Jim Bouton follows his dream

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Lily Tomlin and Bette Midler were among the headliners at the Hollywood "Celebration for Human Rights." "You paid $50 to this?" Midler asked.

Midler shines, Pryor fumes at Hollywood rights gala

The concert was announced in a spectacular two-page ad in the Los Angeles Times as "A Celebration for Human Rights"—starring Bette Midler, Richard Pryor and Lily Tomlin (in that order).

Producer Aaron Russo was quoted on the purpose of the event—"to make clear to the eyes and ears of the country that the entertainment industry feels deeply about human rights." A list of notables endorsed the concert and the concept: Woody Allen, Richard Avedon, Candice Bergen, Ray Bradbury, Lauren Bacall, Phyllis Diller, Alice Cooper, George Gobel, Roosevelt Grier, Chevy Chase, Garson Kanin, Eartha Kitt, Kurt Lancaster, Shirley MacLaine, Joel McCrea, Mayor George Moscone (of San Francisco), Paul Newman, Linda Ronstadt, Tommy Smothers and Barbra Streisand, et al.

A crowd that paid between $5 and $50 per ticket filled the Hollywood Bowl to capacity Sunday night (Sept. 18), and the gross (all of it going to the Our Human Rights Foundation) was estimated at $350,000.

As an answer to Anita Bryant & Co., the concert was a big success.

But when people stood during the "Star Spangled Banner," the audience was at first stunned and then angry. Jeers and boos got to Pryor, who shifted from his original focus to an attack on the predominantly white audience for hypocrisy. "where were you all when Watts was being burned down?" he asked. "you were doing what you wanted to do on Hollywood Boulevard and didn't give a damn about it."

Before he was booed off the stage and into his waiting limousine, Pryor got in one more line: "This is an evening about human rights and I'm a human being. And I just wanted to see where you're really at."

Producer Russo followed with an unscheduled personal appearance—to apologize. But it took Bette Midler to pull the divided crowd together.

The energy generated by Midler's extraordinary musical talent, which was enhanced by the harlettes, stopped the exodus. Her spontaneous evaluation of the affair did a lot to defuse the distress. Her "You mean you paid $50 for this?" brought the kind of universal guffaw that was needed. It all ended in a blaze of fireworks, orchestral overtones of "The Star Spangled Banner," and neon salutes to "liberty and justice for all."

Producer Russo apologizes for Pryor's tirade.