

Bergman-Kurosawa forest of pastoral le photo blur by two of Ma's drooling morons—that's the pre-credit sequence.) Corman serves the pastry a la mode: the boys take turns in Ma's bed; homoeruality between them is implied; a girl pick-up is bound, and tortured—her wrists shredded photographically.

Raoul Walsh's poker-faced

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left Pa on the homestead, determined to Be Somebody. Actually, Kate Barker raised her sons into a gang that that stole a million dollars, eluding the FBI for five years. The movie clan,

A vest has no sleeves

Continued from preceding page

an entire day's worth of television, bits from the news, weather, kids' shows, quiz shows, late movies, garbled tapes. It's good because it hits the Firesign ideals of imagination and juxtaposition; the effect is as if we are recklessly switching a channel selector, back and forth from station to station, hour to hour, city to city. It doesn't ramble like a monologue, but shifts and leaps, and at the same time sticks within the disciplinary confines of one subject. Our imagination works best here because we know television—television is something, not "everything."

Some of the same themes keep recurring: Indians, buffalo, a back-to-the-country, down-home kind of easiness. A stand-up sketch called "Thanksgiving—or—Pass the Indian, Please" is a long, absurd story about white men who turn black and Indians who become Chinese. It goes back and forth in bits of shared sentences, quips, and cliches, until Proctor gets the curious end line: "That may seem like an over-simplification, but it's better than killing people, isn't it?"

"When we end the show that way," says Ossman, "we don't know whether the audience is applauding because the show is over, or because it is better than killing people. Really it's both."

And neither. And irrelevant, sometimes. Whatever "it" is.

Ossman on politics: "We try to stay from political material—it's too weird. We don't try to say something about a subject, we do something that's like the subject instead."

Weird or not, there is some political material: a chanting song in imitation of a train about Rockefeller, Nixon and Humphrey, a joke on President Eisenhower's speeches translated into English, pollution, injustices to the Indians. There's a joyful irreverence toward patriotic tradition and a spirit of exuberant freedom. Proctor: "It's revolutionary humor of its time, because it's directly responsible to the people."

Ossman: "We are revolutionary, I guess, but not in the way people might think. Our message is kind of like 'Here Comes the Sun'—things are going to be all right. It's an awareness that things are changing, and

blurred photo-journalism, the fuzzy chromo color renders the sunny, green forests like primitive Technicolor.

Its sense of period less sure than the Sears, Roebuck catalog

faith that tomorrow's going to be okay. The thing about young people today is that they just don't have enough to laugh about."

If politics is where everything comes down, it's where the Firesign Theatre reaches an extreme of ambiguity that is not only meaningless but somewhat annoying. Getting to be in two places at once may be a good creative ideal, but I for one don't happen to think it's possible and/or desirable when those two places are revolutionary and counter-revolutionary, at once involved and standing aside laughing.

"If you can't laugh at it, it's got you under its control!" says Austin. "When you can laugh at something—then you're free." Well, culture does need humor, sometimes only to relax and breathe easier for a moment. But the particular function of humor in a culture that is gasping from burdens of social and moral contradictions is a more complicated question. Humor reflects culture, offers a fresh funny view of things and some sweet moments of escapism. And laughter has its momentary liberating qualities. But I think it's liberating only because it's momentary, re-vitalizing, spontaneous, a truthful, free response. And "revolutionary humor" should seek to be free, free from conventions, old restrictions of medium, selectivity of subject matter, and from its own structure.

The Firesign Theatre asks a good question, and technically asks it well. But when it comes down to Facing their own Answer, they are not always as free as all that. They are an

victims' throats, and exit me swallowing machine gun muzzles and firing. It sends you out seeing 42nd Street's denizens as even more corrupt and mishapen than usual.

experiment into new definitions of form, but in their search for that expansive, ethereal freedom, their humor is so often hung up in a pretentious, irrelevant intellectual network that their purpose—and their freedom—becomes obscure.

"There are no endings," says Ossman. "Everything is a continuation of changes." Maybe. And the Firesign trip is fun. But again like Woodstock, it's only at its best when it's on earth.

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