

Topics

Crafty Arts

The Nixon Record

The National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences has just made an error in judgment. It has nominated, for one of its annual "Grammy" awards, former President Richard Nixon. This is no phonograph needle. The academy thinks that a recording of his television interviews with David Frost deserves consideration as the best spoken-word recording released in 1978.

That Mr. Nixon left the White House in disgrace should not forever bar him from credit for genuine accomplishment. But considering his overall contribution to the recording arts and sciences, it seems clear that the academy has nominated him in the wrong category. Rather than performing, his Grammy should be for editing.

The Grass Is Greener

Why did China select as the first American film to be released for general viewing throughout the country "Futureworld," a 1976 Hollywood movie that this newspaper's reviewer found to be "as much fun as running barefoot through Astroturf"? We don't know, but the plot is suggestive. It has to do with a country called Delos, where foreigners are killed and replaced by look-alike robots. The plan is to send the robots back home where they will be operated by remote control in the interest of universal peace and reason.

Communist censors the world over favor movies with messages, and maybe this one is being offered to the

Chinese people by the new rulers in Peking as a sly spoof of long Maoist indoctrination. But we rather doubt it. Commissars are not known for their sense of humor. More likely, they simply read the review and, in literal-minded dedication to the new party line of progress Western-style, concluded that running barefoot through Astroturf really is fun.

The Helmsley Touch

The beaux arts tower that once terminated the Park Avenue vista from uptown, with its bronzed mansard roof slanted against the sky, has gone through a lot in recent years. Built as the New York Central Building, this small chateau skyscraper between 45th and 46th Streets was an integral part of the Grand Central development in the early years of the century. Later it was vulgarized as the New York General Building; and finally it was overwhelmed by the mammoth banality of the Pan Am Building constructed behind it.

Now it is the Helmsley Building, restored by Harry Helmsley, the real estate developer, to its original quality. The stone and metal walls have been cleaned, the bronze trim extravagantly gilded, and even the clock that kept Park Avenue on time has been restored to working order. