

# WAR AND MUSIC AND VIDS TO GO WITH

*by* Robert Crisman

## I. Europa

How else to begin but with Gustave Holst's *Mars*--the gods waging war in romantic twilight as drumbeats and cannons blast swathes in the gloaming and glory awaits in the halls of black smoke.

A visual perhaps: Bismarck's cavalry, blood, iron, piss, semen, closing on Paris some thousands abreast, proud Prussian eagles winging to glut as Holst wrests his way to crescendo as Communards barricade, waiting on History's decision.

A quick fade to black and Holst gasps to close, his throat torn away in the trenches of World War I.

And after silence, a blip or an eon, a membrane-thin atonal piping, the ghost of ripped nerves wrung from mud and barbed wire that goes on forever. A frozen dead stillness, its rhythm the breath that was stanchd in the millions of throats that lie at the Somme and the Marne and Verdun and Ypres.

A feast of accompanying visuals now, from the trenches torn out of the front in the west to a ripped corpse on barbed wire and smoke pressing down from leached sky. And then, as if out of the mouths of the dead, George Grosz-rendered bankers in cutaway coats fucking whores on a table with boned slabs of meat spilling every which way. They grunt just like swine, these bankers and whores, in the stench that the slaughtered send up from the moonscape.

A long fade to silence, and black...

## II. Interlude

And now, what music might render Amerika's wars the way the

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atonal breath fetched the trenches that gouged out old Europe?

That piping attempted to bring forth the essence of slaughter and place us within it, as part of its whole, and hence let us know who we are in this era, and what life is now. A mighty attempt, yet it died in the ovens of Auschwitz and again in the cloud that consumed Hiroshima.

Technology trumped the ambition of art to evoke and capture the soul of all things. Could it be that we are less grand than magicians of old? But then too, how can art in this age cast its nets to encompass the atomized swarm of new things and sensations that spew out a future that re-coats the past as dark fog, beyond knowledge and language and all sense of place?

And just as art once presumed that the Earth could be gleaned and brought to account in its fullness, today the mirror we hold to ourselves has been shattered. Shards, bits and pieces, define us.

Yet even this atomization, each shard, gives a glimpse of what is--and in turn throws cold light on the narcissist rapture that clings to the breakage as if it were God's final wisdom...

So then, the music and vistas of post-modern Empire: dry lilt and thrums and cancerine jingles; a swatch of creamed strings from *Father Knows Best*; iced sneers on high floors and rasps in deep alleys; the bubbling of sumps in fracked wastelands; the various, off-key groans of addiction; the coughing of blood; the icepick-like laughter of whores working crowds thronged with Dagwoods in downtown Las Vegas; church bells...

And somewhere amid all the blats, bleats, and belches, the Blues. All set to the rhythm of whips in your dreams.

And intermingled with these, more visuals, yes, a cartoonist's pastiche of vermillions, pastels, and flat muzzy grays sprayed out of a nozzle and streaked through with shit. And alongside, some quick blips of sound that croak the King's English and nibble at ankles and pick at the locks on your door...

And so, as Hiroshima ignites, let us strike up the band, with a last sullen symphonic chord of past ages, as ghosts of the Wehrmacht march through Berlin and Buchenwald vomits its dead.

First though, a flashback: Admiral Dewey strafing Manila as Teddy rides rough up a hill; Old Glory unfurling, shrouding the globe as the 20th Century blasts off for Mars. Under its shadow the Wobblies march past old Joe Hill on a gibbet; townsfolk picnic under a lynching in Georgia; U.S. Marines slash through Haiti; Charles Dawes counts out money and tosses it onto the streets of starving Berlin; Josephine Baker shimmies through Paris; Hemingway offers a toast in a Montmartre cafe; Al Capone offers Valentine's greetings to old Bugs Moran

### **III. Amerika**

Post-World War II, the first noirish months: a newsreel spits out a chorus of a-rhythmic stutters, the hissing of snakes, farts, and giggles, and ads for Old Gold and jingles for toilet-bowl cleanser. We see peace arrive on the black-and-white rubble where once stood a world, and on that rubble the U.S., come home to roost, a vulture pecking the corpses to bones.

