

umbrello

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 3

MAY 1980

## CAVELLINI COMES TO CALIFORNIA

Cavellini's arrival from Italy was an event in itself. Even the customs officials wanted to know who was coming in from where, since they had never seen such a motley group awaiting the arrival of any foreign guest, let alone the greatest! All had stickers on, costumes adorned some, others wore Cavellini masks which were Xerox replicas of his face tied around each head. What a motley crew indeed, and then he arrived, not the least tired, available for photographs, even bringing along his own photographer, Ken Damy, who was assigned the documentation of the trip as well as the filming of excerpts in order to create a film called *Cavellini in California*.

Choreographed by Madeline (Bibi) Behren-Brigham, the arrival worked efficiently, the group all assembled on the motorized cable car which had been rented for the occasion driven by an artist too. As the car left the airport, Cavellini did not see the scenic part of San Francisco until he got to North Beach, but there we picked up other artists along the way. Then across the Golden Gate Bridge on a very cold, damp, foggy day to the other side to take pictures and toast each other with California white wine. A Chinese dinner ended the evening, before taking Cavellini and his photographer to the Mansion, an old restored Victorian hotel which was to be his address for a few days in San Francisco.

Artists started arriving from New York, Arkansas (in fact Russell Butler traveled three days on the train to get to California for the Dada Festival, and Cavellini was indeed flattered!) Artists came from Montreal and Vancouver, from all parts of California as well.

During his short stay in San Francisco and for two weeks, I became Cavellini's English-speaking voice (except for a few hours substitution by some Italian-speaking women). We were interviewed for newspapers, interviewed on video for a group of students, performed on video for La Mabelle, interviewed for independent video companies. The philosophy, the art, the thoughts of Cavellini became mine. He was winned and dined, given parties and honored with a Welcome Sign in Postcard Palace and a display, blessed with good weather after the gloomy and cold arrival day. California turned on for Cavellini.

The ride to Ukiah was beautiful, with Northern California showing its rich landscape, rolling hills, cascades, roses, and much more. Checking in at the Palace Hotel, Cavellini was assigned the Honeymoon Suite, which was the finest suite of rooms in the hotel. There a chair created by Buster Cleveland was decked in stickers for his delight. After a very few minutes of rest, he began to draw portraits of Anna Banana and Buster Cleveland, as samples for what he wanted to do to raise money for Mendo Dada and later for L.A. Dada. He was good, quick, and right to the point in his profile portraits



and he knew it. But what irony!

No one can really describe the entrance into the Saturday Afternoon Club, a staid, conservative fixture in the community who knew Cavellini so well, but where ladies met to drink tea every Saturday afternoon. Tables went on forever, decked with fresh flowers, linen tablecloths, formal waiters, and soon crowds of people. These people were from the community of Ukiah who came to dine with Cavellini, a name they had become familiar with over the previous three years, but only now would they come to know the man. GAC went around to all the tables with me, greeting each one with a warm handshake and a beguiling smile. He had a grace of a prince, and you could tell the impression he made. The feast went slowly and well, armed with bottles of good California wine which was consumed with great joy by the 200 strong who came to dine. The feast was prepared by four Ukiah young cooks, and served with finesse by artists and friends of Mendo Dada. The vibes everyone felt, and when Cavellini was asked to say a few words, he told them that if America has trouble with the elections this year, they can call on him to run for President. And he had all the votes of Ukiah in his lap that night.

The rest of the evening was spent in improvisational performance hosted by Anna Banana and Buster Cleveland, and there was magic in the air. Everyone had no more than five minutes, and for some strange reason, the performances were tight, powerful, and forceful, mingling sound poetry and action, humor and drama, and nothing was planned. Anna and Buster served as remarkable m.c.s throughout and

we left the hall partially off the ground, knowing that the video team that had documented the evening (three students from San Francisco State who had never worked before) were going to make history again and again thanks to their efforts. It was the best evening of performance I had ever experienced! Luckily, my hotel neighbors were the video team, so we saw the tape as soon as we got back to the hotel, and it was better with the second viewing.

## 2 May 1980, UKIAH

Everyone was taking photographs on the street, including Cavellini, who according to Ken is an excellent photographer. The large Warhol posters were in windows, and stickers were everywhere, and Cavellini just posed with groups, with his poster, and everyone else had a good time.

We celebrated the 40th birthday party of the mailbox in Talmage by going out there and having the postmaster take photos of us, and then having Cavellini and Polly Esther Nation take photos of everyone else. For mail art, it was fun. Then we travelled to Mill Creek and Cow Canyon and saw the beautiful country around Ukiah and Mendo Dada's homes. Cavellini always gravitated to his posters, his stickers and his authorizations (those that give you authority to present Cavellini's works in a museum in the year 2014).

The evening saw five hours of performances, a mini-festival in itself.

## 3 May 1980, UKIAH

The Great Parade was a colorful, riotous procession, with artists and citizens alike participating. A lady on a unicorn, Siamese twins, the great Lumberjack Band who led with rousing music—all added lustre to a parade that started late, but still had the blessing of the town. Cavellini was seated in a dark green convertible which had been covered by its owner with Cavellini stickers, and in which sat three bald heads belonging to Ginny Lloyd, Bibi, and Kezu (a Japanese fellow who added shining lustre). These three were to be the judges in the Dance Contest that night.

As Cavellini turned on for his audience, having reached the Court House, he was seated on a throne (which had been used in a play) placed on a car, kissing babies, receiving flowers, and even blessing a man who was going on a trip. The people of Ukiah responded to his presence. He was dressed for the occasion in a blue tuxedo which he had inscribed with his autobiography.

That afternoon he had changed, rested a little over a working lunch where he had been interviewed, and then proceeded to get his pens and do drawings of anyone who wished to contribute two dollars to Inter-Dada 80 for the Festival. After doing about 20 portraits, he was tired, but seemed to respond to questions which some artists started asking in a circle around him. The hour conversation was the first time artists had a chance to have dialogue with him, and they were happy and he was happy as well. He maintains that Dada is dead, that he is not a Dadaist, but that perhaps we are in a period of transformation in which we are making concrete what the Dadaists theorized in the 1920s.

The evening was scintillating with a magic kind of Fashion Show organized by Polly Esther Nation, with all

UMBRELLA is a bimonthly newsletter of art news, reviews and art information concerning current trends. UMBRELLA is published by Umbrella Associates, P.O. Box 3692, Glendale, CA 91201 and is issued in January, March, May, July, September and November. Phone Number: (213) 797-0514. SUBSCRIPTION RATES: \$12.50 a year, individuals, U.S. and Canada; \$16.50 for institutions, U.S. and Canada; Foreign individuals: \$14.50 surface, \$17.50 airmail; Foreign institutions: \$18.50 surface, \$21.50 airmail.

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Printing: GLENDALE INSTANT PRINTING

THIS NEWSLETTER IS PARTIALLY FUNDED BY A GRANT FROM THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS, a federal agency.

participants getting a good part of their clothes from the thrift shops in the community. Ingenuity, social commentary, and just plain fun seemed to reflect all the artists who participated. The fashion show was accompanied by a band which mimicked the music which was being played by tape recordings, and the commentaries for each piece were written by each participant and read by Polly Esther. It was a very smooth, professional, hilarious fashion show.

After a short break, the Dance Contest began with participants slowly performing, all for a \$100 prize. It seemed to evolve into the world's longest dance contest, and in the end, Tom from Orange County won the \$100. Dancing went on into the wee small hours.

The last morning in Ukiah involved two interviews, one with Tommy Wayne Kramer, one of the organizers of the Festival, and the other with the bellhop in the hotel, who not only performed for Cavellini as a juggler (eating the apple as he juggled it) but also as a musical star, singing a song about bellhops. He was the editor of the Community College paper, and then proceeded to ask Cavellini some questions.

