends. Let me leave you with two of my favorites: One day in a bar Severn fell into casual conversation with a stranger. The man began telling anecdotes about a gnomish, baroque character he knew who lived in a round room which contained only a round bed and a round mirror directly above on the ceiling. As the stranger went on Severn heard a more and more familiar note. At last he could contain himself no longer and asked casually, “What’s your friend’s name?” “Severn Darden,” the stranger said. Or there is this one: Severn had a friend named Seth, an angular Greek scholar who looked as if he were an aristocratic Barcelona Jew of the XVIII century or an authority on the foot fetish industry on the Isle of Corfu. Seth in black German ski cap and Severn in Mexican cape were walking down 55th Street bound for a University of Chicago party. It seems that Severn’s reputation and appearance had for some months bedeviled an excitable young philosophy student named Bloom. Well, this particular evening Bloom happened to spot Severn and Seth. He saw red. Something about them prompted Bloom, frothing, to stride up to Severn and demand, “Do you really think it’s worth the candle, old man?” Without replying Severn simply reached into his cape and produced a candle (he had been asked to bring some candles to the party) which he held while Seth lit it and then, holding the candle to the flabbergasted Bloom, walked away without saying a word.

—PAUL CARROLL

OXC 2202
ALSO AVAILABLE ON STEREO OCS 6202

Play your Mercury regular Monaural long-play recordings on a Stereo phonograph? Please do. The sound quality of any Mercury long-play recording is actually enhanced on a Stereo phonograph.

THE SECOND CITY CAST

HOWARD ALK
ALAN ARKIN
(ROGER BOWEN ON SABBATICAL)
SEVERN DARDEN
ANDREW DUNCAN
BARBARA HARRIS
MINA KOLB
PAUL SAND
EUGENE TROOBINIC

COMPOSER
WILLIAM MATHIEU

This Mercury Custom Hi Fidelity recording is the result of the most modern recording technique of our time. The masters for this album were transferred through an Ampex 301 tape machine, a Nutec Filter and Equalizer, Altec limiting amplifier, McIntosh monitor amplifier and a 150 watt power amplifier designed especially to drive the BBC Grampian Feedback Cutting Head.

This monaural disc can be played equally well with either a STEREO cartridge or a STANDARD 1 mil microgroove cartridge. Because of the fine technical equipment used in the recording of these masters, one is assured of the most faithful reproduction in the transfer from original recording to the final masters used for processing.


PHOTO BY MORTON SHAPIRO

KLEIN-WASSMANN / DESIGN
Encores of Golden Hits
The Platters

What a Difference a Day Makes
Dinah Washington

 Vaughn and Violins
Sarah Vaughan

Encore of Golden Hits
The Platters

What a Difference a Day Makes
Dinah Washington

Let's Dance
David Carroll

Endlessly
Brook Benton

More Songs from Great Films
Clebanoff

Let's Dance Again
David Carroll and his Orchestra

Golden Goodies
Various Artists

A Collection of Golden Hits
Various Artists

Reflections
The Platters

Unforgettable
Dinah Washington

Big Band Man
Ralph Marterie And The All-Star Men

After the Ball
Frank D'Rone with Billy May and his Orchestra

Let's Dance Awhile to the Griff
Griff Williams and his Orchestra

Golden Hits
Patti Page

Improvisations to Music
Mike Nichols & Elaine May

Improvisations to Music
Nichols and May

The Sound of Music
Richard Hayman

Rich vs. Roach
A battle of bands and drums between Buddy Rich and Max Roach

Jerry Murad's Harmonicats

Chu-Cha

Mercury albums bring into your home the most realistic and altogether thrilling reproduction of music ever known. Mercury recordings have set the industry's standard for engineering craftsmanship, widest frequency and dynamic range, startling clarity of depth, breadth and direction.

More Top Selling Mercury Albums

The Fascinating Ernestine
Ernestine Anderson

I Love You in So Many Ways
Brook Benton

Let's Dance Again
David Carroll and his Orchestra

Golden Goodies
Various Artists

A Collection of Golden Hits
Various Artists

Reflections
The Platters

Unforgettable
Dinah Washington

Big Band Man
Ralph Marterie And The All-Star Men

After the Ball
Frank D'Rone with Billy May and his Orchestra

Let's Dance Awhile to the Griff
Griff Williams and his Orchestra

Important Note: All Mercury monaural discs can be safely played on a stereo player. In fact, the sound of such discs will be even more brilliant and enhanced by your Stereo system. HOWEVER, DO NOT PLAY YOUR STEREO RECORDS ON STANDARD MONOAURAL EQUIPMENT.
LIVING PRESENCE...
THE MERCURY CLASSICAL CATALOGUE

Great music deserves the finest recording, certainly. We feel that Living Presence is the finest recording, and the phrase itself tells you why Mercury Living Presence albums are unique—they alone of all fine recordings take you into the living presence of the music with performances even more vivid and life-like than you could hear in your favorite concert hall.

Like most good things, Living Presence is basically a simple philosophy. It is the answer to a fundamental question: What is the way to preserve a live performance best? That way is to use a single, extremely sensitive microphone, which, like the human ear, hears from all sides equally well. We place this microphone in what is called the focal point of the auditorium. In other words, we test and re-test for every recording session until we find the location at which the sound of the orchestra playing combines perfectly with the reverberance of the auditorium's acoustics.

Once this microphone is hung in place, it is never moved. Furthermore, the sound which it relays to the recording machines is never altered by Mercury engineers. If the music is loud, it remains loud; we do not compress it or otherwise rob it of its true timbres and range. If the music is soft, we do not boost it by artificial methods. What you hear on a Mercury Living Presence recording is exactly the performance of the conductor at the time of the original session.

For stereophonic recording, three microphones are used, but they are treated as a single unit. They are hung so as to catch the full panorama of orchestral sound in all its balance and depth, spread and definition. Throughout the session, the three microphones, while each picks up a slightly different perspective because of its location, continue to "hear" as one. Therefore, when they have been combined onto the stereo disc, the result is a true re-creation of the orchestra. Naturally, only orchestras and artists who have established the finest reputations are invited to record for Mercury, and they perform on disc the compositions which have made them famous. The record collector knows he can depend on superlative musicianship when he buys Mercury, no matter whether he prefers the ballet to the march, Bartók to Gershwin, the pipe organ to the piccolo.

Add to these albums such features as ultra-quiet surfaces, precision cutting and pressing, carefully inspected production and packaging, and you will see why the words "Living Presence" on each one are your guarantee of the ultimate in superb music and sound.

All these albums are available in both STEREO and MONOURAL versions, so numbers are prefixed by the letters SR for STEREO and MG for MONOURAL album numbers are prefixed by MG.
THE SOUND OF MY OWN VOICE
AND OTHER NOISES
SEVERN DARDEN

OCM-2202
Side 2
At The Second City

1. VIENNA 7:52
2. CHRISTIAN MORGENSEN 4:51
3. OEDIPUS 7:43

A Custom High Fidelity Recording

A PRODUCT OF MERCURY RECORD CORPORATION

LONG PLAYING HIGH FIDELITY