

MOVIE REVIEWS

The Strange World of Stanley Kubrick

by Merritt Moseley

Stanley Kubrick has never been a director to play safe. He chooses ambitious projects, projects which resist easy or automatic translation to film and which produce challenging movies--but movies which disturb, sometimes without really succeeding at their aims. From *Dr. Strangelove* to *2001: A Space Odyssey* to *A Clockwork Orange* to *Barry Lyndon*, his films have been notable, if not for perfection, at least for something which provokes intelligent response and usually admiration and for stylish use of film technique.

A Clockwork Orange presents a good deal of challenge to the filmmaker. The novel on which it is based, written by Anthony Burgess, is set in the Great Britain of the future; it concerns the doings of a gang of violent youths and particularly a certain Alex, their leader; it conveys a depressing picture of what Burgess imagines the future will bring, a dreary and brutal life; and it deals powerfully with questions of freedom and dignity in confrontation with psychological conditioning. The book is written in a special language, invented by Burgess, which combines English syntax with a lot of Russian vocabulary.

Although it retains much of Burgess's narration, and the Nadsat dialect of the hoodlums is retained, Kubrick's film makes much more visual the ideas of the future Burgess imagines. Alex's gang, the Milk Bar where they hang out, the jazzy, funky way Kubrick has filmed their assaults and rapes, are visually very effective. Malcolm McDowell, as Alex, gives a strong performance, aided by the fact that no one else stands out as much. The scenes which detail Alex's "conversion"--by means of aversion therapy which conditions him to find violence disagreeable--to normal, nonaggressive life are fine.

What troubles some people is the movie's moral stance. Its technical choices seem to cultivate an admiration for Alex which is aided by his personal charm and McDowell's attractiveness and which may accord somewhat queasily with his cheerful murderousness. Pauline Kael's review of the movie charges: "Literal-minded in its sex, and brutality, Teutonic in its humor, Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* might be the work of a strict and exacting German professor who set out to make a porno-violent sci-fi comedy." Her reaction was unusually strong, however, and it is also arguable that Kubrick displays, without endorsing, behavior about which we are free to form our own opinions. If the violence attracts us, it is society's conditioning. And whatever our judge-

ment on Kubrick's ethical attitudes, the viewer of *A Clockwork Orange* is in for a major visual, auditory, and emotional experience.



Although Americans had given a great deal of thought to the possibility of nuclear war before 1964, it was not primarily to the comic side of the hydrogen bomb. But in *Dr. Strangelove, Or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, Stanley Kubrick makes a hilarious comedy about the nuclear holocaust. From its opening tableau--a B-52 bomber refueling in flight, an erotic coupling set to the tune of "Try a Little Tenderness"--to the ending in which we not only face the unthinkable but, as the title says, love it, the whole issue of the Bomb is converted from somber potential to black comedy.

If black comedy is the result of exploiting the comic, rather than tragic, possibilities of disease, death, mutilation, and so on, then a comedy about nuclear destruction obviously belongs in that category. And as such, Kubrick's film is the parent of such movies as *Catch-22*, *Little Big Man*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and *M.A.S.H.*

There's a message to it, naturally: a message about the insanity of our nuclear policy, the blindness of the course the nation was pursuing and the people in charge of that course. But the message was never obtrusive; and now, when it's difficult to think our way back to the days of backyard bomb shelters and the notion of massive retaliation, when billions of crackers quietly molder in the neglected Civil Defense shelters everywhere, we still enjoy *Dr. Strangelove*, because its comedy is divorced from local satiric effects; it ridicules everything.

The war starts accidentally, of course; an error is made somewhere, and Strategic Air Command bombers are sent toward the Soviet Union, armed with nuclear payloads. From that starting point, the story proceeds by means of accident and human irrationality. Preposterous incidents, many of them premised on the derangement of the military, abound: at one point the man who, alone in the U.S., can call back the bombers refuses; acting on his pet theory that the Communists aim to destroy the nation by somehow getting at the "vital fluids" of American manhood, he refuses orders and is only subdued after a violent and bloody siege by other units of the armed forces.

There are a number of sparkling performances: Sterling Hayden and George C. Scott are good as crazy generals; Peter Sellers plays three roles--the President, a British liaison officer, and *Dr. Strangelove* himself (by some

accounts, an early burlesque of Dr. Henry Kissinger, then a Harvard professor); and Slim Pickens is memorable in a minor role.

Despite the attractive target which the military mind and war itself offer for the black humorist and the satiric filmmaker, *Dr. Strangelove* remains so far unsurpassed, and maybe unsurpassable, in its type.

"Allegro Mon Troppo"

AN ITALIAN "FANTASIA"

On Sunday, October 21st, the University Committee for Cultural and Special Events will present the second film in the Sunday Night Movie Series, "Allegro Mon Troppo," directed by Bruno Bozzetto. According to Time Magazine, Bozzetto "outdoes Disney." Showings will be in Lipinsky Auditorium at 6:30PM and at 9:00PM.



DR. STRANGELOVE:

OR HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB.

"... outrageous, daring, inventive, devilish, macabre and scintillating comedy."

—SATURDAY REVIEW



Peter Sellers, George C. Scott
Columbia; Directed by Stanley Kubrick



Some sixty international awards honor Stanley Kubrick's oddly titled DR. STRANGELOVE: OR HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB. A wildly comic nightmare that sees the President of the United States and the Premier of the U.S.S.R. cooperate in a bizarre effort to save the world from total disaster. Screen satire at its finest and funniest, DR. STRANGELOVE is "Outrageous, daring, inventive, devilish, macabre, and scintillating comedy," SATURDAY REVIEW.



Sunday • Oct. 7 • 7 & 9 pm. • Lipinsky Aud.