



by Harry Shearer

Jerry Lewis is standing in his dressing-room trailer, looking pensively into a mirror. Seconds from now he'll be introduced, and he'll have to walk onto the stage of his 1976 Telethon and summon, from somewhere within himself, the strength to raise from the American public over the next twenty-one hours an enormous sum of money. The rehearsals are over now; the red lights are on, and the cue cards are neatly stacked in hour-by-hour packages. There's just a moment left for Lewis to be alone with himself. A moment so special that he can't help sharing it with the rest of us.

So the picture of Jerry contemplating in his trailer is being projected by three saucer-sized electron guns in an Eidophor projection console (that looks like the Advent Videobeam's big brother) onto an 80-by-100 rear-projection screen on the stage of the telethon, for the studio audience to see. And the picture is being fed simultaneously down the lines of Centel, the Las Vegas telephone company, to the Bell Telephone microwave tower on top of the Tropicana Hotel, where the picture begins its microwave journey down the desert to Los Angeles, then out across the continent, and to Hawaii and Puerto Rico by satellite. And even with all of us looking at him, Jerry Lewis is appearing to have a very private moment. So private that, when a plaintive, minor-key ballad of his thoughts begins, it seems only natural that his singing be pre-recorded. He'd look silly actually singing to a mirror.

"Before the show begins tonight, my life goes flashing by.

"Before the show begins tonight, I pause . . . and sigh a sigh.

"I turn for a look in the mirror.

"And all of a sudden you're there."

The solo piano backing Jerry now modulates dramatically up a key, building the tension, mounting the sadness.

"You're suddenly nearer and nearer.

"Reminding me how very much I care.

"Before the show begins tonight, I'm wishing it was through . . ."

Four hours ago, when he was rehearsing this opening for the cameras, Jerry combed his hair thoughtfully during this line. Then he relaxed just a little and started playfully combing his armpit. But now there's no joking around. This is for all the marbles.

"But like it or not,

"Here comes that spot,

"And I've got to smile on cue . . ."

He's got to cry on cue, too, but that comes much later. Now he walks through the doorway of the trailer and into the darkness beyond. We have lost him. The picture on the screen has been switched to a long shot of the Telethon stage. And that smoky, boozy, after-hours mood is gone, too. Timpani are being pounded, and a cameraman runs across the stage in a kind of Grouchoesque crouch, a portable video camera sitting on his shoulder like a cornerstone. Two crewmen chase after him, wrestling with yards of heavy black cable. The entire thirty-piece Lou Brown Orchestra is playing, Ed McMahon is reading off the names of the guest stars in his tone of almost angry pride, the audience bursts into applause. We're getting the first real jolt of Telethon energy, and, somewhere in the darkness between the trailer and the curtain, so is Jerry.



Muscular dystrophy is a relatively rare and usually hereditary disease of muscle deterioration. Twenty-nine years ago it received as much media attention as spotted aphids or bovine brucellosis. Then Jerry Lewis, for reasons unknown and unknowable, became the public spokesman for the fledgling Muscular Dystrophy Association. Since then Lewis had pleaded, cajoled, shamed, nooded, pestered, and clowning his way into the single most successful annual fund-raising event in the history of charity. Pushing through the always-crowded field of diseases, Jerry Lewis has made muscular dystrophy a star.

"Cancer and heart disease have going for them tremendous legacy things," Sylvester (Pat) Weaver says, "because of rich people getting hit by Big C." Weaver has been president of NBC, president of the ill-fated pay-TV venture that got voted out of business in California a decade ago, and president of the American Heart Association. He is currently president of the Muscular Dystrophy Association. "You know, big Casino steps up and grabs Aunt Lillie and the next thing you know the money for the cat hospital has gone to cancer research. We don't have the benefit of that kind of tragedy." Lacking such a motivational hook, muscular dystrophy needed to have exactly the kind of show that Jerry Lewis needs to put on.

It's a Jewish-Puritan spectacle. You should enjoy; then you should feel bad; then you should give money to feel good

again. There's a historic association in this country between being entertained and feeling guilty, as much a part of America as the Franklin Mint. But the connection is especially effective in the case of a disease for which the guilt can be bought away so easily. Nobody causes muscular dystrophy, and almost nobody gets it. "If you're trying to evaluate the difference," Pat Weaver says, "between a dystrophic child and somebody who eats like a stupid idiot and drinks all night and might have a heart attack, it's easy for me to pick my cause over his cause."

So the Jerry Lewis Telethon is, as the song says, more than just a show. It's a group-portrait-in-wallpaper of the Las Vegas branch of show business, allied for the occasion with a corps of dedicated volunteers and a dozen heads-up corporations. The Telethon combines the hysterical mystique of the Strip superstar with the equally hysterical desperation of the downtown lounge act; it mixes the glib disinterest of a TV star taping a thirty-second public-service spot with the glib agony of a comedian on a crusade. The Telethon is, in the words of a McDonald's public-relations man, "a masterpiece of communications engineering."

The first series of muscular dystrophy telethons with Jerry Lewis came to an end in 1959. "They had sort of worn themselves out," MDA executive director Bob Ross recalls. A telethon was a reptilian survivor of TV's Mesozoic Era. It was awkwardly "live" just when videotape was making even the clumsiest variety show look slicker than Crisco in a skillet. The idea was revived seven years later when the manager of New York's Channel 5 offered Jerry Lewis and the MDA a new telethon on one of the two slowest weekends of the TV year: between Christmas and New Year's Day, or Labor Day. Christmas-time would have involved a conflict with the cerebral palsy telethon, so—against the advice of most industryites that they were going into a death slot—the muscular dystrophy people chose the first Monday in September, the last weekend of summer.

"Now," boasts the MDA's balding, cigar-smoking publicist, the improbably-named Horst Petzall, "everybody wants Labor Day. And we own it."

In the decade since that decision, the Jerry Lewis Telethon has had a spectacular growth curve. Between just 1969 and 1976, both the number of stations on the "Love Network" and the amount

of money collected have increased tenfold. Somewhere along the way, the words "Muscular dystrophy" disappeared from the show's title. They now appear in the small type down below.

In 1976 the Jerry Lewis Telethon was carried by an independent hookup of 200 stations—almost as many stations as any of the three commercial networks has. The figure on the tote board at 3:30 that Labor Day afternoon was \$21,700,000. That figure is, it turns out,

production house. And that was discount. "If it were a commercial show," estimates TAV Las Vegas president Maury Stevens, "we're talking half a million." A substantial portion of the show's cost is spent cementing the love of the "Love Network" stations by paying them for commercials they would have carried over the weekend.

Then the telephone company takes another million to hook up the stations. And more than a quarter of a million

"Jerry's kids" goes to needy actors.

"People see \$21 million on that tote board and assume that \$21 million goes to research," says the head of another fund-raising organization. "That research claim is a lot of baloney." At the very least, it's luncheon meat. Of the MDA's \$40-million-plus budget this year, less than \$10 million will be spent on research—about the same amount spent by the government-funded National Institutes of Health on muscle-



Jerry surrounded by his three Telethon pussycats (Ed McMahon, David Hartman, Chad Everett) and one tiger (Frank Sinatra).

a projection. The tote board runs forty-five minutes slow, so at three o'clock the MDA people, unaided by computers, project what the probable pledge total will be by show's end.

The MDA gets half its yearly income from this weekend, and it pays plenty to put the show on. Just over a million dollars is budgeted for direct telethon costs, including \$150,000 to pay for the lights, crew, cameras, microphones, and control vans of Trans American Video, the Vegas branch of a Hollywood TV pro-

duction house. And that was discount. "If it were a commercial show," estimates TAV Las Vegas president Maury Stevens, "we're talking half a million." A substantial portion of the show's cost is spent cementing the love of the "Love Network" stations by paying them for commercials they would have carried over the weekend. Then the telephone company takes another million to hook up the stations. And more than a quarter of a million

goes to Theater Authority, the arm of the show-business unions that allows actors and singers to appear without pay on benefits and telethons which bear its approval. The main criteria for that approval are that telethons be spaced at least two months apart, to avoid drying up the well, and that no more than one-third of the take go for fund-raising costs. Much of the Theater Authority assessment ends up in the Motion Picture Relief Fund, so that slightly more than one percent of the money donated to

disease research. Almost half of the MDA's money will be spent on taking care of the 135,000 people who already have the disease. Like all major charities, Muscular Dystrophy is scrutinized by two national watchdog organizations. The Council of Better Business Bureaus in Washington has no complaints. But the National Information Bureau in New York puts MDA on its list of organizations not meeting one or more of its standards (along with the Big Brothers of America,

St. Jude's Research Hospital, Easter Seals, and the Cousteau Foundation). The NIB has been critical of some of Muscular Dystrophy's bookkeeping, and it disapproves of the frequent use of firemen in uniform as a fund-raising technique. The International Association of Fire Fighters is deeply involved in the Telethon—only on Labor Day could you get unions to be sponsors—so uniformed firemen are all over Vegas with collection cans bearing Jerry's face, and the MDA even instructs local stations to have some uniformed firemen answering phones on camera. That, according to the National Information Bureau, is unfair use of the taxpayers' red suspenders.

Like a specialized company branching out into new markets, the Muscular Dystrophy Association has also expanded its jurisdiction to include other diseases, such as myasthenia gravis. But to the MG people it feels more like takeover than merger. "I got bombarded by our local chapters saying that Muscular Dystrophy people have been demanding their patient lists," an official of the Myasthenia Gravis Foundation complains. "This is like a giant taking over a midget, you know what I mean?" There is also a simmering dispute between MD and Multiple Sclerosis over who has the door-to-door solicitation rights to the month of June.

