

What are the answers to cultism?

By Jack Brooks

(For the past three months, my life has been much involved in an investigation of the defunct Theatre of All Possibilities. As a result of the investigation, the cult theories and the leadership and many of the members have left San Francisco. Recent reports put them in some remote areas of Pennsylvania. The office of Senator Alex Cranston, Assemblyman Art Agnos and Supervisor Carl Ruth Silver have expressed interest in looking further into the theatre group. Through the Progress article and my KQED radio reports, I have received a deluge of correspondence and questions from all over the West and from as far away as Kentucky and New York. There are many questions. But, what are the answers?)

Dr. Lee Sannella is currently a practicing ophthalmologist in the East Bay. He is also a licensed psychiatrist, with credentials from the Yale Medical School and Langley Porter and Napa Hospitals. In the mid-60's Sannella began participating in the surfdurf ("Dysphoria" movement). He heard that there was a "new teacher" in town. On a Sunday morning, in a home near UC Hospital, Dr. Lee Sannella met Alex Horn.

It was a meaningful meeting. As a result of it, Sannella, then a practicing psychiatrist, led many of his patients into Evergreen Theatre (later to become "The Theatre of All Possibilities"). I asked him why?

"Alex Horn was a man with a vision. He wanted something better from life; something intrinsically religious. He offered a connection with higher things. God, if you will, that could be formed without drugs and razzle-dazzle. People with this mysticism, Alex was an especially good actor. He could present, develop and sell any thesis."

Richard Mermin, a Mark Osherson researcher who claims to have been led to Horn "indirectly" through Sannella, also attributes his present life-faithfulness to Horn. "Most of those who talked with (other former students') share with me vivid recollections of moments that truly changed our lives. We may hold recriminations against Alex for his abuses and mistakes—some were real and serious. I'm convinced. Surely none would want to return to their ways before these encounters. How many among the more productive persons in the Bay Area, hundreds, if not thousands, should, and do, acknowledge their time with Alex as the necessary preparation for their accomplishments since?"

I must note that Mer-

min is the only one of the "hundreds," who left thousands," who left strongly enough, after my many appeals for persons who felt positively about me, to do so. Sannella comments on Mermin's observations.

"I would question his numbers, but he is definitely right—as a point. People who were basically 'nobodies' didn't pose a threat to Horn. His treatment of them was, therefore, non-violent and benevolent. These people gained the much from the experience. It was the stronger ones who Horn needed to debase and destroy."

LIVING OUT THEATRICAL FANTASIES
Perhaps my strongest question about the budding power of Alex and Sharon Gans-Horn on their followers was answered when Dr. Sannella described a typical "Orbit" that Horn staged. Amidst bacchanalian conditions of dancing, entertainment and eating, Teacher Horn would be "disappearing."

"It all took place in a Sausalito houseboat. Everyone was in full evening dress and the boat was festooned in the most lavish way. Each of us brought One Hundred Dollars in One Dollar bills. There were gaming tables and the game was for everyone to gamble until one person won it all. The prize was \$10,000. There was the most elegant display of gourmet foods. There were specialty acts and jugglers. The party lasted for thirty-six hours. And all to illustrate what 'life is really like.' Where else could you get such parties?"

There were many such "celebrations" to keep the "students" enchanted. The ones with benefits, nudity and sex were usually held at the Sonoma County ranch.

A PSYCHIATRIST'S APPRAISAL OF ALEX HORN

What kind of a man can control every moment of the lives of his followers, dictate when and who they marry, extract large sums of money from them and brutalize

"The violence," said Sannella, "was employed to prove to himself that others shared the same weaknesses that he had. Some of your witnesses said who they never saw any violence toward women. I saw plenty. Horn hates

couldn't deliver. The ugliness set in. Fear and abuse became the adjectives. What happened. I left, as did most of those who had joined with or through me."

WHO JOINS CULTS? Observers of cults all

agree that people with vision and purpose, those who have positive leadership abilities, have a definite contribution to make to the world. Paradoxically, these same attributes, misdirected, create monsters, like Jim

Jones, and the susceptible followers become easy prey and victims. Why do they submit to such indignities and torment so willingly? According to Dr. Martin Orme, PhD, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania,

"The cults demand work and commitment from individuals who may have never previously encountered a situation demanding commitment. Unfortunately, it is no longer necessary for young people to be

(Continued on Page 11)

Cults

(Continued from Page 16) for the common good of the family's well-being and survival."

Herein seems to be the need to discover a substitute family unit. The Theatre of All Possibilities, and surrogate mothers (Sharon Gans-Horn) (fathers (Alex Horn), and mothers and sisters (members of the school).

Dr. Sannella agrees with Dr. Orme and goes even further. "We live in desperate times. Many who have come to that realization are filled with despair. They are searching for anything that offers hope, and a better way. They are prepared to submit to even more desperate means in order to reach the answer. Our society is so permissive and lacking in deep-rooted personal values that the tyrants have had an easy time. Hitler, Charles Manson, Jim Jones, and on a lesser scale, Alex and Sharon Gans-Horn. But they were beginning. It might have gone much further."

It is illuminating, given the activities of the Theatre of All Possibilities, to note that Gurdieff stated emphatically that "anything attained by violence is not to be countenanced." Several witnesses, including Dr. Sannella, have told of Horn followers who committed suicide. The cases were psychotics who, with proper medical attention, might have been saved. It can only be speculated to what extent the Evergreen Theatre of All Possibilities can be held accountable for these tragedies.

Sannella himself has been asked about his responsibility as a doctor, in leading people into the group.

"The good that Horn proposed, like E.S.T., and others, was real. He had something to offer until he got off the track and fell into his power trip. Unlike E.S.T., it wasn't a couple of weekends deal. Horn's vision was pure fiction. On a short-term basis, it worked well. People benefited and beautiful things happened. But, in the long haul, Alex

was a coward. The day your story broke, he had a dental appointment. The dentist said that Horn came in with his tail between his legs, asking what he should do. The dentist is a friend of both Horn and myself. He said he'd never seen anyone so scared in his life. He and others of his type, live in a constant state of paranoia; real and imagined persecution hunts them. They pass the same syndrome on to their followers. That's why it was so easy for him to get them all to sell up and leave town to join him."

What about Horn's appeal to intellectuals? Why were there so many professional people on his rosters?

Again, Sannella is firm in his analysis. "Horn wasn't an intellectual. He had little or no lineage as an Ouspensky / Gurdieff teacher. But he had charisma and animal magnetism. He made that, and his version of the philosophy, work for him. That, and his salesmanship as an actor, impressed the Ph.D.'s that joined him."

What about the deeper personality traits? The doctor had noted cowardice and a need to dominate, but did it go further than that?

Dr. Sannella says that the man feared, or actually exhibited, these traits himself, in himself.

It is illuminating, given the activities of the Theatre of All Possibilities, to note that Gurdieff stated emphatically that "anything attained by violence is not to be countenanced." Several witnesses, including Dr. Sannella, have told of Horn followers who committed suicide. The cases were psychotics who, with proper medical attention, might have been saved. It can only be speculated to what extent the Evergreen Theatre of All Possibilities can be held accountable for these tragedies.

Sannella himself has been asked about his responsibility as a doctor, in leading people into the group.

"The good that Horn proposed, like E.S.T., and others, was real. He had something to offer until he got off the track and fell into his power trip. Unlike E.S.T., it wasn't a couple of weekends deal. Horn's vision was pure fiction. On a short-term basis, it worked well. People benefited and beautiful things happened. But, in the long haul, Alex

Progress Photo by Don Horn