PROFESSOR PEDANTO ON “SHOWBOAT”

A Radio/Stage Play

By

Eric Coble
AND NOW, IT'S MY PLEASURE TO RE-INTRODUCE A FAMILIAR FACE ON OUR PROGRAM. YOU MAY REMEMBER HIS ASTOUNDING ANALYSIS A FEW YEARS AGO OF THE FREUDIAN SLIPS IN "OKLAHOMA" AND WHAT HE CLAIMED WAS PROPAGANDA FOR THE UNITED NATIONS IN "THE SOUND OF MUSIC" - WELL, HE'S BACK WITH A NEW BOOK ENTITLED "THE DICHOTOMY OF YIN/YANG TENSIONS AND THE PRESCIENT PHENOMENA IN THE HIERARCHICAL PEDAGOGY OF MUSICAL THEATER - ANOTHER BRIEF SURVEY" - PLEASE WELCOME, STRAIGHT FROM A STINT AT CAL-TECH - PROFESSOR ERUDITE L. PEDANTO!

(APPLAUSE)

ERUDITE
THANK YOU. ALWAYS A PLEASURE, I'M SURE.

RUDMAN
SO I HEAR YOU'VE STIRRED UP QUITE A CONTROVERSY OVER YOUR INTERPRETATION OF "SHOWBOAT", PROFESSOR.

ERUDITE
SOMEBODY HAD TO. YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH THE TUNE "OL' MAN RIVER"?

RUDMAN
OF COURSE.

ERUDITE
WELL, CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF, THAT SONG IS NOT JUST A LAMENT. IT'S A BIOGRAPHY. AND MORE THAN THAT, IT'S AN INDICTMENT OF THE ENTIRE TOBACCO INDUSTRY.

RUDMAN
WAIT, WAIT, WAIT. LET'S BACK UP HERE. A BIOGRAPHY?

ERUDITE
MY RESEARCH HAS TURNED UP THE FACT THAT THERE WAS INDEED - AND PERHAPS STILL IS - AN OL' MAN RIVER. KERN AND HAMMERSTEIN CLEARLY KNEW OF HIM.

RUDMAN
REALLY. WHAT WAS HIS FIRST NAME?

ERUDITE
DE MISSISSIPPI.

RUDMAN
OF COURSE.

ERUDITE
IT'S ALL RIGHT THERE IN THE SONG - "DERE'S AN OL' MAN CALLED DE MISSISSIPPI."

RUDMAN
SO WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT "DE MISSISSIPPI RIVER"?

ERUDITE
IT'S VERY, VERY WIDE. HO HO. A LITTLE JOKE. MISSISSIPPI. VERY, VERY...

RUDMAN
YES, BUT TO GET TO THE POINT...

ERUDITE
WELL, AS I SAY, IT'S ALL IN THE SONG. FOR INSTANCE WE KNOW HIS OCCUPATION. "HE DON' PLANT TATERS. HE DON' PLANT COTTON".

RUDMAN
SO?

ERUDITE
SO WE'RE NARROWING THE FIELD.

RUDMAN
THEN WHAT DOES HE DO? BESIDES "JUST KEEP ROLLIN' ALONG"?

ERUDITE
EXACTLY. MR. DE MISSISSIPPI RIVER WAS A GIANT IN THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY.

RUDMAN
I BEG YOUR PARDON?

ERUDITE
"HE JES' KEEPS ROLLIN', HE KEEPS ON ROLLIN' ALONG". CIGARETTE AFTER CIGARETTE. AND IT'S BEGUN TO AFFECT HIS MEMORY AS WELL.

RUDMAN
THIS IS ALL BEGINNING TO AFFECT MY MEMORY. WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

ERUDITE
WELL, EVEN HIS NAME. "DE MISSISSIPPI" IS ACTUALLY BASED ON THE TIMALEAN WORD "MISSOSLOOPEE" WHICH ROUGHLY TRANSLATES AS "I'M SORRY, I'VE FORGOTTEN YOUR NAME" OR "MY MIND IS AS THE BOWLING BALL", AND NOW, AS WE HEARD, "HE MUS' KNOW SUMPIN'", BUT HE DON' SAY NUTHIN'. HE DON' PLANT TATERS, HE DON' PLANT COTTON, AND DEM DAT PLANTS 'EM IS SOON FORGOTTEN." CLEAR LAPSES OF MEMORY CAUSED BY OVERDOSES OF NICOTINE.

RUDMAN
I'M FLABBERGASTED.
ERUDITE
WELL, THERE'S MORE FLABBERGASTATION WHERE THAT CAME FROM.
FOR INSTANCE, THE PRICE OF MY BOOK – A PHENOMENALLY LOW
$29.95 FROM BANTAM...

RUDMAN
YES, BUT DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER REVELATIONS? MAYBE HOW SNOOPY
FROM "YOU'RE A GOOD MAN, CHARLIE BROWN" WAS ACTUALLY JOE
CAMEL IN DISGUISE?

ERUDITE
DON'T BE RIDICULOUS. BUT I WILL TELL YOU THIS: OBVIOUSLY
THE NARRATOR OF "OL' MAN RIVER" IS TRYING TO KICK THE HABIT.
NICOTINE PATCHES ARE NOT WORKING FOR THIS YOUNG MAN. "AH
GITS WEARY AN' SICK OF TRYIN'; AH'M TIRED OF LIVIN' AN'
SKEERED OF DYIN'". BUT WHAT DOES THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY, IN
THE FORM OF THIS AGING, FORGETFUL DE MISSISSIPPI RIVER, DO?
DOES HE LISTEN? DOES HE CARE? NO, HE "JES' KEEPS ROLLIN'
[CIGARETTES] ALONG."

RUDMAN
WELL, THANK YOU FOR ANOTHER EYE-OPENING FACTOID, PROFESSOR...

ERUDITE
KERN AND HAMMERSTEIN PREDICTED THE CURRENT ANTI-SMOKING
FERVOR 70 YEARS BEFORE ITS TIME! IT'S ALL IN MY BOOK –
$29.95 FROM BANTAM...

RUDMAN
THANK YOU, PROFESSOR...

ERUDITE
YOU'RE WELCOME. NOW IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME – I HAVE TO GET TO
NEW YORK FOR A TAPING OF "DAVID LETTERMAN". I'M GOING TO
EXPOSE THE SONG "SINGINÎ IN THE RAIN" FOR WHAT IT REALLY IS:
A BALLAD ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING AND THE POLAR ICE CAPS!

RUDMAN
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, PROFESSOR ERUDITE L. PEDANTO!

(APPLAUSE)