Dragon’s Breath in Maiden’s Hair Concert

Rod Drake*

*Iowa State University

Copyright ©1974 by the authors. Sketch is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch
COLONEL Travis pointed out the way to the mortuary. I thanked him and told him I’d enjoyed him in “The Alamo.” He didn’t look anything like Richard Widmark.

The mortuary was the site of the concert. It seemed fitting. Inside the old mansion were thousands of eager piranhas, flopping about, searching for a lake or river. They all had tickets between their capped teeth. Five dollar ones, too.

At the back of the mortuary was the circus arena. The gravedigger, a twisted piece of licorice, was busily standing up caskets made of re-cycled Jews.

Some of the coffins were composed entirely of hands. Hundreds of them sewn together into a box-shape. Others, of feet. One was made just of knee-caps.

My favorite was the one created of noses. Broad noses, thin noses, broken noses, scarred noses, big noses, tiny noses, hooked noses, nosey noses. A nose for all seasons.

One coffin intrigued me; it was entirely formed of eyes. Most of the eyes were as sweet as Mexican rifles, but a few were hard and staring. They followed me as I looked the caskets over.

One particular pair was as bitter as a warless general. They seemed to hate me. I didn’t know why. Maybe it was because I’m a Gemini. Or because I like those vintage Bugs Bunny cartoons.

The licorice stick told me I was early. The band was just tuning their equipment for the show. I asked him why he was standing all the coffins up. He smiled like a lynched frog and said it was because the German strippers dug it.
So I drifted out to the mid-way, back where the crematoriums were kept. There were a lot of people milling around. Some were killing priests with newspapers to win kewpie dolls. Others were cheering them on. A few were waiting for the bus tour of Atlantis. At least, I think they were. They had raincoats and rubbers on.

I saw Kendrix there. She was one of the rides this time. And very nice for a change. She even gave me a free ride.

I asked her if she was going to the concert. She said indirectly, since she was going to be one of the amplifiers.

I had to leave then. The show was beginning.

Inside the arena, I was surrounded by thousands of spectral rainstorms that clapped in cavalry unison. Luckily, I had my Book of Revelations umbrella with me.

The group was called Dragon’s Breath in Maiden’s Hair. Featuring Captain Ripper. He’s a cross between Captain Ahab and Popeye. And an old friend of mine, back from the days when he wanted to be an insignificant surgeon. It’s a lot tougher being an outlaw saint.

Ask Mick. Or Alice. Or Billy the Kid.

He was on stage now. His sunglasses were tiny twin movie screens across which King Kong batted airplanes from the top of the Empire State Building. His motorcycle jacket was made of slashed wrists. Its chain braid was once-used razor blades strung together like the Chicago Seven. His pants were autographed slabs of cement from a Chinese theater and his boots were forgotten alleys in Chicago.

The crowd around me was different now. The rainstorms were gone. In their place were patent leather vultures, as desperate as “I Like Ike” buttons.

The band was pounding out one of their boa constrictor blockbusters, “Haight Maelstrom.” Captain Ripper leapt about the Dunkirk stage shouting out lyrics like Persian arrows at Thermopylae:

“Haight Maelstrom, cloud my sight,
My blood's turning black and boiling low,
Let me maim and kill everything,
EVERYTHING Tonight,
'Cause I want rivers, rivers of blood to flow!"

The band fired tranquilizer rifles loaded with tie-dyed heroin into the audience. A needle hit me. When I pulled it out, a flood of miniature Civil War tombstones poured out of my arm. I wondered how they'd gotten in there. And I worried how I could stop the tide.

A sad, tired old Nazi wrapped up my arm with a Portuguese man-of-war who was imitating a bandage. The Nazi smiled briefly at me. Deep within the chasm wrinkles of his face I saw whole cities aflame, screaming a death chant in perfect 4/4 time.

On stage, Ripper was slashing his Biblical spurs into the clutching talons of the Coliseum audience. And he continued singing like a nuclear hurricane. A real pro.

The vultures were gone. Lizards in pin-striped suits gleamed slit eyes at the rock holocaust. Cadaver green tails swished like bullwhips, flinging surplus bayonets all around the O.K. Corral area.

The group tore into their masterpiece, an opera tribute to World War II. The band vanished and the stage was transformed like a bourbon thunderstorm into a smoldering Pearl Harbor.

Ripper and the band returned in Quaker clothes. They played as the epileptic stage changed to Omaha Beach complete with insurance salesmen and an American tour group.

Then they were at Iwo Jima. Newsmen landed on the beach and painted Apaches cut them down. Ripper, in a priest's robe, stood on the pile of bodies and ground his Frankenstein boot heels into them.

The lizards went berserk. The whole arena pulsated with candy hate. Phantoms in suits of armor from the SLA passed out leaflets that oozed blood when read out loud. As ingenious as waterproof firecrackers.
The show had driven them into a Linda Lovelace frenzy. And I could understand why.

Captain Ripper was introducing the band. Loblo on lead electric machine gun; T. A. Nails on bass bazooka; Brad Knuckles on rhythm electric M16; and Moe Lester on cymbals and depth charges. A crew of ice cream professionals, to be sure.

Ripper was haloed fly-paper now, launching into his theme song, "Bloodlust." The band ricocheted along, hanging on like teen-aged cobras. Ripper screamed the lyrics like a Tyrannosaurus in heat:

"Bloodlust, bloodlust,
Gonna rip ya up, gonna tear ya apart,
Bloodlust, bloodlust,
Got so much desire, don't know where to start."

The group’s finale varied this time. Loblo and Knuckles fired their instruments off-stage, turning roadies and groupies into shredded wheat.

The audience slapped fear-flecked tails on the floor in appreciation as arms and legs blossomed around them. The licorice stick smiled like a revolving door at the feat.

The bass destroyed a balcony like a sewer nightmare, a cataclysmic Martian orgy. Lizards dissolved like cake in a gravel rain as they fell. The balcony became a Fourth of July volcano that erupted a thousand plastic Victorian Crosses on the crowd below. Ripper pummelled the audience with an Altamont microphone.

Then, the show was abruptly over. The crowd was bloodied-bruised pleased, and left searching for an executioner with a hangnail.

Kendrix had hurt her elbow and shin, but was as cheery as a soft-boiled space ship. I offered to take her home, but she told me Captain Ripper had already asked her.

Besides, Ripper had my offer beat easily. He has a chariot made of live slaves tied together. Of all races and nationalities, of course.