

'Theater of All Possibilities' deserves a second look

Editor's Note: This is the second in a series of articles on the Theater of All Possibilities. Jack Brooks will also be discussing the theater on the Jim Eason show, Friday between 3 and 4 p.m. on KGO Radio.

"Speaking in general, what is necessary to awake a sleeping man? A good shock is necessary . . . one shock is not enough. A long period of continual shocks is needed. Consequently, there must be someone to administer these shocks. The work must be organized and it must have a leader. The first and most important feature of groups is the fact that groups are not constituted according to the wish and choice of their members."

Georges Gurdjieff, as recounted by
P.D. Ouspensky
"In Search of the Miraculous"

By Jack Brooks
For the Progress

In an attempt to find some conclusion to the bizarre events that surround the operation known as The Theatre of All Possibilities in San Francisco, I have tried to find rational explanations in the stories of former members, in the texts of the plays of Alex Horn and in the writings of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky.

The quote at the top of this article comes as close to a key to the events that have marked Alex Horn's activities since he came to Northern California nearly a decade ago as may be possible.

Let me hasten to say that other Bay Area Gurdjieff / Ouspensky groups are in no way connected with or sympathetic to the warped interpretation of that very popular philosophy, as practiced at the Theater of All Possibilities. The bastardization employed by Alex and Sharon

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Alex and Shirley Gans - Horn

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"Horn slept with every woman in the group. The women felt it was the ultimate in their spiritual growth."

Gans - Horn is summed up by the former wife of one of the present leaders, a woman who no longer lives in the Bay Area but who is still trying to recover from that "nightmarish" period of her life.

"Horn uses a mixture of Gurdjieff / Ouspensky, Sufi, Judaism, Dante, Orwell, Captain Marvel and anything else that suits his purposes of mental and physical control of the students." The woman asked that her name not be used because she still lives in fear of retaliation. She did stress, however, that "If it ever got into court, I'd be there to testify."

Fear of retaliation is something inherent in controversial operations. Many people called me or wrote and asked that they receive the promised anonymity. Others didn't ask for that shield because they felt that the shuttered theatre should be kept closed.

According to former Everyman Theatre actor (that was the name of the operation when it was in the Mission District) Mark MacIntyre and others close to the Horns, the Horns have left San Francisco and may not be back. Repeated calls to their home on Jackson Street get no answers, although the phone has not been disconnected.

"It doesn't matter," says ex - member Kathleen Mandis, whose married name was Salmon when she was in the group. "This is a pattern. As soon as there is any pressure, the Horns split and the group goes underground. They're meeting somewhere."

Contradictions are routine in the stories about actor - writer - director - guru Alex Horn. Long - time friend Bob Pritikin is of the opinion that "Alex is the gentlest man I've ever known." Pritikin is not a member of the group.

Gerald Greer, former head of the group's Red

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Mountain Ranch in Sonoma County disagrees.

"The things I saw Alex Horn do to people are too incredible and unbelievable . . . how do you make people believe that such things can be true?" he said.

SEX AND COMBAT

Greer continues; "Alex Horn's credo at the ranch was, 'We're here to f--- and fight and, if someone gets hurt, so be it!'. The men in the group were forced to fight each other. The results were bloody. But, on Horn's instructions, no medical treatment was allowed, even for the most serious injuries. I saw one guy with his forehead hanging in a flap of skin. All he got was a bandaid."

That's the fighting part of it.

Other sources have commented that his philosophy of physical beating continued at the Theatre of All Possibilities.

The sexual excesses took many forms. Again, in the words of ranch director Greer: "Horn slept with every woman in the group. The women felt it was the ultimate in their spiritual growth. The result was rampant venereal disease, which Horn then transmitted to his then wife. I saw a woman come all the way from New York City so

she could bear one of Horn's children. It was the high point of her life."

The event that ended Greer's association with Horn is, perhaps, the most ludicrous thing that this investigation has uncovered. I have withheld the names for obvious reasons.

"Alex had to prove to the group that his word was law. He had to illustrate that growth, by his concepts, meant a total destruction of 'self'. To that end, he made a member of the group commit incest with his own daughter. It utterly destroyed them and their family; I couldn't take anymore and I left."

The victims of that degradation have since left Horn and have put their lives back together, after years of unimaginable torment.

THE 'TEACHER'

San Francisco first felt the impact of Alex Horn's brand of theatre when the Everyman Theatre opened in a former gymnasium at 24th and Mission. The first production was a piece that Horn tried, unsuccessfully, to get produced in New York.

What he did get in New York was a new wife, the noted Obie Award winning actress, Sharon Gans.

When "The Fantastic Arising of Padraic Clancy Muldoon" opened at the Everyman, it was

greeted by unanimous critical condemnation. Irene Oppenheim, then writing for the Bay Guardian, said, " . . . it's a self - indulgent disaster." Jeanne Miller of the Examiner was, as is her hallmark, even more exact: "I remember no more punishing experience . . . The Shapeless turgid play is totally lacking in originality, drama or theatricality . . . Bored to a point of total exhaustion." I was not yet a critic, so I escaped the ordeal. Surprisingly, such reviews didn't close the play. It simply moved the operation into a new area of ticket and publicity exploitation.

STILL THE QUESTION, 'WHY'?

This story won't be closed until that question is answered. A partial answer to the reluctance of current members of The Theatre of All Possibilities to say anything at all may be contained in the observation of former Red Mountain Ranch director Gerald Greer: "The fear factor generated by Alex Horn among his followers is as strong as anything I've ever heard of being put out in a group outside of the Hell's Angels".