



The Many Martins

In a Crazy Contest

By Lynn Darling

Take Steve Martin, please.

It was supposed to be a wild and crazy night, a Steve Martin look-a-like contest sponsored by a local radio station, and the clone army came to compete.

There were Steve Martins in rented white tuxedos, 18-year-old Steve Martins, Steve Martins with dogs, Steve Martins with balloons on their heads and spectacles with fake noses on their faces, Steve Martins with straight gray hair and Steve Martins with real gray hair.

As it turned out, "wild and crazy" was an understatement for the evening.

It wasn't that everyone didn't have a good time last night, it was just that everyone was about the precise number of people who showed up. There were over a dozen contestants, there were over a thousand people in the audience packed into a room that holds 350, and outside there were the 1,500 people who didn't get in. They overflowed the three floors of the Marriott Twin Bridges Hotel, jamming the halls, and backed up traffic on surrounding highways for more than an hour. They scared the wits out of the people who had expected a small, intimate get-together.



The real Steve Martin, top, and impersonator Mike Bennett, above, by Ken Feil.

The WPGC disc jockeys who organized the event sat near the stage, chain-smoking cigarettes. "Hey, Scott," someone yelled at Scott Woodside, one of the morning deejays, "they won't let your old lady in here." Woodside looked blank.

"Hey Scott, the traffic's backed up for two miles out there."

"Oh my God," Woodside said, drawing the words out one at a time.

"Hey Scott, there's a guy out there, he's a contestant and he's crying, Scott, he's with his mother."

Woodside winced.

But eventually all of the would-be contestants made it into the Chesapeake Room. There was Allen Luger. With a small live dog named Josh and the requisite white suit and some fake feces that he dangled at appropriate moments.

"I've always loved that guy," Luger,

a Mercedes car salesman, said of Martin. "He's not afraid to do anything." After his act, Luger looked down mournfully at Josh. "Usually he sings with me," he said. "I guess tonight he was too scared to sing."

Steve Perna made it onto the stage for his five minutes of fame as well. Most of the time he works in a department store, sometimes startling customers by asking them if they would be interested in any fur-lined sinks or \$300 socks, two of the most tried and true bits in Martin's routine.

"It's a realistic kind of humor, you know," Perna said. "It's the kind of stuff we would all say if we could get it out."

And then there was Dave Gardner, who wowed the crowd for his five minutes only to find that he had ad-libbed so much material that he hadn't had time for the grand finale.

"The tutu," he moaned. "I didn't get to show them the tutu."

The tutu it turned out was under the white suit and was to be the piece-de-resistance of Gardner's imitations of a Czech Playboy bunny. "I finally found something I could do well," said Gardner, who is 29 years old and works as an air traffic controller at National Airport. "I went on with only one beer but when they started laughing I really loved it."

The evening went on, with imitations of Steve Martin on helium, hippie Steve Martins, Steve Martins fresh from the wars of acne, and Steve Martins who exceeded even Steve Martin's scatological humor.

Finally it was time for the five finalists to be chosen and to make their last 30-second bid for stardom. Gardner was one of the chosen. He got to do the tutu. The crowd went wild. "I



Steve Martin

can't believe it," screamed Gardner's wife, Barbara, "he's a weirdo but I love him."

Looking most bemused at the waves upon waves of blown-dry, high-and-dry, and freeze-dried college students who had come out for the event, was Patrick Fitzgerald, a dead-ringer for

Steve Martin who had come on stage without a routine but simply because he had had two years of people mistaking him for the real thing.

"I'm just an average kind of guy," Fitzgerald said. "But if everyone tells you you look like someone else, what are you gonna do?"