

Arts & Entertainment

Old movies: don't color their world

There I was on Thanksgiving Day, parked on my sofa watching "Miracle on 34th Street." After piles of turkey and stuffing the slothful feeling was beginning to set in.

Santa Claus had an orange face. Now, it's been years since I believed in the little bugger, but never in my 26 years of existence do I recall Santa's face being orange. His face had a glow,

Dave Meile

his cheeks were rosy, but he was never orange. When Santa (Edmund Gwenn) eventually stood trial, I observed a veritable sea of orange faces. It was ugly.

WTBS, Ted Turner's superstation from Atlanta, and a computer colorization company, Color Technology Inc., are turning old black-and-white films into color films.

It would be different if WTBS and friends wore their greed and callousness on their sleeve; we Americans like a good greedy business. But the colorization folks are so much more imaginative. Jack Petrick, executive vice president and general manager of WTBS, said recently on CNN's Larry King Live:

"Let's allow the people to decide whether they like colorization." This sounds uncharacteristically democratic for a television executive. It is more like Ronald Reagan's glazed-over press-conference look; the answer sounds good but avoids nearly every conceivable issue.

Every colorizing advocate has miraculously left out the details. All are guilty of omitting the fact that colorization is nothing more than a new idea to make money. You and I know this, and WTBS is arrogant enough to think we don't. It was all cut and dried a long time ago. The superstation execs probably had their meeting with corporate sponsors and wrung their hands because only 12 people watched "Allegheny Uprising" last week, and they were all from the Allegheny mountains.

"Something must be done," was the likely reply from an executive in a Brooks Brothers suit. Some technenerd" who's studied colors all his life hits on the idea of colorizing new films, and thus wooing the younger viewers who find black and white films archaic.

Colorizing cretins

If we all believe Petrick, art (argue

about whether film is art on your own time) is now an interactive, communal experience. Go ahead and paint your picture or sculpt or make a film. But now, under the Petrick model, we can change whatever we want.

The man himself, Ted Turner, is not nearly so shifty. His is the attitude of a spoiled 10-year-old millionaire, who after buying the Mona Lisa, cuts out her nose to see if he can get a rise out of people. "Last time I looked they were my films," said Teddy, who now owns many MGM and RKO studio films. This says a lot for art and creativity. There is no art. Art is now a commodity like stocks, cattle or slaves. I own it, and I have no responsibility to anyone else, not even those who create it.

This is arrogant, insensitive and disrespectful, but it is hardly surprising, coming from a man whose idea of making a national TV network more accurate was to buy it; a man who tries to con people into believing that his baseball team, the Atlanta Braves, is "America's Team." You really have to stretch your imagination to believe that Americans would identify so much with such consistent losers.

Appalled actions

It worries no one at WTBS that the film industry is appalled at their actions. Famed director John Huston, after suffering through the first seven minutes of his own film "The Maltese Falcon" likened colorization to a conspiracy. Jimmy Stewart, when remarking on the desecration of the beloved film "It's a Wonderful Life" was straightforward and undeniably logical: "The color doesn't have a place in the story. The colorization advocates have failed to justify the possible colorization of films in which the use of black and white, shadows, etc., is an integral part. Nor do they seem disturbed that when one scene dissolves into another, the color temporarily vanishes. Apparently their wondrous technology has not found a cure for that.

Ugly precedents

Surely there are problems more important than the colorizing of old black-and-white films — apartheid, the arms race, the homeless. But on a personal level there are some big implications and some ugly precedents being set here. Call me paranoid if you like. Tell me I'm overreacting. My

latest nightmare has me perched in front of my Zenith at age 75 when the announcer blares: "Tonight, for the first time in 30 years, the original black-and-white version of 'Citizen Kane,' 'Dracula,' 'Psycho,' etc." You fill in the blank. Yup, there's more important issues in the world. Just don't be misled by lies and deception. Colorization is simply another instance of smugster rich boys in suits clawing for more at the expense of the intentions, hopes and creativity of artists and viewers alike. The only thing new and improved will be Ted Turner's mansion.

It is technology from hell. Lord knows what swill will be colorized and hyped in the name of hipness and coolness. What the Turner gang fails to realize is that they are toying with people's feelings of sentimentality, imagination and reverence.

