

MARCH 21, 1994

ODD COUPLES

## BUY THE LATEST PYNCHON, GET SPIKE JONES FREE



Spike Jones and secret admirer Pynchon.

On April 1, the Catalyst label will release *Spiked!*, a CD reissue of Spike Jones recordings, with liner notes by Thomas Pynchon.

**S**ATIRICAL, SELF-INDULGENT, CHAOTIC, SCHIZOPHRENIC, VISIONARY, JUVENILE, cartoonish, cacophonous, brilliantly crafted, digressively harmonious, discursively enlightened just about encompasses the quixotic literary output of Thomas Pynchon and/or the goofy musical output of Spike Jones, with a string of adjectives leading inexorably to non sequitur—where the hell's the connection, Pynchon and Jones?—which also modifies quite neatly *Spiked!*, this collection of 23 off-the-wall musical constructions by bandleader Lindley Armstrong “Spike” Jones, the “King of Corn,” who, from the early forties through the mid-sixties (he died in 1965), pioneered a zany (in retrospect), Monty Pythonesque musical style featuring deconstructed arrangements of popular songs scored with garish vocal antics and such unlikely “instruments” as pistols, cowbells, saws, auto pumps, fire bells, toy whistles, and assorted sound-effect paraphernalia, music that could be said to echo (or presage) the labyrinthine, sardonic prose of avant-garde novelist Thomas

Pynchon, whose five published works (*V*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Slow Learner*, *Vineland*) do in fact resemble licks along Spike Jones lines when you think about it, as the album's executive producer Tim Page did, recalling that in the introduction to *Slow Learner*, Thomas Pynchon had celebrated the profound impression made upon him as a child by Spike Jones's music, prompting Page to approach Pynchon, through his agent, with an offer to contribute liner notes for *Spiked!*, an offer that the reclusive novelist most surprisingly accepted, producing 3,000-plus words, fully eleven CD-size pages of pungent Pynchonese (unedited) on the subject of Spike Jones, in an ingenious cross-referencing of kindred musical and literary spirits that could next lead to, what?—Joan Didion on Yma Sumac . . . Martin Amis on Cliff Richard . . . Woody Allen on Ukulele Ike . . . Eudora Welty on Frankie Laine . . . Toni Morrison on Eartha Kitt? Hard to say.

BARRY SINGER