But door-to-door is just back-burner stuff for the MDA. To see what's really made America care about muscular dystrophy, you have to go to Las Vegas just before Labor Day.



The welcome at McCarran International Airport (built in 1972, and named after the Senate author of a famous anti-immigration law of the Fifties) is distinctively Vegas. Even before you get to see slot machines, you get to hear celebrities. After all, this is the town the stars built—with a little help from the Central States Teamsters Pension Fund. So every ten seconds, as the moving sidewalk trundles along from the passenger gates to baggage claim, a pre-recorded celebrity counsels caution. "Please hold the handrail, hey, hey, HEY!", Bill Cosby yells in his Fat Albert voice from a hole in the ceiling. Pause. A trumpet blows "Charge!" and Doc Severinsen introduces himself and says, "Hey, please stand on the right and pass on the left." Must have been wearing something wild the day he cut that track.

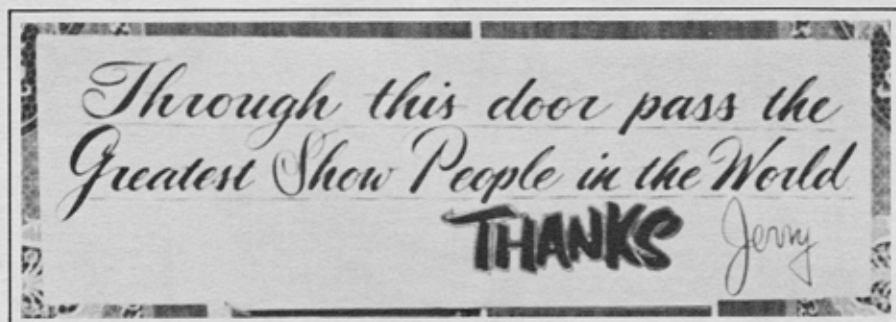
The Las Vegas Strip reaches from the

environs of the airport to the fringe of downtown. Del Webb's Hotel Sahara is the closest major Strip hotel to downtown, which in Vegas is not necessarily an advantage. It also boasts the smallest marquee of the big-time hotels. But on Labor Day weekend the marquee is dwarfed by a billboard sitting on the asphalt at the end of the valet parking area in front of the main entrance. Yellow stars on a field of red, and in the middle of the billboard Jerry Lewis looking pensive in clown makeup—no easy feat—and the slogan of this year's Telethon, compliments of Benton and Bowles: "The Greatest Star Show Under the Sun." The Sahara, where Lewis is just wrapping up an engagement in the Congo Room, is Telethon headquarters. Small circular cardboard replicas of the billboard clown-face are plastered on the casino walls all weekend, reminding the gamblers that there is a less enjoyable way to spend their money.

Directly up an escalator from the poker tables and dollar slots is the Space

lounge, serves as the command center for the Telethon until just before showtime. Pieces of the show-to-be are spread out on metal tables: graphics cards displaying the trademarks of corporate sponsors, piles of mimeographed script pages, boxes of videotape labeled "Peggy Lee Insert Material," "Lola Falana Pitch," "Mary Tyler Moore—tape from 35mm," "Totie Fields Tribute." In the far corner of the room is a horseshoe formation of metal tables facing a curving array of corkboards on easels. Pushpinned to the easels, on color-coded three-by-five cards, is an hour-by-hour breakdown of The Show.

"I come back to do this show every year because it's like family," says assistant director Gary Hoffman. One family it's very much like is the Arthur Forrest family. Artie Forrest produces and directs the Telethon; his wife Marcy is the talent coordinator; his son Richard is the associate producer; and his daughter Nicole is listed on the credits (along with all of Jerry Lewis's sons except Gary) as a



Center, a convention facility that divides up into little rooms or opens into big ones, as the occasion demands. Most of the Space Center is being walled off and rigged up as the Telethon studio—a project entailing the stringing of miles of cable through false ceiling, the placement of hundreds of mikes and lights, and the hanging of wall-size sheets of reflective silver Mylar panels behind the audience section (a blow-dryer is run over the sheets to iron out the wrinkles).

Putting on a live network-quality variety show from a hotel is the biggest job of the year for Maury Stevens and Trans American Video, and since they started working for Jerry when he moved to Vegas in 1971, it has been very effective advertising. "We do all of the Griffin shows up here," Maury says, "all the Dinah shows, *Let's Make A Deal*, we do all those shows. We do ninety-eight percent of anything that emanates from Las Vegas."

Room Eleven of the Space Center, directly across a corridor from the dealers'

production assistant. Nicole Forrest is sixteen months old.

Artie and his wife—a tall, sleek, well-sprayed ex-model—are juggling those three-by-five cards. The pea-green ones represent pre-taped pitches ("Hi, I'm Mary Tyler Moore. Won't you help?"), which are scheduled with greatest frequency during the slow hours—Hours 10 through 14, 3 to 8 a.m. Vegas time—along with Jimmy Dee, the musical ambassador of Guam, and a card which just reads "Lounge Act." There is plenty of shuffling of the coral cards that fill what are known as the "heavy talent" slots: Charo had to go to the funeral of Marty Allen's wife, so Lainie Kazan replaces her. Gary Hoffman tells Artie, "Marvin Hamlisch's mother got sick in a prime-time spot." A white card is scotch-taped to the wall behind Artie: "Abbe Lane to be inserted somewhere."

"We just got the Moisheye Dancers," another assistant announces, hand over phone. Artie gets on his

walkie-talkie to spread that news as the Dancers' card is pushpinned into Dionne Warwick's old slot. He calls them the Moisheyev Dancers, too. Could be the troupe from Brooklyn.

Artie Forrest is a well-tanned, middle-aged man with tight curls of gray hair. He wears the air of a hard-boiled New Yorker as distinctly as Secretariat wears the markings of a horse. He's got the perfect metabolism for this kind of show. And the perfect sense of humor. When he's in a good mood, he says things like, "Are you still here? Throw him out of here." Friday afternoon preceding the Telethon, he's not in such a good mood. "It's getting hectic," says an aide, "and Artie's real sensitive. So he'd like you to leave."

It was Artie's idea, the aide tells me, to ring the Telethon with almost as much security as surrounded the Patty Hearst trial. There is, first of all, the security force of the Sahara. These gentlemen wear tie pins fashioned in the shape of miniature handcuffs and pistols. There is Carex, a private security force whose members are described by a non-Carex guard as "dodoes." They are working thirty-hour shifts this weekend. No relief. And there is the Navy. As long as I can remember, the Telethon has had sailors in dress whites serving as ushers. "Show the flag and the uniform as much as possible, that's the trip," says one of the Naval reservists doing Telethon duty. "You know, show 'em where their tax dollars are goin'. It's pretty effective, too, 'cause the guys are out there looking good, you know, white uniforms, not carrying guns or anything. And food?" he adds, helping himself to another plateful from the Telethon commissary, "I ain't never eaten like this."

Explaining the elaborate security arrangements, Artie told me later that "Jerry was threatened three times. Phone call to the police department, to the Sahara, to our office. Before the Telethon, during the Telethon, and after the Telethon." The day-shift sergeant at Vegas Metro Police says his department received no threats aimed at Jerry Lewis. Sahara security says one fairly routine threat was phoned into the hotel near the show's end, and, in response, two policemen escorted Lewis back to his room. But the Fortress Telethon concept was decided on days earlier, and outlined in a security memo. The procedure called for members of the audience to pass through a metal detector at the entrance to the Space Center immediately upon getting off the escalator from

the Casino. They passed through the detector again if they had to go to the bathroom. Artie plays hardball.

Not only does he share the most hostile side of Lewis's sense of humor (Jerry, a friend of his says, likes to say things like "Shut up, fuckface" facetiously—"To us who know him and love him, it's a bit"), Forrest also shares Jerry's distrust of reporters. "I'm not particularly fond of the press," Artie tells me. "They never find anything good about anybody. A lot of them are just out to kill Jerry. Fuck Jerry Lewis, that's the name of that game. I've seen it plenty of times."

Forrest also shares Lewis's taste for obscuring the involvement in muscular dystrophy with an aura of mystery. Artie refers to a serious illness in his child-



hood, which was not MD, but which inclines him to want to "pay back" for surviving. Lewis simply will not answer the question most often asked him: "Why do you do it?" Everyone on the Telethon staff agrees that the secrecy extends even to the other half of Lewis's long marriage. "Not even Patti knows," they say. None of the six Lewis children is dystrophic. "Why would you even want to know why he does it?" is Artie's thought on the matter. (Wouldn't Patti?) But an MDA press release cheerily notes that "Jerry has promised to reveal his secret when a cure for muscular dystrophy is found." The more you give, the sooner you'll know.

"It does have something to do with certain . . . attacks that were made on him early in his career," a friend of

Lewis's concedes. The conventional Hollywood wisdom has been that Muscular Dystrophy was Jerry's atonement for a career built on lampooning spastics. "In the first place, he wasn't really making fun of spastics. The notion was actually that of a scared, insecure kid who was trying so hard to please, and as a result everything he did came out kind of spastic." But, yes, "He did feel motivated to do something for spastics."

Hmmmm. It's a minor point, but spastic behavior is exhibited by people afflicted with cerebral palsy, not muscular dystrophy. Dystrophic people don't jerk around crazily; they just sit there. "Well, it wasn't the disease so much as it was a certain person behind the scenes, a person who served at that point as a shining light in his life. You might say that Jerry had arrived at a point where he came to terms with his own life and decided that the time had come to do something bigger than his career." This was back in 1950, when the crazy kid would suddenly come on at the end of the Martin and Lewis radio show, right after the credits, and adopt this strangely serious voice—all throat, no nose, an octave and a half lower than the one he'd been using for the past twenty-nine minutes—to do a ten-second pitch for this unheard-of disease. A quarter of a century later, the 1975 Telethon was beaten out of Nielsen's all-time record for a television audience only by four Super Bowls, two Oscarthons, two World Series games, and four big movies. No kidding—bigger than his career.

The last movie Jerry Lewis released was *Which Way to the Front?* in 1970. According to someone who worked on it, "The picture was dumped, thrown away by Warner Bros. I would have done the same thing, it was such a silly goddam movie. See, a Jerry Lewis picture always had a floor. You knew you could probably get your money back. But it also had a ceiling. And about this time investors started looking only for things that had the potential of going way over the top."

The last movie Jerry Lewis made until this year, when he began shooting *Hardly Working*, was *The Day the Clown Cried* in 1972, which was to have been his first serious picture, the story of a clown in a concentration camp. It has never been released. The reason seems obvious to most observers: if the funny ones aren't making money, death is a real longshot. But there was a time before the Jerry Lewis Cinemas franchise operation had gone bankrupt—the Cinemas were automated theaters that

showed only G- and PG-rated pictures—when Jerry explained that he wouldn't let *Clown* be released unless distributors could guarantee a release pattern in which people wouldn't have to sit through an X-rated trailer in order to see the film.

Lewis now plays Vegas and theaters in the round and the Olympia Theatre in Paris, where he is acclaimed as a comic genius (MDA even bought ads in the trades to reprint the Paris reviews). His brief, abortive move toward Broadway ended when his update of the old Olsen and Johnson hit *Hellzapoppin* bombed in Boston. And . . . he does the Telethon. And commercials for the Telethon's sponsors. And he attends the conventions and sales meetings of the Telethon's sponsors. And he tapes radio and TV spots for the stations carrying the Telethon. And he meets with the station managers of the "Love Network," and he has planning meetings with staff of the show and people from the MDA, and he attends medical conferences arranged by the MDA and chews out the doctors for not yet finding a cure. "Jerry spends so much of the year on Muscular Dystrophy," says his manager, Joey Stabile, "that he's not developing film and TV projects like he should be doing." That's one way of putting it.



The most secure area of the Space Center is a partitioned-off module to the left of the bandstand backstage. Parked in here are two trailers: a boxy mobile home with a dozen tuxedos hanging on a rack—Jerry's place—and a rounder, sleeker vehicle with smoked-glass windows, for Frank Sinatra. A waggish crew member keeps sneaking in and sticking a small hand-lettered sign on the front of the singer's trailer. It says "Deluxe Winadago." Someone else keeps taking it down.

The videotape boxes and easelboards have been moved out of Room Eleven by Sunday afternoon. Control of the Telethon has moved to the Trans American Video van parked in the rear of the Space Center. The van is off limits to press, per strict orders from Artie Forrest. Standing in front of the van is a green board, on which crew jokes about Forrest have been chalked and on which serious memos have been scotch-taped. "On Sunday," one reads, "Telethon shirts will be issued to all personnel working during the airing of the telethon. These must be worn." Sure enough, a wave of dark blue shirts, with

the old crazy-kid caricature of Jerry on the back, has swept through the Space Center during the afternoon. Everyone from cameramen to carpenters has taken time out to slip off his own shirt and slip on Jerry's.

Room Eleven is now occupied by telephones, adding machines, a crew of tabulators, and Fred Schaefer—the Master Tabulator. Each of Fred's people is responsible for calling up local stations in a particular area of the country and finding out the latest figures on the local tote boards. These numbers are the raw material for the dollars displayed on the Telethon. The system of putting numbers on the tote board is a secret that MDA field director Jerry Weinberg guards closely. When I ask him to explain it, he stares at me for a moment, then he looks around the room and laughs. "That," he says, "is something our competitors have tried to learn for years." Competitors? In the free marketplace of diseases, Muscular Dystrophy doesn't tell Gimbel's.

A small battalion of Naval reservists, Kansas Jayhawk cheerleaders (carrying red-and-white pompons supplied by the Cheerleader Supply Company, Dallas, Texas), and young guys and gals decked out in bright carmine McDonald's blazers are assaulting the buffet in the commissary. Before the weekend is over, the Sahara's contribution to the Telethon will amount to 6,000 eggs, 4,000 pieces of chicken, and 40,000 cups of coffee. Smiling down on all this eating is a friendly Jerry-face caricature on a banner that hung in 7-11 stores all summer long. Next to the face, big red-and-white letters say "Let Jerry Lewis Keep the Change For His Kids." "Jerry's kids" is one of the main themes of the Telethon. Lewis assumes symbolic paternity over everyone from the poster girl to middle-aged Bob Simpson, a wheelchair-bound vice president of United Airlines. The poster must be hanging in the commissary for morale purposes: the buffet's free.

Downstairs the audience line has started to form, snaking back from the escalator in the Casino out past the seven-card-stud tables, through the side door, and down Sahara Boulevard for about half a block. Upstairs, in the hallway that runs the length of the Space Center separating the studio from a hotel kitchen, Mexican teenagers are opening cardboard cartons and carrying plastic 7-Up collection buckets into the audience seats.

In the Green Room, Jerry's personal message to the stars has been hung over the doorway leading to the stage. "Through this door," it says in the fancy cursive script always used for the logos of classy hotels, "pass the Greatest Show People in the World. THANKS. Jerry." None of the greatest show people are here yet, but the room is already awash with tuxes and black gowns in a town where the safari jacket is considered formal wear. "In past years, people in the Green Room wore very casual clothes," Marcy Forrest explains. "This year I sent them all a letter saying, 'Go to your closet and say I'm going to meet Frank Sinatra. How do I want to look?' " The closets apparently answered in unison: "Go rent something."

Six o'clock approaches. Jerry's in his



Jan Murray, Jerry's ideal handsome comic, in

trailer preparing to look pensive. Uniforms are everywhere you look. A squad of girl guides strides toward the lined-up audience, listening on the run to some last-minute advice from their leader: "You're not covered by insurance in here, so don't trip." On the stairway of the control truck, Artie is making a quiet speech to the crew. "I want to thank you for the jobs you've done so far. And I just want to say one more thing. We've got the greatest sponsor in the world—the kids. We're all here for the kids. Okay, let's go."

Jerry's on stage now, shaking hands with Artie. A voice calls out over the p.a., "Gentlemen, man your cameras. Pictures, please." The crew gets into position. The audience gets quiet. At six o'clock by the Helbros timepiece and

tote board, "the official timekeeper of the Jerry Lewis Telethon," there are still two minutes to showtime. The official clock is fast.



Hour One. Big opening. A standing ovation when Jerry comes out and sings the first of a dozen pieces of special material: the Muscular Dystrophy version of "You Are the Sunshine of My Life," big-band bossa nova style. "I see the end of pain and strife," Jerry sings, "but still so much depends on you." At song's end he introduces Ed McMahon, "my pussycat," and one man in the audience stands up to applaud. The rest of the ovation remains firmly seated. After nine or ten seconds, Ed's fan gives up and sits down.

Jerry starts out the evening speaking



Which Way to the Front?, and on the Telethon.

softly in his briskly efficient grownup voice, more throat than nose, a lot of up-and-down inflections—more musical, actually, than his singing. And fast. "I am often asked about my goal, and it's a very, very simple answer—it's a dollar more. For the last twenty-six years I've always tried to get a dollar more. That's not asking much. Now just think, 200 million Americans, chipping in together, giving a dollar more." Now the voice migrates up into the nasal passage, and it gets loud. Jerry's here. "Two hundred and twenty million Americans for a dollar? Get it up!"

While Vicki Carr, Jerry's "Lucky Charm," sings in center stage, Lewis stands to her left at his transparent styrene lectern, leafing through the red binder embossed in gold with the words

"Telethon 76." When Vicki begins asking for pledges in Spanish, Jerry wanders over to the special section of seats reserved for corporate sponsors and entertains them by quacking off-mike in gibberish Spanish.

It's at moments like this—or when he approaches the rear-projection blowup of Joey Heatherton and assumes a slack-jawed, pre-humping crouch—that you can see the small spark of an anarchic comic impulse still left inside Jerry Lewis. It doesn't show up on camera very often, because it conflicts with Lewis's sense of what he's supposed to be doing now. When that manic Jerry does surface, its head has been held under the waters of passionate humanitarianism for so long it often comes up foaming with hostility, strangely vicious toward the people and things Lewis still feels safe in ridiculing.

"The character he played in his earlier pictures is a tremendous source of pain," says a writer who got to know Lewis during the comedian's days as an adjunct professor of cinema at the University of Southern California. "He hated playing what he calls the idiot." So, in his early fifties, Jerry Lewis is working very hard, trying his best to act like a grownup, suppressing that crazy kid except for those brief, startling outbursts. The Telethon is his chance to prove he can be an adult in public, talking nice to the men in suits from the big companies. "We got presidents here!" he yells.

If only his idea of being a grownup weren't so goddam unctuous, so patronizing, so full of unconscious flashbacks of the adults who used to give him a hard time. If only he were doing this caricature of a grownup as a bit, instead of as a life. If only his idea of an adult weren't Jan Murray.

"Jan Murray is to Jerry Lewis like Schweitzer is to most people," says the man who worked on *Which Way to the Front?*, in which Jan Murray had a featured role. "To Lewis, Jan Murray was the quintessential handsome comedian: a tall, dignified *mensh* of a comic." *Treasure Hunt*; *Dollar a Second*—that Jan Murray.

And yet, you must remember something else through all of this. The man is playing in pain. "Jerry has this incredible inoperable pinched nerve in his neck. He's had it for about nine years, and it keeps him in pain as much as twenty-four hours a day." The friend of Lewis who told me this resembled a lot of people who know him: they were perfectly willing to talk about Jerry Lewis as

long as they were assured their names wouldn't be used. It's probably not fear. They genuinely like some part of Lewis—a man who by all accounts has a powerful way of "hooking" you in a one-to-one situation—and they don't want to be in the position of publicly screwing him. "A giver he is," says this friend. "He's very generous with money. He's given away thousands in his time. He also thinks money buys friends."

Then there's the intercom. Lewis is an incredible gadget freak. He has fifteen or sixteen cassette machines scattered about his Century City office. He records phone conversations. (A reporter, informed two weeks later that a call had been taped, protested to Jerry, "That's illegal." Answered Lewis: "Fuck legal.") He used to own a radio station that he could interrupt, at any time, to go on the air from his house. "His children are asked to keep their intercoms on at night so he can hear clearly what's going on in their rooms. It was his way," the friend says half-apologetically, "of showing his kids that he loved them." In a 1975 television interview, answering Tom Snyder's question about how he disciplines his kids (that is to say, his children), Jerry recalled the time he administered some corporal punishment to ten-year-old Gary, then sent him back to his room to be confronted by Patti. "Then," Jerry said, "I turned on the intercom to hear what he was gonna say to her about me. I expected the worst, you know, nasty stuff. You know what he says? He says 'Daddy's the only one in the world who really loves me.' Now try and figure that out."



At the end of Hour One, \$164,000 is on the tote board. Nobody has mentioned it. That's cigarette money to Jerry and the MDA people these days. There is, for the second consecutive year, space for double millions on the board. Who wants to hear from thousands? This is the time in the show when the performers get the applause. Later on, the big ovations are reserved for the money.

Hour Two. Ed puts on a pair of shades to read his opening copy: "Stay up with Jerry and watch the stars come out." At 7:15 we get the first of three visits with Mr. and Mrs. Clown. That's not what they're called—these dramatic vignettes performed by Lewis and a New York actress of his acquaintance—but they are playing husband and wife, and they are both wearing clown makeup. An official of the MDA complains (off the record,

of course) that "Those clown spots make me shudder."

There are, besides the cassette machines and clocks, dozens of clown figurines in Jerry's office. There is also a color painting of Lewis dressed and made up as a hobo clown. There is a black-and-white photo of Lewis in clown makeup wearing a straw hat. *The Day The Clown Cried*—it's almost as if he's releasing that picture in installments, a minute at a time, in these silent clown vignettes. Each year he tapes a new one, as well as re-running the previous episodes, stringing them out through the Telethon. It is like watching Tijuana velvet paintings come to life.

Clown Spot #1: Mr. and Mrs. Clown are just sitting around, silently, when a casual Jerry Lewis voice comes on the soundtrack and admonishes them for not watching television. "Don't you know the Jerry Lewis Telethon is on?" Mr. Clown shakes his head repentantly and turns on the set—just in time to hear a sober Jerry Lewis voice reciting a pitch for money on the show. When Jerry-on-the-tube says go to the phone and make a pledge, Jerry-the-Clown silently complies, casting a poignantly sensitive gaze at Mrs. Clown and thoughtfully patting her belly. You see, she's . . . pregnant. Got a clown in the oven. Fade to black.

More videotape. Jerry's got an out-take reel, stuff that was just too loose, goofy, off-the-wall to be left in the promotional announcements for the show. The out-take reel is neck-and-neck with the roast for honors as top show-business bore. Both of them were probably entertaining, back when they were still backstage vulgarity rituals, before they were cleaned up for the home audience. On the reel he shows on the Telethon, you get to see Jerry breaking himself and some other people up. On the reel he screened in the control truck for his son Gary the day before the show, he did a promo arm in arm with a fat lady from Channel 8 in Honolulu, and concluded it by yelling, "Watch the show and getta hunka nooky." It got screams in the truck.



Meet the sponsors. A platoon of corporation executives dutifully sits in the sponsors' section until assistant director Gary Hoffman waves them up to the microphone for the first of their allotted minutes with Jerry. The Lewis Telethon pioneered in signing up commercial sponsors for a fund-raising event. Today's advertising genius is the media man who finds a new medium, unclut-

tered by dozens of competing messages. The Telethon has been discovered by such geniuses.

The Southland Corporation is a Dallas company run by John and Jerry Thompson, two incredible brothers who faced down the challenge of being on the actors' union unfair list for producing non-union commercials and went right ahead to build up a chain of 5,700 7-11 stores. Their advertising manager suggested an involvement with the Telethon, so last year Jerry and Artie Forrest flew down to make a presentation. As Artie recalls the meeting, it was a typical case of people being "hooked" by Jerry.

"I swear to you as I sit here now"—Artie hits the table for emphasis—"and I have a lot of integrity, I really do—there were tears at the end of his speech like you never saw before. The president or the chairman or both of them—I forget who it was—could just about say, 'Whatever you want to do we're with you.' That's about all they could get out. And I'm not kidding, I'm talking now about high-level corporation executives who we never see and we never meet. They're the power behind when you go in to pick up a little piece of cake. And the tears were unbelievable. The advertising manager since then has become a very dear personal friend of mine, of Jerry's. I mean, he can't walk in and say hello to Jerry without crying."

It's the tender trap. They're hooked and they love it. So parading by Jerry's styrene podium in rapid succession are representatives of Arthur Murray Dance Studios, the Brunswick Corporation, the Schick Safety Razor division of Warner-Lambert Pharmaceuticals, Reynolds Aluminum, the Roller Skating Rink Operators' Association, Hickory Farms smoked meats, and the Southland Corporation. Each of these firms (along with 7-Up, Sara Lee, Olympia Beer, McDonald's, and Glemby International Beauty Salons) has promised to deliver at least \$100,000 to MDA. As you might imagine, the more they give, the more exposures they get on the Telethon.

So eleven times during the show, "superkids" from McDonald's pair up, put on their carmine blazers, and report to Jerry. They stand beside a map of the United States dotted with a couple of dozen little golden arches. As money is reported for a particular region, that region's arch lights up. The kids conclude each segment with the same upbeat line: "Jerry, there's much more to come." McDonald's was the Telethon's

first national sponsor when the show outgrew New York and a local hamburger chain, and McDonald's remains one of the heaviest contributors. By contrast, Glemby beauty salons annually just make their \$100,000 pledge and get only two spots during the show. Considering what commercial minutes are selling for in, say, this year's Super Bowl, it's a bargain.

Each sponsor has devised a promotion to generate the money it will "contribute" from its customers. McDonald's has "large fries for small fries"; Schick has "the triple-edge blade concept"; Seven Up has "Do Your Own Thing." Arthur Murray runs dance-a-thons; the skating rinks hold skate-a-thons; Brunswick is promoting bowl-a-thons; the beauty salons have cut-a-thons. A man in his early twenties nervously representing the Melvin Simon and Associates shopping malls reports the proceeds from the Giant Money Slide and the Trout Machine Ride set up at a new shopping mall in Irving, Texas.

"Muscular Dystrophy is one of our top priorities," says an executive with McDonald's public-relations firm in Chicago. "Out of eight to ten people on the McDonald's account, somebody in our office is doing something for MD every day of the year." The hamburger firm spends hundreds of thousands of dollars creating MD-oriented advertising materials, but the decision to participate in the show is left to the franchise owners. An executive at the ad agency for the California McDonald's franchisees' association says, "It is strongly recommended that we be involved with the Telethon." She giggles after saying "recommended."

There is general agreement that McDonald's isn't sitting on a pile of unsold patties because of this involvement.

"I've got no research on this, it's just gut-level," the p.r. executive cautions, "but to the extent that this replaces sales efforts, its effect on consumers is just as positive as if they were seeing a McDonald's commercial. You know, people don't mind feeling good about corporations. And where the product and the price choice are similar, people will be influenced by—and I hate to use this word—the image of the company." When the question comes down to Big Mac or Whopper, Jerry's kids can swing the undecideds.

This year the corporate sponsors passed along over \$6 million to the Telethon. They spent an additional \$5 million promoting the show. Most of them

chose to use Jerry Lewis's services in that advertising. Jerry sang for 7-11 on TV; he praised Hickory Farms beef sticks on the radio; he posed with poster-girl Lisa Cagle for 7-Up billboards. And for Reynolds Aluminum, Jerry the Clown mimed his reactions to the off-screen voice of Jerry-the-Announcer explaining how to help crippled kids by turning in empty cans.

☆

Hour Three. It's almost midnight in the East now, and Jerry is talking to the sleepyheads back there. "Take a snooze, set your alarm clock, check me out later on. 'Cause this is where I'll be, all the time, 'cause that's the way it should be done. The whole thing."

In past years, part of the Telethon's lure was the opportunity to see this

take some of the weight off JL. It's heartening that success has finally brought Jerry some real friends, at least on Labor Day, but the shows now lack a certain edge of danger. The man didn't even loosen his tie.

The Telethon is, in fact, purring along like a well-tuned Porsche. Left-hand side of the stage, Jerry and Governor Blanton of Tennessee are reprising their brief act from last year. The Governor: "When you came down to see us, I thought you were running for something." Jerry: "I do comedy, already." The Governor, breaking up: "I quit." Center stage, a bustling woman assistant director noiselessly sets Lola Falana's two backup singers on their marks, and whips microphones into place for them. On the right, Ed's standing at his po-

floor managers are supposed to cue the audience. It's just the little something extra you get when you use Ed.

The man can also freeze in position more naturally than any human being still breathing. He stands with his legs crossed at the ankles, one hand on the podium for balance, the other holding a mike up to his mouth. He's waiting to talk, and he just holds that pose for five or ten minutes, until Jerry's finished. Ed doesn't fidget, he doesn't twitch, he doesn't check his nails every few moments. Maybe he's opening and closing his septum or doing tummy lifts or using one of the other ROTC tricks to avoid boredom or fainting while standing at attention. But if he's doing something, you can't see it.

And the big guy is always good for a laugh. To fill a minute before the local stations cut away, Jerry starts teaching Ed a stanza of nonsense syllables. The gibberish words are so devised that, if you stumble on one of them, chances are you'll end up saying the word "piss." Jerry keeps trying to get Ed to speed up. No way. When the Good Lord was passing out unflappability, Ed was first in line.

☆

"Artie? I'm gonna do it from here, in front of the band." Jerry is moving his stool over to center stage to sing the 7-11 jingle that's been running on television all summer. The week before the Telethon, Jerry went down to the rehearsal hall of the Space Center every afternoon to go over his musical numbers. He nursed them, rehearsed them, and argued with the musicians about whether they were playing the right notes. When a spirit of perfectionism confronts a voice what's been yelling, "Hey, Lady, I stepped on your baby" for twenty years, you're better off not being in the band.

"Can I have your love?" he sings. Whoever wrote this jingle for the 7-11 people knew how to capture Jerry Lewis's essential message to the American public in a five-word opening line. Lewis's genius is that he has devised a method of measuring America's love for him in its most heartfelt form—dollars—while appearing in the role of the selfless crusader. Only with the license granted by "his kids" would he have the nerve to stand up and sing "Can I have your love?" Only with the protection of these afflicted thousands, whose strength and courage he says he envies, can he be sure the audience is not yelling back at its sets, "Sure, Jerry,



Jerry nurses, rehearses his songs before the Telethon.

beautiful humanitarian turn self-pitying and nasty as the hours dragged by. You could count on a really ugly rampage if you held out till five or six in the morning. "Where are all my so-called good friends in Las Vegas?" he once demanded in the doldrums of a New York telethon. "They say 'Jerry, God bless you, you're doing great things,' but I would really like to know where the hell these people are when I need them. 'Cause the way I heard it, that's when friends are supposed to be there."

But now Jerry has his "pussycats." Chad Everett, David Hartman, and Ed McMahon—Pussycat Number One—stand across the stage from Lewis at the sidekick styrene podium. They introduce each sponsor, announce the openings and closings of each hour, and

dium, listening attentively.

Listening is one of Ed McMahon's chief talents. Whether he's with Johnny or Jerry, he assumes the air of someone who's totally absorbed in the proceedings, and he actually makes you believe that it's possible. He's never bored. He's always Ed. Every time you shoot a glance over at him while someone else is talking, he's tuned in. Ed gives you the security of working with a net, but he also gives you unflagging enthusiasm. When Chad Everett introduces the president of Olympia Beer to Jerry, Ed knows he's not on camera. But he still does a big "Do-you-hear-who-this-is? Can-you-believe-this-man-is-actually-here? Well-let's-hear-it-for-him!" take to the audience and starts clapping loudly. It's not his job, necessarily. The

you can have my love. Up a tube."

"And could you arrange," he sings, "to let me have the change for my kids?"

"We say Jerry's kids," Horst Petzall, the MDA publicist, acknowledges, "but it's not just kids. Several of our diseases strike people in the prime of life." Before the soft-spoken Petzall came to work writing radio spots and press releases for MDA, he worked as the news director at Radio Free Europe. "People," he says, "should know what their dollars are going for, although I guess for some reason most people are more likely to give money to help sick children than sick adults. I don't understand it," Horst says, shaking his head. "I'm much more moved by someone stricken at their prime."



Hour Five. Lewis calls for his first "timpani." The drum is rolled to herald good news on the tote board, and, as the numbers flip to \$2 million, the orchestra strikes up the tote board's theme song: "What the World Needs Now."

"Something big is brewing," Jay Dardennes confides in a Louisiana drawl. The two of us, and a couple of hundred others, are trapped together in the commissary, watching the Telethon on TV. A phalanx of armed Sahara guards blocks all the doorways leading out of the commissary. Their appearance was unannounced, and MDA staffers seem as puzzled as the rest of us. The Space Center has been sealed off, and the hallway into which the rooms normally empty has been established as a cordon sanitaire. Jay Dardennes is national youth director of MDA, and he's worried because he's supposed to be on stage in half an hour introducing Jerry to some youth, and he can't get out of here. Neither can a Carex guard, who interrupted his vigil to grab some cold cuts. Security won't let a security guard out. What's going on here?

"Only four people know," Maury Stevens says to me sagely, bustling toward his control truck. "Not even the Governor could get in now," a security officer named Clyde Swindell observes. The word going around is that we can't exit because Sinatra has to enter. "If President Ford came here right now," Officer Swindell says, "he'd have to wait for Frankie."

It must be something big. Two ex-members of the Fifth Dimension, Marilyn McCoo and Billy Davis, are now trapped in here as well. They made the mistake of stopping in the commissary after doing their set onstage, and they're

now standing by one of the doorways, negotiating with a series of increasingly high-ranking MDA staffers. They've got a plane to catch. Every once in a while in show business, you confront the pecking order. A few years ago, when Sinatra staged his comeback at Caesar's Palace, there was TV footage of a line of big celebrities standing outside the showroom door waiting to be seated. You could see the pained expression on Johnny Carson's face—he was fifth or sixth in line—when Jack Benny walked right past the line and into the room. No matter how big you are, there's somebody bigger.

Finally a nod comes from Barbara, a young blonde MDA assistant who's been trying to phone someone who knows what the hell this is all about, and Marilyn and Billy gain their release. A few moments later I get sprung by Frank Sinatra's press agent, Lee Salter, one of the few people connected with this show who doesn't bother putting on a color-coded Telethon identification badge. It occurs to Lee that it might be a good idea if the magazine people see his client perform, so with great speed tickets are produced, and another writer and I are hustled through a curtain and into the audience. Leaving the commissary I pass the Carex guard, who is telling the Sahara guard to please let him out, he has to pee.

Frank Sinatra has never before appeared in person on a Jerry Lewis Telethon; last year he microwaved an appearance from New York. The audience that has just been seated (the house is turned over once an hour) now realizes how lucky it is. These people are going to see a live Sinatra performance for free.

A couple of real torpedoes, with mouths that look as though they were chiseled into the flesh, are now standing at the exact rear center of the room, the point where all the aisles through the audience meet. Their badges say "Sahara Staff," but I've never seen them here before, and an hour later they are gone forever. A local reporter says it's like this all the time at Caesar's Palace, when Sinatra is performing there.

Pat Henry and Sam Butera are Sinatra's opening acts at Caesar's Palace, and the Chairman of the Board has decided to let middle management warm up the house. Then, at ten minutes to midnight, Sinatra dances out on stage in a tuxedo and hugs Jerry. Even members of the French cabinet don't hug each other as much as people do on this show. Jerry likes to call it the world's largest

love-in. "This man," Lewis says of Sinatra, "meant two million dollars to us last year."

Frank presents a check to Jerry from the Argent Corporation, owners of the Stardust Hotel. The check is for six grand. This morning the local all-news station reported that Argent had, after much hemming and hawing, finally agreed to write off as a loss the \$10 million it had lent to a certain Sherman Glick who was, at the time of the loan, the president of the Argent Corporation. Only Las Vegas heard about that; 84 million people see the \$6,000 check.

At midnight The Telethon makes news. Welcomed by the first standing ovation of the new day, Dean Martin unsteadily walks out on stage and hugs his ex-partner, a man he reportedly hasn't



The Great Reunion: Jerry, Fran-

spoken to in twenty years. Sinatra fades momentarily into the background, saying of the reunion he has arranged, "I think it's about time."

The hugging continues as the floor managers milk the applause. Jerry gets a big laugh with his first line: "So, how ya been?" Everyone's wondering what he really thinks. There is an exchange of closeups, Dean and Jerry, on the big screen, and Lewis is sending out strangely enigmatic signals for a man who usually skywrites his emotions. After a few moments, Frank breaks the tension. He pulls a gun out of the piano.

Strange how being locked up for an hour with no explanation, and being pushed around a bit by large fellows with guns, and being in the presence of gentlemen who appear to have had ex-

perience fitting people with cement footwear can send a good firm "Oh, Jesus" down your spine when Frank Sinatra walks over to the hind end of a grand piano, picks up a shiny metal pistol, and walks back toward Dean and Jerry saying, "I gotta get you guys off one way or the other." The gun was never on camera. But the reporter sitting next to me sees it, and I see it, and we verify for each other that we're neither stoned nor in the grip of Green Felt Jungle paranoia. It's a gun. It's a joke, but it's a gun. Maybe it's a toy. A toy gun. Okay, I'll grant you that much. From ten rows back I can't tell the old persuader from a good prop. All I know is it broke up the hug.

Now Dean is doing his drunk act. He explains to Jerry how he came to be

the Dean Martin Drunk Bit. But I wasn't hugging him and smelling him. The Martin and Lewis partnership was a quick success propelling the crazy kid and the singer through nightclubs, TV, and movies in rapid succession. It broke up in 1956, according to the friend, because Martin let the lion's share of responsibility fall on the hard-driving Lewis. "After he had a heart attack, he just decided it wasn't worth his life to keep working with Dean." As if that weren't enough, Martin opposed Jerry's plans to direct their movies.

So Lewis just stands and watches, and bites his lip a lot, while Sinatra and Martin goof and stumble their way through a medley. And when it's over, when Dean is hugging Jerry before walking off the stage and back out of his life, it is hard to tell which one pities the other more.