Then off to Lake Mendocino to say goodbye to the tired, but happy Ukiah organizers and friends, and then back to San Francisco.

## LOS ANGELES

Armed with many copies of the Sunday Ukiah paper, which highlighted Cavellini on the cover in all his regalia during the parade, an article, as well as an interview, Cavellini arrived at LAX in buoyant spirits.

He delighted in visiting artists' studios saying that it would be impossible to find so much space in Italy for artists' use. He also had a chance to savor the beauty of the California Southern coastline by going down to La Jolla via Newport and seeing art museums, as well as being celebrated at a party given for him by artist Joyce Cutler Shaw in her beautiful home overlooking the La Jolla shores. Shaw sponsored the visit of Anna Banana & Bill Gaglione on a three-part lecture-performance tour, and so we enjoyed seeing them perform again and then meeting other artists and students. A special edition of an embossed print of the name Cavellini

with his dates had been made during Anna and Bill's performance and was given to him as a gift, still wet.

A visit to Disneyland with a host of friends was riotous and side-splitting, and Cavellini took advantage of the setting to get pictures and films taken for posterity. Jerry Dreva, Lon Spiegelman, Michael Mollett, Bibi, Neal Taylor, Jane (another translator) all had fun at Disneyland.

Visits to galleries, artists' studios, fine continental cafes filled many hours during the days. On Thursday night, 8 May, the Bay Area Dadaists performed, Cavellini also did some portraits, performing as well.

The Dadafest in L.A. celebrated an opening on Friday night, 9 May, of an exhibition of California Dada. Cavellini was honored, celebrated, and videotaped and many of his correspondents came to the opening just to meet him. On Saturday, in Venice, a small parade wended its way down Ocean Front Walk, attracting attention and participants. The parade also was preceded by a performance of Dadaland being wrapped in a Cavellini poster (the Warhol one) and then having everyone take a bite of Cavellini, including Cavellini himself. The parade ended at Artworks, the bookshop of artists' books owned by Barbara Pascal, Lael Mann, and the editor of *Umbrella*, where Cavellini proceeded to greet friends, sign books, posters, and stickers for anyone who asked, as well as commemorative T-shirts.

After a formal reception for Cavellini on Sunday afternoon, the group proceeded to Hollywood where one of the most successful events occurred. Abdada LeClair from Santa Rosa and Teddy from Los Angeles, along with Dadaland

did a photobooth piece after putting stickers on every other star on Hollywood Boulevard within a two-block range. The police even cooperated, and suggested that only the Chamber of Commerce might be angry. And then photobooth photos one after another were taken for posterity with performances at their most raucous.

The Punk Prom went on for hours, including a vicious dance contest and a fashion show.

Cavellini's last days in California were taken up with a move to the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel to savor another type of world, a lush, exotic world. He delighted in the variety of Southern California, but still had nostalgia for San Francisco, mecca for many Europeans. That good California wine really hit the spot for Cavellini, as well as the warm sunshine. We were all burned out, but he was going strong to the end. A vital, energetic man, he seems to be growing old with grace, more energy than anyone half his age. What he kept telling me that what seemed to him so real was actually surreal, and becoming moreso in retrospect; that what he saw was not real America, but alternative America; and that he shall never forget this experience as long as he lives.

—jah

A commemorative T-shirt with the portrait of Cavellini silk-screened in green and red on a white background, with a punk haircut for the man of the hour is available for \$9.00 from Artworks, 66 Windward Ave., Venice, CA 90291 or from Inter-Dada 80, 1451 Knob Hill Rd., Ukiah, CA 95482.





Hollywood. Photobooth shots with Cavellini and clockwise from the top left, Abdada Le-Clair, Polly Esther Nation, Michael Mollett & Dadaland.

San Francisco. Cavellini signing one of his posters, which serves as a letter.