A cascade of images, faces: dry ice at Inchon, and gray Pork Chop Hill; Truman, Acheson, John Foster Dulles, his brother Allen a gentleman ghost; the Shah of Iran, the deposed Mossadegh, and Jacobo Arbenz; a mushroom cloud broiling the sands of Nevada; Nixon and Ike; the Beav and Ward Cleaver; Lumumba, Fidel; Yosemite Sam; H.L. Hunt and a drunk Joe McCarthy. A tract: *None Dare Call It Treason*. A gusher spews in Odessa, Texas. Rats scuttle east a Mercator's projection, headed toward Riyadh, Tehran, and Lahore, and Beijing...

Patti Page warbles "How Much Is that Doggie in the Window?" Betty Page writhes half-naked in bondage. Hugh Hefner lights up his pipe.

Pitch-black freeze slams. Patty dribbles to close. Then, a bomb bursting and Ike Turner smiles through the smoke. A barker--perhaps Arthur Godfrey--yells "Take It Away!"--and Little Richard blows through the roof of the Senate and images blast off like bullets: Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry, Presley, the Killer, et al.

"AWOP-BOP-ALOOBOP-AWOP-BAM-BOOM!" drowns out the National Anthem...

A southern white preacher shrieks brimstone. The Klan burns a cross. Little Rock conjures a flaming white riot. Emmett Till lies in the coffin his mother kept open to show the whole world what they'd done.

A U2 goes down over Russia. Ike mops his brow. Kennedy smiles and smiles. Johnny Weissmuller roars, beats his chest in a Hollywood jungle. Marilyn blows kisses and breathes "Happy Birthday!" to Jack.

Quick cut, and now Dippermouth sings "What a Wonderful World." Zapruder captures the murder in Dallas. Jack Ruby blasts Oswald. Sam Giancana and E. Howard Hunt leave their shadows behind at the scene...

A montage of tracers: Bull Connor's dogs shred dead Medgar Evers; Watts, Newark, Detroit; the Panthers, San Quentin; MLK dies at that motel in Memphis. J. Edgar Hoover laughs at a racetrack, then spits on MLK's grave...

A naked nine-year-old girl flees Trang Bang as U.S. jets rain down the napalm. "Feuer Frei" by Rammstein drowns out her screams as she burns. John McCain waves from a plane overhead...

A lull--followed quickly by screams of the tortured in Tegucigalpa. The torturer gets on the phone between bouts, tells his wife to pick up some rump roast for dinner. He croaks like Al Bundy and calls his wife "Peg" as he fondles his prod in the breezeway. Sinatra blows through Cahn's "Love and Marriage"...

A parade now of splats, splurts, and gurgles, laced with snippets of wisdom from George "Poppy" Bush. Daffy Duck laughs and cracks out a wet, steaming fart. A six-year-old boy holds his nose, eyes shut tight, streaming tears.

A Looney Tunes jingle. Ted Bundy laughs.

Dick Cheney smiles and birds rot on beaches. Charred chunks of meat festoon the bridge in Fallujah. Ministry belts out the "New World Order" as Afghani corpses litter a village and Drones hunt down more.

Cut to Obama, Osama, Assad, and now ISIS, the Kurd refugees.

Iraq's pipelines in flames. Police and the soldiers throttling the hopes, dreams, and riots in Cairo.

Ferguson, Baltimore, Charleston, flames and more flames...

Billionaire Trump the bankruptcy baron, taking his run at the White House. He wants all the Mexicans gone, gone, gone from this country. And blondes bought-and-paid-for to wear on his belt loops for show. As for the rest, well, what the banks want they will get, just like always...

The Star Wars theme seems appropriate here, as Jabba the Hutt bangs a bad bag of dope and croaks out "You're fired!" Ben Carson, aghast, whips out the cross and some garlic...

Something just hit me! Whereas above I noted the sea-change that came with the atomization of life and perception in this, the "post-modern" era, and with it the end of art's ancient mission to bring all of life to account--perhaps there's a thread running through, from Europa til now that renders the sea-change just one more post-modern illusion.

All those Good Germans cheering on Hitler, who wanted to stand on the neck of the world; the Good Ol' Boys rah-rah-ing Trump who still does. The billions of people choked by their weight who've wanted them gone past forever.

Just for a moment, imagine those bullets drowned out in a rage of African drums...

Two songs: the first, John Lee Hooker, neck deep in mud, humming "Murder," a slow, deadly blues. Miles Davis falls in with the echo that trails to the end, past unmarked graves that stretch from Verdun to Warsaw to Omaha Beach, and on past Mai Lai, and then up the Tigris, and into the Afghani foothills.

The second, as yet unwritten, will start when the Pilgrims stepped off the boat, and then sweep through the years like a scythe.