Sinatra finishes up his set, and we brace for another bizarre security maneuver to cover the Chairman's exit. But the doors stay open, and when Sinatra strolls down the hallway past the kitchen and out toward the limo on the loading ramp, he is surrounded by nothing more than the usual half-dozen members of a superstar entourage. He is as remarkably unprotected going out as he was vacuum-sealed coming in. The story now is that the lockup was only designed to keep news of Dean from leaking to Jerry. Well of *course*. Except that Monday afternoon Sinatra makes a return appearance, minus Dino, and the same quirky routine is repeated: a ninety-minute quarantine for the entrance, no sweat for the exit. Artie Forrest insists none of this was done at Sinatra's insistence. "I just didn't want people falling over him," Artie deadpans.

At one in the morning, "Sinatra for President" buttons begin circulating backstage.



This was the Telethon for which all the Italian crooners showed up. Tony Bennett did two sets, Perry Como did one. The talent the television network saw during the evening hours was pretty high-priced. But fifteen minutes of every hour belong to the local stations, and during that time the Space Center is filled with lounge-act traveling music while the new audience supplants the old. At the moment we are being regaled by Hominy Grits, a man-woman team performing an epic but thinly accompanied version of "I Believe in Music." He's playing guitar and harmonica; she's banging the hell out of a tambourine. They're both dressed in sil-

ver and white—her dress looks as if it's made entirely out of angel hair—and they both sing. They're working on the special filler-act stage, a second-story platform reached by a narrow stairway from the studio floor.

The Gritters are not getting quite the response they want from the audience, which at this early hour primarily consists of sponsors and MD patients. The sponsors clap mainly for their fellow executives and the taped pitches, leaving it to the dystrophics to applaud for Hominy Grits. They clap hard, but not hard enough for the girl in the angel hair. "Come on," she yells, "do you *believe* in music?" The woman next to me, late fifties, wearing a yellow plastic snood and sitting in an Everest and Jennings "Starliner" wheelchair, shifts the ice around in her slurpee cup and grins. But she doesn't clap.

Clown Spot #2. Mr. and Mrs. Clown don't need to be told to watch the Telethon this time around. They react with sad, silent-clownish agreement to Jerry's offscreen recitation of the good their dollars could do. We wonder about their change in attitude. Then, as Announcer Jerry urges a short walk to the phone, the camera slowly pans over to a crib and we see that not only is their new baby crippled, he isn't even wearing a clown face. Maybe it's illegal to apply heavy makeup to an infant. In any case, the spot makes you think.



Freda Payne has just received a respectable round of applause for a Streisandian version of "The Way We Were." And Jerry's bugged. These goddam people who are sitting here getting the best entertainment in the world *for free* are sitting on their hands. At least, the well ones are. It's time to get some of their love.

"I think it's very important to make two disclaimers," Lewis says in his concerned adult voice. "I have to do this, because my instinct usually serves me well. One. The early hours of the morning. People that are seated in the studio. It's hardly possible for you to be totally energetic and enthusiastic. But these performers are coming from all parts of the world to help us. They have no way of knowing our appreciation and gratitude. They only know and live and *survive* on an audience's applause."

It sounds bleak. It also sounds as if he's talking about himself. Lewis, who started in the business at the age of fifteen, is hurt and embittered by his lack of critical acclaim in this country. Like



Sinatra, and Dean Martin.

here: "I had to go, and this was the nearest door." While Sinatra begins singing "The Lady Is a Tramp," Martin stands next to him staring off to the left of the stage, where a dozen large plastic discs bearing the sponsors logos are hung. "I like all those things . . . those buttons," Dean says when it's time for him to sing his half of the song. His face is locked into a laminated Robert Mitchum smirk. Twenty feet away, Jerry stands at his podium, smoking a cigarette and wiping his hands.

Gary Hoffman offers Lewis a microphone. Jerry, staring in fascination at the spectacle in center stage, waves it away. He doesn't want to be in this act.

"Jerry was very hurt by the fact that Dean was drunk," a friend of Lewis's said later. To me it looked like an act:

some jazz musician, he has to go to France to be acclaimed a genius—and those people, nice as they are, don't understand English.

"So if you would be kind enough, as long as you indeed are the audience in the studio, if you could just acknowledge that, it only takes a moment, and I repeat, any good doctor will tell you, it's good for the system. 'Cause you'll atrophy sitting there." There are people, Jerry's kids, who have literally atrophied sitting ten feet away from the man. Maybe they didn't clap enough.

It's characteristic of Lewis that he feels the need to lecture the studio audience in front of a nationwide television audience. He will make an example of this roomful in front of 50 million people. His whole speech has the feeling of the remarks the boys' vice principal would interrupt a high-school assembly to deliver.

"It makes the performers feel good, and then it lessens my load of having to let them know you are indeed grateful because that's just words. Who says they really believe that?" It's a good point. Performers are so insecure, they're probably sitting in the Green Room right now wondering if in fact they might not be the Greatest Show People in the World. "So I would appreciate it if you would consider that, the next time a performer steps on this stage. The second disclaimer"—now he's taking advantage, he knows no other channels are on the air this time Monday morning—"is that a VTR or videotape recording of Mr. Kirk Douglas. . . . Some people are disappointed that he isn't standing stage center. Kirk Douglas would love to be here."

The studio audience had emitted the first genuine "ooooooooohhhh" of the evening when Lewis had said "Please meet Mr. Kirk Douglas" an hour ago. But all they met was a fuzzy closeup on the Eidophor screen. Somebody must have bitched.

"He took the time . . . to go to a studio and make that videotape recording . . . for my kids." How much guilt can you stand at three in the morning? "He had to go to Europe, or somewhere. Therefore he wasn't available for this date. He took the time to make this videotape recording, just as many other performers do. I think they're entitled to the same applause as the performer that's here live. It'll make . . ." And now some alarm in Jerry Lewis's head appears to go off. He's been the shaming, self-righteous grownup for just one second too

long, and all of a sudden he can't take any more of it, either. The vice-principal has put himself on a bumper. Jerry may not be the kid any more, but in crisis moments he can still talk a kid's language. The voice shifts back to the nose. "He ain't gonna hear your applause. But I'm gonna tell him you did good. Okay? Good. Here's David Hartman." Whew. David Hartman has been here all night, but you better believe that he gets some kind of a hand.



The tote board shows \$4.2 million at three in the morning, but it is ignored. Aside from a pitch by Perry Como at the beginning of his set, there is not that much mention of muscular dystrophy, either. If you had been in a coma for the past thirteen years and woke up right now, you'd swear you were still watching *The Jerry Lewis Show*, a two-hour, live, Saturday-night variety show that ran on ABC in the fall of 1963. Then as now, Jerry worked with Lou Brown and the orchestra, and a sidekick-announcer (Del Moore, who died before reaching true pussycat status), and big-name guests like Sammy Davis, Jr. (who appeared three times during the show's brief run). Jerry would run around real loose, reiterating every ten minutes that the show was live! Live!

In many ways the Telethon is a variety show from another era. Laughter and applause are not augmented electronically. Lewis would rather lecture than sweeten. The show is evaluated by comments from the station managers who carry it. It is not tested and researched and galvanic-skin-responded, as virtually every prime-time program now is—although Benton and Bowles recently did propose some research in depth. "We told them we're a health agency," Petzall the publicist recounts, "and we couldn't afford it."

The big difference between this program and Lewis's old variety show is that there's no ABC to cancel the Telethon. It's taken him a long time, but he's got his own bat and ball, and the stadium has been built to his specifications. There's nobody to say no to Jerry, because that would mean saying no to "Jerry's kids."



The Telethon could probably go off the air in the middle of the night, come back on at noon, and collect the same amount of money. It stays on basically to keep the momentum going, to keep the people working on the show from crashing. Almost nobody sees what happens

on the air during these dead hours. Here's why.

Jerry comes out to begin Hour Twelve wearing a set of wax teeth. A little later, he scotch-tapes his nose to his forehead, a kind of instant nose job. "To my little people with sleepy eyes in the East," he says, "get off your butts and get us some money." After introducing a videotape of George C. Scott, he explains why he read the intro off the cue cards. "I know personally most of the performers we have on this show, but in many many cases there are certain things that it's important for the artist and for their career to have said in just the right way. But I don't need cards when I'm talking about what we're here for. In twenty-six years, I have never read a card about my kids."



Into the para-world of occult: Ed

John Valente, a youthful rocker with potential MOR crossover appeal, sings to a prerecorded track while Lou's band lounges behind a gauzy curtain. Like perhaps a third of the performers on the Telethon, Valente says nothing about muscular dystrophy. Jerry walks over to the sponsors' section during Valente's song and pulls his shirttail out through his zipper. Representatives of half a dozen fraternities appear with Jerry to announce their contributions (minimum for a youth group appearance: \$10,000). Jerry greets each of them with a sing-song gibberishification of the Greek-letter names. Most often it comes out as a variation of "Alpha Melvin Klaveman."

Joe Williams comes out and does a set of the blues. He's a pro who knows better than to ignore the cause. "Jerry," Joe

pauses between songs, "you are well-loved, believe me." Acknowledging the applause for his last tune, Joe calls out, "Thank you. Send money. Send money."

Jerry calls for the timpani, and the tote board rolls to \$5 million. An act called Razzle Pee Willy appears on the stage—a man with his torso painted to resemble a huge face, holding a trumpet to his navel, miming to a recording of the "Colonel Bogey March."