Let them monkey with our feelings, because I believe their efforts will quietly shrivel and die. Nonetheless, their greed will not, and it makes me mad as hell. Though this diatribe is in black and white, my face, unlike the computerized orange face of "Miracle on 34th Street," is purple with anger.

State of the Arts

At Westbrook:

There will be two nights — not just one — of chamber music performed by UNL students in Westbrook Recital Hall this week.

Because of the number of students who will participate in the recital and the large number of works to be performed, recitals will be held in Westbrook at 8 p.m. on Thursday and Friday.

Both recitals will be open to the public without charge.

On KRNU:

KRNU-FM, UNL's public radio station, will carry the Texaco-Metropolitan Opera broadcast of Bellini's "I Puritani" on Saturday.

Live coverage will begin at 1 p.m. on KRNU-FM, 90.3 on the FM dial.

The performance will feature Joan Sutherland in the role of Elvira, with Black Rockwell as Arturo, Sherrill Milnes as Riccardo and Samuel Ramey as Giorgio.

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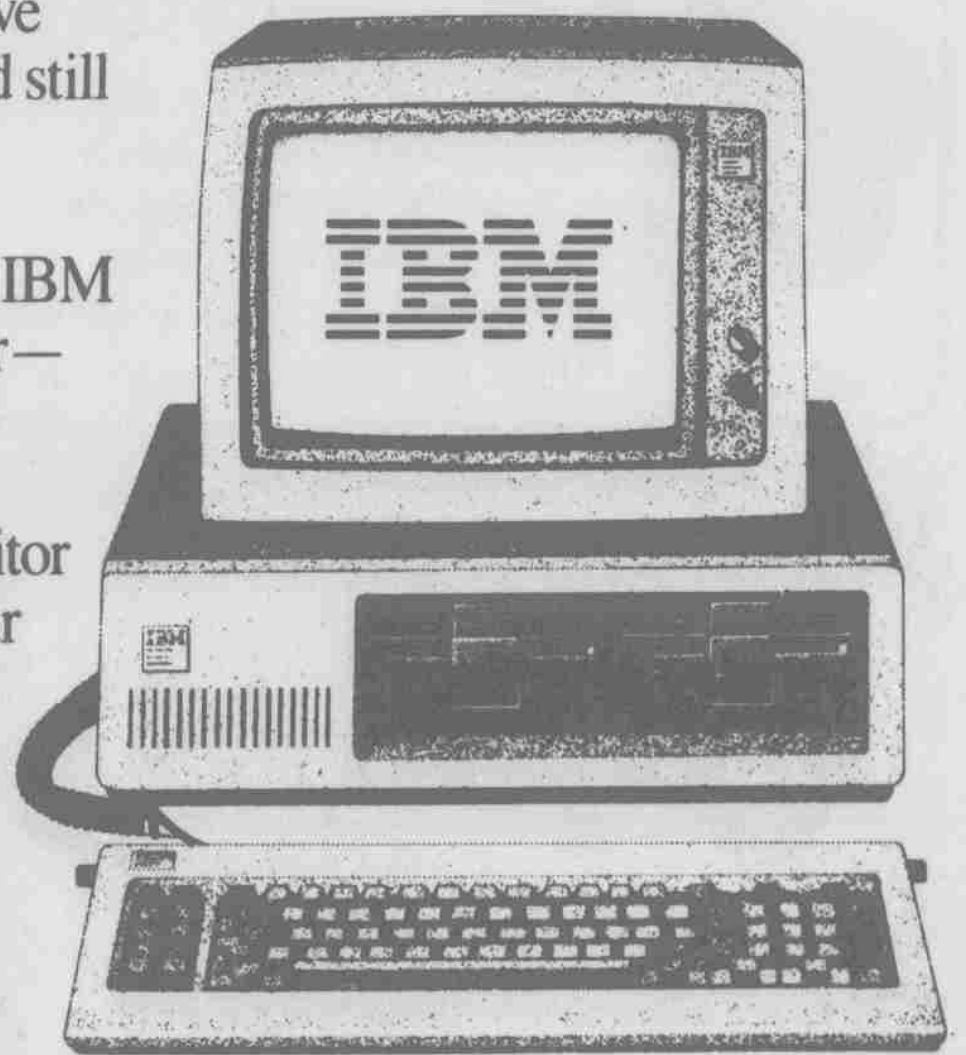
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