

# The gentle bear called JONATHAN

**I**t's an eerie feeling for a journalist to be redundant at a Press conference. But when the man billed as America's greatest stand-up comedian meets the reporters it's really a one-man show. His.

You could reasonably expect that after 29 years in showbusiness Jonathan Winters would know most of the answers. But the questions too?

In Melbourne recently to compere the Miss Sports Girl of Victoria quest final on Channel 9 for a charity, this over-size, superbly witty and often serious man pre-empted for an hour every likely and unlikely question, from the reason for his army beret and swagger-stick to

... and swagger stick to his views on Unidentified Flying Objects, up-staging the Press at their own game.

The core of Winters' humour is perceptiveness and sensitivity, well based on reality, on off-beat incidents. And it comes impromptu, a fact which drives television directors mad.

It was at a Hollywood pool party that he heard that a compere was needed for the beauty quest — sponsored by Channel 9, radio 3AK and the Yooralla Sportsmen's Committee, in aid of handicapped children — and he volunteered his services free.

That gesture was indicative of the not-so-funny side of the gentle, bearlike comedian, the part of him that is chairman of the National Congress of American Indians and that wants to be accepted, too, as a serious actor.

Wearing an Indian bracelet and describing himself as one-sixteenth Indian, Winters talks about his frequent benefit shows held for the American Indian, and how

worth!

Winters' humour aside, if

Winters' time is taken up now with painting pictures, writing a movie and trying to get known as a serious actor.

Picture by Les Gorrie.




Having appeared years ago in "The Loved One," "The Russians Are Coming" and "It's A Mad Mad Mad Mad World," he is no newcomer to the screen. But now Winters wants people to take him more seriously.

"In the US they put us funny-men into little cubicles and say 'Don't try to do anything heavy.' I won't want to do Shakespeare — I couldn't remember all those lines anyway. I don't want to be a Clark Gable or Spencer Tracy. But I know I can act.

"It's a question of people having faith in me.

"Look at Alec Guinness — he was a great comedian but how many people can remember that? He was probably one of the best comedians in England but he chose to be a dramatic actor. He was knighted for that, too." W

— DEIDRE NOLAN



he insists on checking up on the allocation of the profits: "I always go to the colleges and reservations to see exactly where the money is going."

He has nearly finished an autobiography. "The book will be called 'I Couldn't Wait For Success So I Went On Ahead Without It.' I hate to take the negative line but I don't think it's going to sell — it's not jammed with sex. I didn't have six nights on location with Ann-Margret or run around with Rita Hayworth!"

Winters' humour aside, if

**Winters' time is taken up now with painting pictures, writing a movie and trying to get known as a serious actor.**

Picture by Les Gorrie.

the book is half as entertaining as himself (and he says he has written it as he would talk), it's a sure seller. He has not concentrated entirely on his showbusiness career but will go right back to his beginnings in Ohio 52 years ago, and his days in the Marine Corps and at art school before his wife, Eileen, convinced her life-of-the-party husband that he should turn his humour into dollars.

Now he does only two or three television appearances a year. His time is taken up

with painting, writing a movie and trying to establish himself as a serious actor.

He confesses to a strong belief in ESP. Eileen, in Australia with him, said: "He's psychic. He seems to read minds. For example, there's no way you'd tell him a lie — he'd know straight away." It is not surprising

away. It is not surprising then that his paintings are mostly surrealist and fantasy.

Winters says he hopes to have a part in the movie he is writing. Which brings him to the subject you sense weighs on his mind: acting.

Having appeared years ago in "The Loved One," "The Russians Are Coming" and "It's A Mad Mad Mad Mad World," he is no newcomer to the screen. But now Winters wants people to take him more seriously.

"In the US they put us funny-men into little cubicles and say 'Don't try to do anything heavy.' I won't want to do Shakespeare — I couldn't remember all those lines anyway. I don't want to be a Clark Gable or Spencer Tracy. But I know I can act.

"It's a question of people having faith in me.

"Look at Alec Guinness — he was a great comedian but how many people can re-

how many people can remember that? He was probably one of the best comedians in England but he chose to be a dramatic actor. He was knighted for that, too." W

— DEIDRE NOLAN