Now the crew next to the control truck is breaking up. The names are getting to them. Ed has just introduced Jerry to Mr. Schmeck of the Order of Eagles and Verna Funke from the women's auxiliary of the Moose. These people have just walked out of the pages of a Johnny Carson monologue. A mo-



predicts \$21.9 million in donations!

ment later Jerry chats with the Supreme Tall Cedar of the Tall Cedars of Lebanon, a middle-aged man wearing a powder-blue polyester suit and a conical white hat with a green tree sewn on it. Next up to the podium is James Rademacher, head of the letter carriers, another union sponsor. He gives Jerry a check and reveals that this is his final appearance on the Telethon. "Jerry," he says, "at the end of this year, I'm hanging up the satchel."

More? Carrie McDowell, a twelve-year old girl with long blonde hair, comes out and sings "Over the Rainbow." It sounds as though Judy Garland has swallowed Teresa Brewer. Jerry is delighted. "I don't force sick kids on you, but take a look at a well one."

Capping the dead hours are Richie

and the Pook Family. Half-a-dozen kids in cartoon animal suits—a duck, a Goofy-type dog, a Bugs-type bunny—stand on the stage for ten minutes waiting for their music. Jerry introduces them once, and nothing happens. "Cue the band," Jerry yells. But they can't be cued. The bandstand behind the gauzy curtain is empty. Someone in the booth panics at this point, and starts rolling a tape of one of the filler acts, doing "Feelings." After a few seconds, someone in the booth rams that knob back down to zero.

"Arthur, what's happening? Did we lose power or what?" Artie hits the talkback switch in the truck. "Mr. Lewis, I sent the band to get something to eat." Jerry reads the introduction again—something about everyone can be a pook. The kids in the animal suits tense up, ready to cook, and whistling out of the speakers comes a loud, pure, one-kilohertz tone. "This is only a test"—that tone. It's not easy to dance to, especially in pook suit.

Ten past eight. The kids finally did their act and are looking for cold towels. "Go!" Jerry yells. "Gimme a little pleasure!" From his table in Room Eleven, Fred Schaefer has gathered the pledge numbers reported by the local stations and verified them, according to processes that are MDA "trade secrets." Then he has telephoned those figures to Jerry Weinberg, who is sitting at a table with phones and little Sony monitors just to the left of the stage, in front of the sponsors. Weinberg, in turn, has telephoned his secretary May, seated across the stage directly below the platform where Hominy Grits tried to believe in music. While Weinberg notifies Artie Forrest and Ed McMahon of the impending roll, May resets the rotary knobs, one for each digit, on the anonymous-looking, garbage-can-gray metal box in front of her. When the timpani roll, she flips a toggle switch beneath the knobs, and the plastic flaps with the numbers on the Helbros tote board flip over to the new setting. The "pleasure" is \$6 million. It's not nearly enough.

"We've had fun," he begins. Mr. Lewis, the boys' veep, is back. "I guess we've been a little lazy. We really got some work to do. I've been tiptoeing, I've been passive, and I guess that doesn't do the job. I have a reputation for being abrasive, for being an egomaniac. I guess I have to turn some of that on now. You might examine the possibility that I'm a fool, doing what I'm doing up here. I doubt that. I like what I

am. Maybe it's time for you to examine what you are. Gimme a bucket. End of Mr. Nice Guy."

With that, Jerry takes a 7-Up plastic bucket and runs out into the audience. The band plays an uptempo rouser from the Count Basie book, and Lewis dances through the aisles, bartering with the spectators, trading proximity to the star for some of the green stuff. "I love you too," he says to a fan, "stick it in there."

Lewis used to do this routine every hour when the Telethon originated in New York. The ballroom of the Americana always seemed packed with teenagers from Brooklyn and New Jersey who strongly identified with Jerry's character because they, too, were anarchic idiots. The run through the aisles was a way of pressing the flesh, keeping in touch with the constituency. For the Vegas crowd, though, Lewis treats it almost like a punishment. Daddy's the only one who really loves them.

"See this?" He's back onstage, holding up the bucket. "I grabbed a bundle from this little cocking around."



Now Jerry is kissing Ed on the nose. Comedians belong to a privileged class of American males. Only they and athletes are allowed to have public sexual contact with other guys, free of stigma. Jocks can pat each other's asses; comedians get to kiss. Jerry is bussing his pussycat right now because the time has arrived for the Telethon's sole brush with the para-world of occult: Ed's Prediction. This is a short one-act performed entirely with straight faces, for which again credit must to to Mr. McMahon. The plot here is that every year, at around 9:30 Labor Day morning, Ed correctly predicts, within hundreds of thousands of dollars, the final figure on the toteboard. This isn't something he does professionally, you understand. He never predicts for Johnny. This is just some magic kind of pussycat thing that happens only with Jerry. It's either precognition or Ed in some pre-estian way takes responsibility for, and thus creates the reality of, his own pledge total.

"At the end of more years than the Good Lord thought I had coming to me," Jerry says, "I would hope that I have ten percent . . . of what this man has. And I say this without any fear of being called maudlin or sentimental." Ed now goes into his trance, which strongly resembles his normal demeanor. Jerry starts getting apprehensive: is

Ed going to do something *crazy* and predict too high? Give him room, here he goes. . . . Ed predicts that the Telethon will gross . . . twenty-one nine. *Twenty-one point nine million dollars!* The crowd loves it. This is more exciting than applauding for appliances!

But Jerry stalks almost completely off the stage. "What's the matter?" Ed feeds him. Jerry shakes his head, his mouth hangs open. He is shocked, fearful, disbelieving. "No," Jerry says. "I'm sorry. . . I don't even wanna hear. . . . This man is a cuckoo bird."

It's a fine performance of the perennial favorite, and Ed's prediction becomes the goal for the rest of the show. The dramatic subtext of the Telethon up to now has been Will He Make It, as in: "Can Jerry stay up for twenty-one hours without killing someone?" The question now is Will We Help Him Make It? The phone numbers are flashing on your screen.



Jan Murray is the only comedian booked on this year's Telethon. There's a policy about that. "We've found that comedy dies on this show," Marcy Forrest says. "Comedians really don't help to set a mood. It's tough when you see one of the pieces that David Hartman did with MD patients and it moves you so much that you want to call in your pledge only you can't talk because maybe you're going to cry—well, it's almost poor taste to bring on somebody who's going to try to make you laugh."

But Jan is, as we've seen, kind of special. Besides, he's not trying to make anybody laugh.

"Jerry, I have a message for you. I just paid a visit to our dear Totie Fields. She's fun, she looks good, she feels good." (Totie Fields has just had her left leg amputated. She contracted phlebitis following what the newspapers called "minor surgery." Gossips are calling it a face lift.) "It's wonderful," Jan continues, "and I'm celebrating her tremendous recovery, she's going to be back onstage very very soon. . . ."

"Thank God," Jerry interjects.

". . . and what better way to celebrate than to give to this man's kids—so, Jerry, here's a check for \$500."

"That's his own personal money this man is giving," Jerry says.

"And if, ladies and gentlemen, God forbid you've had a tragedy in your life recently, maybe you've lost someone very close to you, there could be no better way to remember that loved one than by sending something to Jerry and his

kids. So won't you call the number on your screen right away?"

"God bless you, Jan."

"God bless you, Jerry."

Aside from Jerry and Jan, this is a very non-Jewish show. Jerry's kid-adult tug of war is also a contest between the Jew he is and the Christian he's becoming. So his office door in Century City bears a plaque that says "Super Jew." On the other hand, there is this blossoming relationship with Oral Roberts.

Oral Roberts was the first nationally-telecast faith healer, and he used to lay on hands and transmit through them the healing power of the Lord. But Oral has now classed up his act considerably. The

vue to Vegas: Richard and Patti Roberts, the World Action Singers and the Ron Huff Orchestra on a pre-recorded track, and the Grandfather Mountain, North Carolina, Cloggers. This act could headline at Knott's Berry Farm, it's that polished. Then Jerry introduces Roberts as "a true gentleman and one of God's chosen people," and Oral takes center stage.

"I said to the students at Oral Roberts University, 'Think of your love for crippled children. Think of your love for Jerry Lewis. Think of your love for God.'" Not bad. Second place—behind the Deity, ahead of the kids. Oral gives Jerry a hefty check from the students at



Even as he swaps homilies with Oral Roberts, Jerry is haunted by memories of his earlier

announcer on his weekly television show introduces him as "author-educator-evangelist Oral Roberts." And he's become the benefactor of a charity that supports medical science. Look, Lord—no hands.

Last year Oral made his first appearance on the Telethon on behalf of Oral Roberts University, a major power in both spirit and basketball. Then Jerry and his wife Patti made an extremely rare joint appearance last spring on an hour-long prime-time Oral Roberts special. Jerry did parts of his nightclub act, leaving out the rash bit, and then he and Patti chatted with Oral about life.

Now Oral has brought his whole re-

ORU. Some of Lou Brown's musicians start whispering behind the curtain during the Oration. Jerry shushes them. "I pray," Oral finishes up, "that every friend and every partner of the Oral Roberts ministry will step to the phone right now. God bless you, Jerry."

As Oral strides purposefully out of the Space Center, Jerry tries to explain to the Jews watching what their boy has gotten into. "It gives you a strange kind of strength to know Oral Roberts. I think it's just because basically he's a nice man, and that's all we really want in life is to deal just with nice people." (A week after the Telethon, a Los Angeles station carries another prime-time Oral

Roberts special, "Don't Park Here," directed by Jerry Lewis.)

