

"Taste"

Mysteries of The Screaming Yellow Zonkers

By Geoff McMurtry
Diversions

Screaming Yellow Zonkers. Sounds like a low-budget Japanese horror film. Maybe it is. Better yet, though, Screaming Yellow Zonkers are something to eat at the drive-in while watching low-budget Japanese horror films. Or in front of the TV watching Bugs Bunny. Screaming Yellow Zonkers are the kind of



Andrea Hoy/Diversions

Zonk and Frank Hudecek, his boss

snack Mom would discourage, so you know they taste pretty good.

When popping a Zonker into your mouth, the first thing you notice is the sweet, glazed, crunch outside. Then you notice the sweet, delicious, yummy inside. Finally, you get to the crunchy popcorn center. A Zonker is very much like Karmelkorn that made it to the major leagues.

If you already know what Zonkers are, this part is redundant, but if you're one of the many wondering what in the world is a Screaming Yellow Zonker and why would anyone eat one, this could be educational. Screaming Yellow Zonkers are a "sweet, glazed, crispy-light popcorn snack," according to the box. Basically, that means take a hugh bunch of popcorn, pour honey and syrup and other really good stuff on it, glaze the outside so it's not all gooey, and put it in a really cool box. And there you have it. Simplicity itself, really, and the best you can do for a snack without involving chocolate. And, of course, no caffeine. Never had it, never will.

Now let's go back to the box for a moment, shall we? As tasty, delicious and just real darn yummy as Screaming Yellow Zonkers are, the best thing about them is the packaging. Yes, the packaging. I guess I always was a sucker for good liner notes, but these come close to being on the same level as XTC.

The box is covered with a big picture of a big pile of Zonkers, and on one side a pair of

legs appears to be sticking out. On the opposite side protrudes a face bearing the expression of fear and terror often associated with victims of a popcorn avalanche.

But the real reward for perusing a box of Zonkers comes when you get to the back. It's a cartoon about Screaming Yellow Zonkers. "Before there was Screaming Yellow Zonkers the world was dull and boring," it starts out, "In fact, the birds actually hated their own singing. Even local town monsters lost all interest in eating people." Of course, the story has a happy, tasty ending.

Instead of cartoons, some boxes have contests where you can win cash and valuable prizes, like a trip to Europe or somewhere really neat and cultured like that, or, if you're a BIG winner, a cuddly stuffed Zonk of your very own. I'd recommend getting the stuffed Zonk and going back to buying the cartoon boxes after that.

A few fun facts about Zonkers:

- Every last Screaming Yellow Zonker ever eaten got its start in Lincoln.
- Screaming Yellow Zonkers are distributed from Lincoln to all 50 states.
- Screaming Yellow Zonkers are made by the Lincoln Snack Company, which started doing so in 1969.
- The Lincoln Snack Company also makes Fiddle-Faddle, another candy glazed-popcorn

snack in peanut, peanut brittle and almond flavors, and Poppycock, a gourmet popcorn snack. Ask your butler about it.

● The Lincoln Snack Company has about 100 employees to make their snacks.

● Screaming Yellow Zonkers come in two flavors — Screaming Yellow Zonkers and Screaming Nutty Zonkers, which have peanuts on them.

● One disappointing fact — the great cartoons on the back are not the work of some silly, demented, visionary genius who lives in a basement under the factory. I had thought they might be. They are instead the work of highly proficient advertising copywriters. Bummer.

Screaming Yellow Zonkers are undoubtedly unpopular in households containing a dentist, but they are one of those good old-fashioned American snacks. The kind that's all sweet and bad for your teeth and fattening, with no fiber or protein to get in the way. You don't eat candy for supper, and you don't munch on steak and potatoes or green beans between meals, because that would spoil your supper. Nope, you won't find any wimpy fruit juice or Nutrasweet in Screaming Yellow Zonkers, just good old-fashioned sugar and preservatives. And that's what makes this country what it is.

"Sound"

SOUND AND FURY

By Charles Lieurance

I wonder if there would be such a controversy around the Grammy award winning "Graceland" LP if it had been recorded by someone other than whitebread-Manhattan sophisticate Paul Simon. A year ago if you would have told people Paul Simon was going to record an album of Zulu music you couldn't buy enough brillo to wipe the smirks off their faces.

Photos of Paul Simon in Harare with Joseph Shabalala of Ladysmith Black Mambazo and singer Miriam Makeba with his arms raised in triumph, looking like an accountant who thinks he's Tarzan, are a little disconcerting for anyone who has been following Simon's career since his break-up with Art Garfunkel. Through the years Simon has come uncomfortably close to James Taylor territory, where VH-1 lubricates the senses of the pasta and zinfandel set.

But though the image is cognitively dissonant, the album makes perfect sense. Simon's voice may be the weakest part of the mix, but his songwriting has never been stronger.

What we have here is not merely a sterile, westernized setting to popularize the music of South Africa, but a grouping of styles in songs that would pack a wallop in most any context. "Boy in a Bubble" for instance immediately refutes claims that "Graceland" isn't political enough. But because the song has intelligent, subtle lyrics instead of the bash-the-issues-over-the-head-and-run-for-your-life stridency of, say, Billy Bragg, "Graceland" critics have chosen to ignore its message entirely.

What most of those who have criticized "Graceland" fail to see is that there is politics in music itself, not just in lyric content, that the purest folk music is political just because of its spare sense of place, because the feel of the music assumes things about a country that it represents, forces the listener to see a place in its ideal state. Just as the music of the Carter Family or Pete Seeger, independent of lyrics, brings to mind the essence of blue-collar life or the simplicity of a rural existence, the music of "Graceland" paints a picture of a culturally free Africa, exotic to our ears and free from western notions of politics. Even an absence of politics can be political.

The music does not put the struggle of South Africa into western political terms because the music is not in western terms. Polyrythms, anarchically jubilant guitar playing and lush harmonies like these can only give to us a sense of wonderment. We, the west, are tourists here. The music represents an ideal Africa uncluttered by the baroque, restrained tones of the white government.

It is irrelevant that we receive this invitation into a South Africa that is not in songless despair through the unlikely channel of Paul Simon. The album works even if the channel is a little lackluster.

And to enrich the affair Simon makes beautiful musical connections between Africa and America. Are there connections with more political implications than that?



To the leftwing press, who are at times more hellbent for diatribe than the right, Simon's album is un stomachable.

"With the 'Graceland' project Simon seems to have cleared each step along the way and there is no rumor of disgruntled or ripped-off musicians. However the larger question of principle remains." (The Guardian, March 4, 1987)

This, of course, is the most condescending, patronizing piece of half-witted bile to grace the pages of The Guardian in many a moon. Sounds as if Simon has spent a lot of time wiping his fingerprints off a murder weapon. It's as if these poor ignorant South African musicians just can't deal with the intricacies of recording finance. It's nice that the left can take time to look out for South African artists who may have been taken for a ride by the monster troll Paul Simon. What could be more inherently racist than assuming these popular South African musicians didn't know what they were doing?

And when they can't find foul play, they go for principle, which they consider a "larger question." A larger question than what, we're tempted to ask. These South African musicians don't know their own principles either?

In my book, when it comes to making a lush, exotic revelatory piece of music that embraces hope and music's power to place that hope in others instead of the despair of political sloganeering, principle is not the larger question, but the insignificant one.