

Arts & Entertainment

'Amerika' descends into predictability

By Charles Lieurance
Senior Reporter

The news on the street is that conservatives and liberals alike are staying away from the ABC miniseries "Amerika." Liberals are boycotting the show because of the red paranoia it represents. Conservatives are of two minds. First, even the thought of a Soviet occupation of this fair land is enough to ruin any conservative's evening. Second, conservatives don't go for this sci-fi stuff. Give a conservative a good episode of "MacGyver" any day of the week.

There ain't many Republicans at a Trekkie convention.

And, of course, in many ways "Amerika" is science fiction of the cultural variety. It takes place 10 years from now and plays off all kinds of science-fiction paradigms. Number one is that the world of "Amerika" is a familiar one littered with homespun American iconography — wheat fields blowing, small town parades, Sunday family dinners, Sunday family arguments. This

makes those moments in "Amerika" that contradict the iconography all the more startling. It's an oft-used device in numerous science-fiction novels and stories. The audience is at home but home's not what it used to be.

The paradigm that kicked in during Monday night's episode is the most disturbing and the one that will most likely be the undoing of "Amerika." This is the Nazi paradigm. The questions surrounding Nazism and Adolph Hitler's rise to power are an obsession of the 20th century, a constantly implemented metaphor for the rise of dubious charismatic leaders, for tyrannies large and petty, for the denial of human rights, for that place where we might be headed somewhere between "Mein Kampf" and the book of Revelation. Nazism has been the subject of "Star Trek" episodes, TV miniseries, movies of the week, all-star motion pictures and endless novels about the triumph of the indomitable human spirit, or the destruction of the will, and has been hidden sometimes neatly and sometimes not so neatly in the subtexts of a

million more novels, plays, films, cartoons, etc.

What made the first night of "Amerika" seem unique in the history of TV plot writing was its avoidance of the Nazi paradigm. The black-leather villain in jackboots was nowhere to be seen. There was no talk of genocide. No vaguely swastika-like symbols floating around everywhere.

'Amerika' update

That all started to change Monday night. The audience was introduced to an Aryan sadist in leather with a taste for American women. There was even talk of a "final solution to the American question." Hmm, where have we heard that phrase before?

I suppose it was too much to hope that "Amerika" would stay as three-dimensional and as well-written as its first night, but I still hoped they wouldn't start slipping into a world of easy villains and easy heroes.

Now there are no more gray areas. Kris Kristofferson and his family of landowners with ideas about the distribution of land, money and food that would make a Marxist spontaneously combust, are the good guys. The Russians as now represented on the Milford, Neb., level by the leather storm trooper are the evil Huns bent on destroying everything the American people hold near and dear.

The script writing has already fallen to a pretty hideous level. One of the first lines spoken Monday night was, "You don't really know how to love a man," said with an accent somewhere between Ricardo Montalban and Marcello Mastroianni. And the episode ended with a hyper-cathartic scene in which a bedraggled troupe of VFW curmudgeons bring up the rear of a Milford parade. A crowd gathers, recalling the good old days when nobody had to answer to no stinking Russkies. Kristofferson, as the famous Devin Milford fresh out of a gulag in Texas, gives the crowd the cue to start singing "The Star Spangled Banner." It starts slow,

but eventually the whole town is singing. The sadistic Russian officer starts to give the signal to stop this nonsense and is stopped by American figurehead Peter Bradford (Robert Urich), who tells him: "I think you'll find it's best to let this go." By then, of course, the sounds of "The Star Spangled Banner," only half-remembered by some, are wafting out across the fields of waving wheat.

There's an all too similar scene in the movie "Casablanca," in which a bedraggled bunch of Frenchmen strike up "La Marseilles" in front of a bunch of leather-clad SS officers. That scene had cinematic good taste. The scene in "Amerika" was tremendously infantile, a display of cinematic bravado best left to those who make those wonderful montages that appear on your TV screen just before the network signs off to the accompaniment of the national anthem.

Still, there's enough going on in "Amerika" to keep a viewer hooked. It's just that what was actually meaningful film fare for the small screen is now mostly cheap thrills.

Edmunds remakes rock history

By Stew Magnuson
Senior Reporter

The Dave Edmunds Band Live, "I Hear You Rockin'" (Columbia Records)

Whenever a producer for a rockabilly or rock 'n' roll band is needed in England, they say, "Get Dave Edmunds." Lately Edmunds has been getting more attention behind

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the board for such bands as the Stray Cats and Pole Cats and such obscure, but excellent groups as King Kurt than he has for his own music.

Edmunds is a rock 'n' roller. Always has been. Years before the new American roots movement came along, he was recording new, lively rock 'n' roll. "I Hear You Rockin'" is a live collection of classic new and old rock. Yes, rock 'n' roll is still alive and all the classics weren't recorded 30 years ago. Some classics are even in my memory.

Mixed in with Dion's "The Wanderer," "I Hear You Knocking" and Elvis Presley's "Paralyzed" is Elvis Costello's "Girls Talk" and Nick Lowe's "I Knew the Bride When She Used to Rock 'n' Roll."

This is a great party album, full of fun, bouncy rock numbers and a beautiful homage to straight-ahead, unadulterated rock music. No synthesizers or fancy tricks. A little boogie-woogie piano, some saxophones and a good time. Even Edmunds' boring MTV hit "Slipping Away," written by ELO's Jeff Lynn, takes on new life played live.

In 1970, Edmunds hit "I Hear You Knockin'" is still a great sing-along tune, and his cover of Juice Newton's "Queen of Hearts" is a pleasant surprise.

The only song that doesn't cut it is "The Wanderer." Even Edmunds playing live can't match the energy of Dion's original in the studio.

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