

"But perhaps Jerry would be in a revealing mood during the Q & A, which, as we'd been forewarned, was to be centerpiece of the show, and would take up most of its runtime. Two microphones were set up at the end of the two main aisles, about twenty feet back from the edge of the stage. Lines formed behind each, as audience members queued up to have a word with the Great Man. The more I replay the evening in my mind, the more these lines come to resemble slaughterhouse chutes. What followed was pure Nassau County Theater of Cruelty, as Jerry hit one fawning worshipper after another ("On behalf of mankind, Jerry, I'd like to thank you...") square between the eyes by with indifference at best, vitriol at worst.

. . . "This was a blue-collar, middle-class crowd: Retired mail carriers, schoolteachers, telethon volunteers, cops, restaurateurs... one of whom attempted to woo Jerry to brunch at his establishment by citing an obscure routine from *Cracking Up*, the last feature that Lewis directed. Another woman, a 'Puerto Rican Jew,' recalled how Lewis' misunderstood manchild persona had been a comforting point of identification for her as an outcast teenager. It was the most moving testimonial of the night, but she overstayed her welcome at the mic—as, in Jerry's opinion, did everyone—and so he bawled 'Officer!' (Her response: 'I am an officer, so that's not gonna work!')

. . . "One questioner announced that her husband's family had run Brown's Hotel on Loch Sheldrake in the Catskills, where a very young Lewis had once perfected his "record act." 'I don't know if you heard, but the place folded,' said Jerry, who couldn't have cared less: 'Next!' Another mentioned that his late father had been the police chief in Jerry's hometown of Irvington, New Jersey, which prompted Jerry to ad-lib, straight-faced, 'I never liked your faddah,' before hesitantly accepting a copy of a photograph of himself with the deceased, with all the enthusiasm of someone being handed a dead, wet opossum. This was the first and last time that Jerry would allow anyone to violate the sanctuary of the stage; the woman who'd 'stayed up all night knitting him a scarf' had to operate through a go-between. When praised, as he was incessantly, Jerry blandly accepted it as his due. When asked about his craft, he would fall back on a handful of unspecific platitudes, usually to do with the aforementioned sacred duty to the audience.

That night, however, it seemed as though the audience was something to be endured, if not shooed away outright, as with one schlub who wore a tucked-in Mets jersey over a pendulous gut, who started barking an indecipherable question about Jerry's friendship with Gil Hodges and his being in the booth during Game 3 of the 1969 World Series. ('Whaaaaat?')

--**Nick Pinkerton**, 4/12/13, Bombast 88 excerpt (<http://blog.sundancenow.com/weekly-columns/bombast-88>)