

# GRAFFITI

By RICHARD SMITH  
Staff Writer

A man once wrote to The Times of London with the following: "Dear Sir: In my day . . ." and signed off. I know exactly what he meant.

Now the reason I bring this up is because I want to talk about children's television. Let's face it, it's not the same as it was in our day; not in this country (see last week's Omnibus) and certainly not in my own (which is England — don't you just dig my accent?). But just in case you think I'm headed off on some tedious nostalgia trip, think again, and don't be so presumptuous next time. What I have to say may convince you that it's jolly good that things have changed.

In my day puppets had

strings, dogs were spotty and teatime was at 20 to six, just before bedtime. And it all reeked of establishment, of official BBC-dom. The children's program we all loved the most had the umbrella title of "Watch With Mother." It was on during midweek lunchtimes with a different story each day. Little did we know that the programs we were so innocently watching were chockablockful of sexual innuendo and perversion.

Yes, it's true! The same people who bring you Masterpiece Theatre were corrupting the minds of millions of little children. Read on and see if you don't come to the conclusion that there are some pretty sick people at the BBC.

Forgive me if I start with the worst. "Captain Pugwash" was a five-minute weekly cartoon that we all knew and loved. Except that, eventually, it was banned. Captain Pugwash's crew sailed on a ship called "The Jolly Roger," ("roger" being slang for . . . well, you work it

out), the first officer was called Master Bates, the second was called Seaman Stains and the last was known as Dick the Cabin Boy.

Some grown-up must have watched it one day and told someone important (like the national press) what exactly was going on. It took them long enough: the show was on for a number of years. Now it's shown after midnight on one of the minority channels, with half of the British population seriously wondering how they just hadn't noticed. And if you don't think that's enough, I have others.

"Bill and Ben, the Flowerpot Men" was started in the '50s, and was eventually banned in the '70s. The official reason was that the BBC was afraid it was encouraging disabilities in the speech of children. Bill and Ben, I should explain, spoke by making noises like "Flobalobb. Lobbafobby-lob-lob." Stuff like that.

But we all know the rumour that went around; the real reason the show was struck from our screens. Bill and Ben got in the same flowerpot and made funny noises once too often, didn't they? And Little

Weed, the plant whose vocabulary consisted of a high-pitched "Weeeeeeeeeeeeee," squealed a little too excitedly, didn't she? Horrible images come to mind: dirty old BBC men laughing maniacally as Bill climbs in with Ben and . . . well, it doesn't bear thinking about, really.

And finally, for your delight and delectation, there's "The Magic Roundabout," another puppet show with a penchant for the perverse. Characters included: Ermintrude, the cow who ate flowers all day; Brian, the incredibly stupid snail; Florence, the dozy female with the dodgy hand signals; Zebedee, the coiled spring with a moustache who would bounce around at the end of the show and say, "Time for bed"; and Dylan, (the hare with not just a passing resemblance to a certain rock legend) who would sit around all day eating carrots looking totally stoned.

No wonder it never made any sense to us; all the characters were high. It was nothing but a sharp parody of the '60s. It's so obvious now. All those psychedelic flowers. The Roundabout itself, where things would suddenly come to light.

"Have another weed, Florence."

"Don't mind if I do, Brian."

Booing!

"Time for bed."

Makes you wonder. Of course, "Watch With Mother" is long since defunct. Lobbyists successfully petitioned that most children did not watch with their mothers (who were earning themselves a living thank you very much), if the children had mothers in the first place. It's called "Seesaw" now. Very bland, very safe. No innuendo there. And almost unwatchable to boot.

You see, I'm in a real dilemma here. Part of me thinks it's totally brilliant that the entire British public was fooled for so long, part of me thinks that the BBC is a sick place after all, and part of me remembers these programs with misty-eyed nostalgia. Can I do all three? A lot of people still love the shows. "Watch With Mother: The Video" is the bestselling video of 1988 so far in Blighty.

So, I don't know, the next time you scoff at what the youngsters have today, maybe you'd like to think back at what you really had before you launch into your tirade, "Of course, in my day . . ."

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## Let's Active

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and bassist John Heames.

A marked departure from the pop stylings predominant on the record, "Orpheus In Hades Lounge" sounds like a cross between Question Mark and the Mysterians and the Lounge Lizards — bizarre and quite enjoyable.

"Mr. Fool" again speaks of being content with past accomplishments. This time the message is directed at a boastful fool who keeps "talking up awards from those days spent hanging out" and

who uses his arrogance to hide his fear of future failure.

Side one ends with Mitch and the gang taking us on a loud fast trip "Ten Layers Down." Not sure what this one's all about, but who cares — it rocks!

Side two, while not quite as strong overall as the first, has its fair share of fine playing and intelligent lyrics. In "Too Bad" Easter presents a comical, fatalistic view of life: "When the bad luck streak was etched in stone/It

landed from the mountain down the street to my home."

"Bad Machinery" comes off as a bitter indictment against Reagan-era government, but you have to listen hard to pick up some of the best lines, e.g., "Seen through camouflage-colored glass we all suspect." Easter wishes a not-so-fond farewell to those who've been turning the key of the bad machinery, ending the chorus with the stinging: "Take care, please forget to write."

Last, and in this case, perhaps least is the appropriately titled "Terminate." The pseudo-jazz arrangement is a welcome enough change, but the song never quite goes anywhere. To be fair, this track might sound better were the rest of the album not so consistent.

John Leckie, best known for his excellent work with the Dukes of Stratosphere, shares production credit with Easter, and his influence can be heard here in the brilliant guitar tones and the clarity of the drums. The fact that the same four people played on every cut (unlike the "Mitch and Friends" set-up on the last album) gives the record a cohesiveness and strength that has always been somewhat lacking in past efforts.

It is clear that Easter and his new cohorts are breaking away from the more crowded, busy musical arrangements that characterized his earlier work in Let's Active and with pop stalwarts Chris Stamey and Peter Holsapple. Here's hoping this current lineup stays together for a few years and continues making records as good as this fine dog

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