

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

'My People' Come Back, Again, and the World Has Changed

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My name is Earl Wilson, Jr. I am the son of a well-known gossip columnist of the mid-20th century, Earl Wilson (Sr.). I have a unique vantage point to contemplate the cultural changes in the world over a period of more than 100 years.

My father was born on a farm in Rockford, Ohio in 1907, population 1400. I recently contacted the mayor to find out more about what he knew about my dad. He said that my father was the most famous man who ever came from Rockford, Ohio. And then I learned the reason. Nobody ever leaves Rockford, Ohio. In 2013 the population is still 1400.

I can envision my dad riding into town once a week in a horse drawn buggy with his father to get supplies from the general store. As a boy, when he got to downtown Rockford, I imagine he saw returning doughboys from WWI. These young men had seen war and they had seen Paris! Coming back home to farm life with no indoor plumbing, electricity...or French post cards convinced them to move to civilization. When somebody asked my father when he decided to come to New York he said, "Just as soon as I heard about it!"



One of the best ways out in those days was to write for a newspaper. Radio was new, there was no TV...but every little small town had a newspaper...and my father brazenly offered his services to the local paper as a cub reporter covering the high school news. The editor was amused by his cockiness and hired him at 25 cents a week.

My dad became convinced he was born to be a newspaperman in New York City! He worked his way through college at Ohio State University and got a "gofer" job on the Washington Post. He began sending samples of his writing to The New York Post. Nobody responded. He did this every week for a year. Then one day the editor of the paper noticed a huge pile of envelopes sitting on a desk and asked about it. "Some guy, thinks he's a writer from Ohio sending samples of his work." The editor decided to get rid of the pile but sent my dad a short note of explanation to stop this annoyance.

"Dear Mr. Wilson, Stop sending samples of your work. You have no talent. Go back to Ohio and the farm and be happy."

My dad sent him a telegram:

"I don't want to be happy. I want to work for you."

The editor was quite amused with that idea and invited my father to come to New York..."We'll find something for you to do."

My Dad's attitude about sex was that of many of his generation...it was naughty. His column, "It Happened Last Night," was famous for the "cheesecake" photos of young starlets showing what

used to be called, “cleavage” (seems quaint today). He was seen in press photos with a tape measure to get the accurate proportions of many showgirls at The Copacabana.

I grew up in this world. Sex was hush-hush but...it was everywhere. I remember seeing Anita Eckberg in my parent’s bedroom with my father taking photos of her for his column. Mom was out walking the dog. I heard Anita say, “Earl, shall I take off my blouse and bra?” I couldn’t quite see into the bedroom but I heard him say, “Yes, go ahead.”

You can imagine my excitement. I was still a teenager. My mother returned...it was no big deal...except for me. It was a very big deal.

Now, by the time I was 30, clearly, something was changing. *Hair!* And *Oh! Calcutta!* had been done...Linda Lovelace was a star and gays had made their stand at Stonewall. My dad had a book out called *The Show Business Nobody Knows*. He had been invited to see a burlesque show in which the star took off all of her clothes. He was shocked and dismayed. He thought this was the end of show business. How could you give away the “secret”...there was nothing left to entice you. I had a different attitude.



Let My People Come, A Sexual Musical...is a unique musical revue that I wrote in the summer of 1973 on a dare. The show’s original producer and director, Phillip Oesterman, dared me to write a revue about sex...that had really explicit songs. I told him I didn’t think I could do it. “I’m not that kind of guy,” I insisted innocently.

He disagreed. He said he believed the time was right to produce a musical reflecting the new open and honest attitude about sex that all the young people were enjoying. I was 30 years old, and I felt part of the sexual revolution so I understood the sentiment. But could I write explicit lyrics? What would my parents think? Would I ruin my nice clean reputation?

“Sit down and write the most honest sexual song you can think of...use all the four letter words you’d never use in a song...Let’s see if you can do it. I know this will be the biggest off-Broadway musical ever if we do it right. Someone is going to do it... Let it be us. Get to work, I’ll call you back in half an hour.”

I did what he asked. To my amazement, I accomplished the task easily and quickly. When I played him the song a few hours later, he was ecstatic. “That’s GREAT!”, he exclaimed. “I knew you could do it!”

The song was based upon a real experience I’d had...one that every man would love to have...an act of love provided by a sexual female who really wanted to make me happy.



The song was called “Come In My Mouth.”

I’m still amazed I had the nerve to write it. But once I did, the rest came rather naturally. I didn’t take any of it very seriously...I never thought we’d ever get it on. After I’d written a few songs, Phil decided we needed a cast.

“A cast!”, I screamed. “We don’t have a show!”

We met several times a week for about 5 months with a cast of 14 young actors. We talked about our sex lives and I would then write a song about it.

I was the first to take my clothes off at a rehearsal...to show them how easy it would be. Half the cast joined me...the other half explained why they couldn’t...their parents, their religion, their bodies...etc.

I asked my mother [she was known as the “BW”, Beautiful Wife, in my dad’s column] if I could have a backer’s audition in her living room. She said I could if she could be in the audience...and

she thought perhaps my father might best not attend.

We did the audition in front of a group of real investors. We just sang the songs. They sat with their jaws hanging open not believing what they were listening to...and they put on their minks and tip-toed out of the apartment. They later all wanted to invest...too late! We were a huge hit.

My mother, working on her 4th vodka, motioned to me to come sit with her at the end of the performance.

"I think you've got a hit."

I was shocked. "Really?"

"How much do you need to get it on?"

"\$10,000."

"I'll give you \$3,000. You get your producer to come up with the rest. I want to be treated like a real investor!"

Phil Oesterman owned a flower shop in Houston called The Flower Children. He went to the bank and borrowed \$7,000 for a new freezer for the shop. He didn't buy the freezer...he invested the money in the show.

It took about a month of performances at the Village Gate until we started selling out.

The show became one of the most successful off-Broadway shows in history, toured the world breaking attendance records in many places [Philadelphia and Toronto for about 10 years.] and was nominated for

A Grammy. The last U.S. production was in 1987.

The show was recently brought back successfully in Chicago for a limited run and is now about to be re-launched in New York City. We are starting much the way we did nearly 40 years ago...in a tiny cabaret...with an exciting young cast. The show is always updated and because it is a revue has a lot of freedom...and there is an archive of material that has been added over the years.

I can tell that this young cast will bring a very contemporary attitude to this material. I have re-written some of the songs to embrace contemporary events and attitudes. It is amazing to me that while we have moved forward in so many ways...we all think we're more liberated...in many ways we have not moved very far. If you are 15 and gay in America...you still face many of the challenges your parent's generation faced.

Equality in marriage is still an issue...and there are still many people who want to control what the rest of us do in our bedrooms.

Let My People Come is ultimately a musical revue...but in it's own way is a mirror on how far we have come in our attitudes about human sexuality...

And I can promise you...our attitude is:

"I believe that sex is good, I'd be doin' it now if I could" (from "I Believe My Body When It Talks To Me," *Let My People Come*).

The show begins previews in New York on Feb. 8 and opens on Feb. 14. Information at LMPCparty.com.

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