Clown Spot #3. Ten minutes long. The only soundtrack is Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, the "Pathétique." It's Christmastime in Clowntown. Three presents under the tree. They get opened, one at a time. Slowly and silently. Lots of reaction shots. She opens his present. It's an iron. He unwraps the gift from her. A big tie. One box left. More reaction shots. Him. Her. Box. Him again. Hesitancy grapples with desire, and they both win. Finally, timidly he opens the present. It's a leg brace.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the floor manager yells to the audience as the vi-

player at eleven in the morning. "Jerry's calling everybody." Ed's prediction would require a sixteen-percent increase over last year's pledges, but the board is up only five percent. "For a while it goes up to seven, and everybody starts relaxing, and then it drops right back down. Freddy's changed the board twenty-four times in the last hour. They're throwing everything on."

The strategy of putting numbers on the tote board is something Fred Schaefer could tell me something about—if he weren't so intent on throwing me out of the room. Room Eleven freezes when I walk in.

The people on the phones getting the local totals are Schaefer's dozen. The same people are flown out to Vegas from New York every year. "People Fred knows he can count on," says one of the tabulators, a friend of Fred's brother-in-law, "people he knows won't flake out."

Fred's not so happy we're talking. "I don't have time to talk. You picked a bad time. It's going fine." Then he calls the MDA press office for advice on the best way to kick me out.



The millions are somehow starting to roll. Jerry has been spending a lot of time offstage, perhaps "calling everybody," perhaps not. "Who would he call?" Artie said incredulously when I asked him what was going on. "Getty's dead, Hughes is dead." Maybe, as Jerry Weinberg says, the sudden shift of the tote board into overdrive is simply a matter of "the moving of the wheel. Momentum."

\$12 million at a quarter past noon. "We hit you hard," Jerry is explaining onstage. "We use no devices. We smack you in the nerve ends and in the heart." Patti has appeared, sitting in a front-row seat—strong, gray, silent, looking like a screen test for the role of Pat in *The Final Days*. Mommy's here. "They call each other Daddy and Mommy," says a family friend.

The tote board gets its first standing ovation for its rendition of \$13,129,763. Now it's time to pull out all the stops. Jerry does his most requested Telethon song, a rewrite of Barry Manilow's hit rewrite of the Bach toccata in C Minor. After a somber verse, the song kicks into a triumphantly sad chorus, with Jerry at his most Jolsonesque: "Help me to help them . . . Now! . . . Now! . . . There's no time to wait!" The second *now* Jerry stretches over three long notes. He's giving his all. After a couple of times through the song, Jerry and the band re-

peat just the chorus, thirteen or fourteen times, louder, more intense each time, "Now! Now!!" It's a drain. At the end Jerry is limp, and Mommy and the rest of the audience are on their feet.



Lee Salter, Frank Sinatra's press agent, precedes his boss onstage this time. Lee gives Jerry a \$500 check in honor of a man who recently died of muscular dystrophy. "We accept his money," Lewis says, "with the hope that that won't happen again." Artie Forrest comes out from backstage, walking Joe Louis into the sponsors' section. Is *Joe* going to give money? They'll do anything to shame you at this point.

Sinatra comes out again wearing a white leisure suit. He looks as good in a leisure suit as he sounded in singing "Bad Bad Leroy Brown." "Meaner than a junkyard dog. Woof!" He sings three songs, reads a one-minute pitch off cue cards between each tune, and pauses to let Jerry interrupt with \$16 million at a quarter to two. Twenty minutes later, another timpani: \$17.1 mil. They're just squeezing over the million line each time, but they're maintaining the pace they need for a crack at a new world Telethon record.



This is the make-or-break hour. Ed's prestige as a pussycat is on the line. They got the Moiseyev Dancers, they got the tape replay of the Martin-and-Lewis reunion, they got Lola Falana. Culture, history, and legs. Gary Hoffman personally works the studio audience, coaxing them to keep standing and applauding as they watch the tape of an audience fourteen hours ago standing and applauding. Lewis watches the Eidophor enlargement of his midnight encounter out of the corner of his eyes. There's a faint smile on his face. Then he leans back on the podium (notice how there's a chair behind Ed's podium, but none for Jerry: he must stand, for those who can't), and he laughs at Dean's line about having to go to the bathroom, and he starts biting his lower lip.

Lewis does a lot of lip-biting during this show, breaking up the bites with an occasional round of lip-pursing. Even when he's not doing a telethon—when, for example, he was making *Which Way to the Front?*—Jerry goes straight through twenty-, twenty-one-hour schedules, rarely pausing to eat. Though his official source of energy is milkshakes, it would seem that his adrenalin is traveling in some fast com-



anarchic self (as in *At War With the Army*).

nette nears an end, "when we come out of this, please do not applaud!" It will appear to the viewer that the studio audience has been moved beyond ability to clap.

One final, long, silent shot of Jerry-the-clown. The music hits a dolorous last chord. A man in the audience starts to applaud. Everybody in the house goes "Shhhhhhhh." There is a moment of realistic, moved silence, then someone in the booth starts to rewind a tape over the p.a. system, and the spell is broken by what the engineers call monkey chatter.



"Ross is all upset," says an MDA em-

Can the Telethon continue its exotic growth? With all the stations it can use, the MDA may be planning more show-business coups. When the Beatles reunite, it just might be for "Jerry's kids."

pany. (In fact, as Lewis revealed in 1978, he had for some years been addicted to the pain-killing drug Percodan.)

Just outside the Green Room, 175 Russians in colorful national costumes are waiting to go on. They are making Telethon history. They're drinking Coca-Cola.

"ONLY SEVEN-UP SOFT DRINK PRODUCTS ARE TO BE USED IN YOUR COMMISSARY AREAS." Jerry Weinberg wrote that emphatic sentence as part of a five-page memo detailing the protocol of corporate sponsorship to the local stations. Telethon sponsors are promised freedom from product conflicts. But détente is bigger than dystrophy. So there's a little soft-drink bar set up in the middle of the room, and, for these vividly costumed visitors, it's a free country.

The troupe comes out and dwarfs the stage, slopping over in front of the tote board. To a huge pre-recorded track—it sounds like the Soviet Army orchestra and chorus overdubbed itself two or three times—the company does the opening number from its nightclub act. The Moiseyev Dancers are in Las Vegas because they follow Frank Sinatra into Caesar's for a week. The audience stands and cheers. Then the track starts up again, catching the dancers by surprise, and Jerry starts dancing a crazy kazatzka—nothing spastic, you understand—squatting and kicking, holding a cigarette in his right hand. Then he yells a sing-song mixture of Hebrew, Yiddish, and gibberish at them, including the Hebrew blessing for wine and a comment in Yiddish about Henry Kissinger: "It should stink from his head."



It's \$20 million, just before three, even though the machine sticks at \$10 million and Ed has to walk over and flip the last number by hand. Jerry starts hugging members of the crew, the bearded floor manager, Larry with the cue cards, and nobody needs to be told to stand up at 3:12 when May toggles the board over to \$21 million. The miracle has happened again—the Miracle of the Clown.

Larry holds up a card that says "Eight Min to Walk Alone," and Mucio

(Moose) Delgado of the MDA kneels down behind the executives' table next to the stage and starts opening shipping cartons and handing plastic bags of confetti to the sponsors.

"You often hear people wondering," Jerry observes, "if corporation executives are really human up there in their ivory towers. Well, I've gotten to know these people, and lemme tell you—these *big corporation executives* are nothing but marshmallow pussycats. Pushovers." Somebody else must be buying all those copies of *Winning Through Intimidation*. The Thompson brothers are beaming at the man from Warner-Lambert. This is a more satisfying tribute than a hundred Advertising



"Walk on through the wind . . ."

Council campaigns about the blessings of the free enterprise system. This is from the heart.

Every Muscular Dystrophy telethon ends with Jerry's singing "You'll Never Walk Alone," a peculiar choice of songs to address to crippled people. Tradition has it that Lewis is so overcome by emotion at this point that he can't make it all the way through the song. Normally, he will get to about the first "Walk on through the wind" and just finally give in to the tears—yes, a man can cry, especially with those numbers up there—and he will set his microphone down on the stool and walk off the stage in darkness, leaving the band to finish the song.

But this year, for some reason—

perhaps some inner source of strength he tapped in that opening introspective moment—Lewis gets through the entire song. Only on the last, highest "never" does the voice waver uncertainly. And then, it's all over. Women are walking out of the Space Center crying. Some men are. The sponsors are jubilant, shaking hands with each other and with Jerry Weinberg and Bob Ross of the MDA. Artie Forrest is hugging the crew. It has taken all year to get to this moment.

Jerry sees none of it. He's back where it all started, in the trailer. According to someone who's been there, Lewis will now break down and sob from total exhaustion. He will take a couple of phone calls and a couple of sleeping pills, and sack out until around five the next afternoon. Then, for a few days, he'll keep "a very low profile."

The books stay open on each year's Telethon until December. Inevitably, the MDA will collect over 100 percent of the pledge total, and Jerry will take full-page ads in the trades to announce that fact. Lewis and the muscular dystrophy people would like nothing more than to never have to do another Telethon, they say. A meeting to begin planning next year's show is held that night.

Can this thing continue its exotic growth? Practically speaking, the Telethon has all the stations it can use. They'll probably work on getting on a VHF commercial channel in Chicago instead of the PBS outlet they had in 1976 and the UHF channel in 1978, but in all likelihood the advance planning is focused on more show-business coups. Having seen John and Yoko show up in Vegas one year, I wouldn't be surprised if, when the Beatles reunite, they come together for Jerry's kids. The show could always get more sponsors, although Pat Weaver keeps writing memos cautioning that the Telethon is getting too commercial. Perhaps if the dispute with Myasthenia Gravis works out all right, the MDA might even acquire more diseases.

The last voice I hear before leaving Las Vegas is Totie Fields, speaking from a hole in the airport ceiling. "Watch your step," she says. ☸