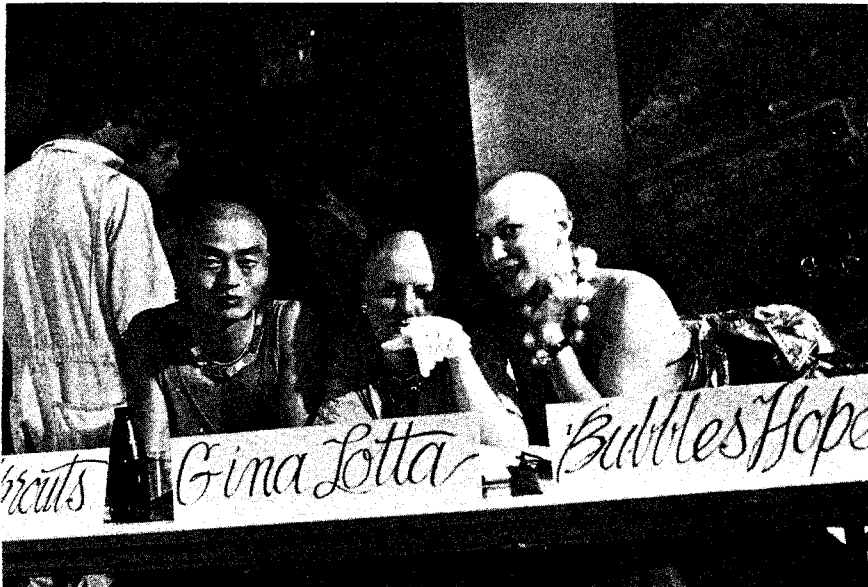
Disneyland. Cavellini with Tigger. (Photo by Neal Taylor).

All other photos in UMBRELLA are by Judith A. Hoffberg.



Cavellini as Grand Marshall of the Parade in Ukiah.

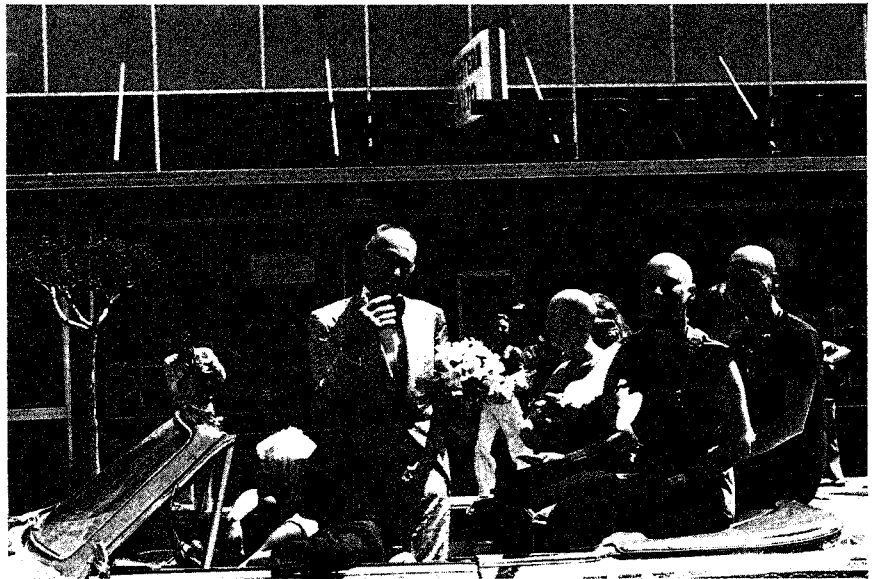
Cavellini posing with Dadaland and Buster Cleveland after the Fashion Show in Ukiah.



Ukiah. The three judges during the Dance Contest in Ukiah.



Venice. Cavellini marching in the parade on Ocean Front Walk along the Pacific.



Ukiah. Cavellini and the three graces during the parade.



Ukiah. The remarkable convertible all covered with Cavellini stickers, which was the lead car in the parade.