

Wavy Gravy: Gonzo politics for today

By Joel Brown

"Hey - you've got Gravy in your ear!"

Wavy Gravy, nee Hugh Romney, activist, "creative anarchist", Woodstock emcee, Hog Farm communitarian, was talking to a local radio station from a telephone in the Memorial Union Student Organization office, trying to stir up interest in his Nobody For President campaign.

"Yeah, Gravy. You know, that brown stuff you put on your turkey!"

Wavy Gravy is in his forties now; he has been out on the edge of the popular culture for almost twenty years. But, unlike other 1960s notables, his commitments to his causes and his brand of revolutionary humor have not weakened.

"Nobody For President, man.

Nobody has brought the hostages home, nobody has stopped nuclear power, nobody has put an end to the draft once and for all."

It is easy to think of him as another silly sixties casualty. He changed his name to Wavy Gravy, and now, talking in the MUSO office, he wore a carrot-shaped false nose and a SOLAR POWER hardhat with a solar cell on the front powering a tiny propeller on the top. Laughter follows him like the Secret Service after Ted Kennedy.

But Wavy Gravy is a lot more substantial than one might guess from the helmet, or the red, white and blue jumpsuit with Nobody For President stenciled on the back.

He and Baba Ram Dass, his cohort in the Nobody campaign, are members of the board of

directors of SEVA, a Hindu word meaning service to humanity. This international group under the auspices of the World Health Organization, is devoted to combating blindness, particularly in the Third World, where simple cures for vision problems cannot be afforded by many who need them.

Wavy is currently organizing a classical music program at Lincoln Center to benefit SEVA.

On the propeller-powered side, he has enticed his friends the Grateful Dead to donate concert-proceeds to SEVA.

"Apathy sucks," he read from a Nobody campaign button. Apathetic is the last word one could apply to Wavy Gravy.

"Even MacDonalds says that Nobody does it better. And a lot of people are doing things for

nobody."

Besides the Dead's SEVA Benefit, Wavy also appeared at a recent Oakland Coliseum Benefit for the Cambodian refugees. "Joan Baez got me up there on stage at the end," he says. "I played kazoo with The Grateful Dead, The Starship, and Joan, and Carlos Santana, at the Coliseum, in front of all those people."

"Something like the SEVA campaign can work," Wavy said, serious for a brief moment. "You just need hard work, dedication, and the available technology."

Suddenly the man in the fake nose and propeller helmet was not smiling.

"Something like eighty percent of the people who are blind on the planet don't have to be," he said.

The seriousness doesn't last for long.

"I use humor to make a political point," Gravy said, in reply to a question contrasting his SEVA work to the Nobody For President campaign. "We've handed as many (Nobody For President) bumperstickers to truck drivers as to hippies."

Nobody For President is not Wavy Gravy's first foray into presidential politics. In 1968 he and his friends ran a pig for that office, largely because it was both black and white. In 1972 they ran a rock for president and

roll (hamburger or hotdog) for vice-president.

"Nobody was president before George Washington," Gravy asserts. "Still, we've had a terrible time getting Federal matching funds. And we've had a terrible problem getting Secret Service protection for nobody."

"I have a sneaking suspicion," he added, "that nobody is God."

According to Gravy, nobody is running on the platform of the birthday party, with the support (sometimes) of the Libertarians and the Yippies.

Gravy said, "Nobody's better than the millionaire's club popularity contest. There should be a civil service exam for the presidency, so we can make sure whoever's elected is not part of the shuck and jive we get now."

Gravy replied to a question regarding how widespread the Nobody Campaign is with an anecdote about the demonstrations at the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant in California. Just as Gravy was being hauled off to jail in his clown suit, the Warden recognized him and began shouting Nobody For President slogans. Gravy was soon appointed liaison between demonstrators and law enforcement.

Gravy said, "I think it was Yeats who wrote that 'In dreams begin responsibility'."