

APOCALYPSE: Artists AND Presidents

by William Baskin

Artists and Presidents might, on first glance, appear to be incompatible indeed. On closer examination, perhaps they are not. At least this is the opinion of one critic who recently reviewed the off-Broadway production by the Theatre Company of Boston by James Leo Herlihy's Stop, You're Killing Me (NEWSWEEK, 31 March 1969, p. 105). Among other comments were these:

"The sense of apocalypse hangs heavily in the air, and plays such as Jules Feiffer's Little Murders, Ronald Tavel's Boy on the Straight-Back Chair... (and) the three short plays that constitute James Leo Herlihy's Stop, You're Killing Me are all about the drifting malaise of our time, the insidious genocide that is infiltrating the flesh and soul of the body politic... Rochelle Oliver as the girl in the motel makes silence frighteningly eloquent. And as Terrible Jim, Larry Bryggman gives a marvelous performance, combining relentless intensity, absolute emotional accuracy and perfect technical control to create a memorable character---the strong young American boy with no bearings, a malformed soul in a malformed culture whose urge to destroy is the central problem that artists and Presidents will have to solve if apocalypse is to be avoided."

In the not-too-distant past there was much said and written about the compulsion to confess and the syndrome then was to bare the soul and to unburden the "guilt." In more recent days, the compulsion to violence and destruction---both

Physical and spiritual---seems to have replaced the "old" compulsions. The Presidents (both of our country and of the greater universities of our land) are beginning to take more courageous and positive, constructive stands in regard to the manifestations of violence and destruction which fall within their provinces. The exchange of letters recently between President Hesburgh of the University Notre Dame and President Nixon are an example of this new trend. Closer to home, at Chapel Hill similar positions are being, solidified. The threats to the free atmosphere of the university community are being met more openly and are being solved more quickly and, hopefully, with less lasting damage to, and destruction of, excellence in the instructional-learning programs.

And now, so it seems to me, the creative-performing artists must come into the picture. In spite of the very negative review that appeared in these pages of the address by Mr. William Glenesk, pastor of the Spencer Memorial Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn Heights, New York (N.C.ESSAY, 3 March 1969, Vol. 3, N. 23, p.1), many of Mr. Glenesk's remarks touched on the role of the artist in contemporary society and on the extraordinary potentialities for the artist to contribute meaningfully and excitingly to the building of the physical and spiritual worlds of each of us and of all of us. If Society can be educated to these potentialities and make their realization possible, the future of the ar-

tist is secured and will be rewarding. This places upon the artists (as it has upon the Presidents) a responsibility and a challenge. It now appears that the Presidents are beginning to assume their responsibilities for leadership by recognizing the need to build rather than to destroy and to assure us that the apocalypse does not come in our time. Can and will the artists do the same?

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Dear friends - wonderful people -
How can I say what you have meant to me? You've given me happiness, tears, and meaning while I was here. I'm leaving now and although, I'll be very happy, a part of me is left behind. I love you all.
I pray that we will meet again someday - tomorrow.
Thank you.

Amy Wood

