Turning the Spotlight on Hidden Talent at Penn

Shades of Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland at their eager young best: Did Liz Greco, Marjorie Weiss and friends look at each other one day and say, "Hey, gang, we've got lots of talent. Let's put on our own show"? In the movies all the bright young talents are so ready for stardom that it's only a couple of reels to Broadway, but Penn's first-ever Franklin's Follies was a six-week work of love and funny as singers, dancers, actors, writers, and craftspeople—many of whom had never met before—were melded into The Company and Crew of the Franklin's Follies.

It was a labor of funhours and spare time, rehearsed in pockets and pulled together just the last week. As the pieces began falling in place, the grapevine ran wild. They're not only realising doing it—it's going to be great! And so marvelled the audience from the minute the curtain went up. Seemingly in the University had been hiding dozens of trained bodies and voices that didn't get that way overnight. There were clearly good and neat-pros who could leap and soar and teach others how. But mixed with them also held together by exuberance and hard work were the gypsy amateurs who became troopers for this one show. Choreographer Michael O'Garn, warning that every body out there was going to "dance, dance, dance..." said it all. Built a spirit of a motion that didn't stop with the soaring Straw Hedge ballet in a Physical Plant setting, but went on to the executive suite where Sheldon Hackney's Talents Two-Step Friday night yielded to Tom Elphick's Steelhead Shuffle: the next.

An enthusiastic audience didn't know which to praise higher: the tunes, the rhythm, the dancing and acting that went into the seventeen scores and skits: the hitting lyric parodies and madcap skitpicks that spotted academia's foibles from the workplace's point-of-view or the sheer good nature of so many so willing to point it at themselves or stand there while others did it to them. Visually it was Penn all ages, colors, sizes and shapes hooting and mugging together in hundred of rank—and turning finally into The Company. "I suddenly realised," said a theatergoer afterward, "how beautiful we all are. And that there is really a thing called Penn."

A Tribute to the Players and Planners of Franklin's Follies, produced by the Office of University Affairs.

Photos by David Gulstine. Costumes by David Silvertone and Ann Dunagan.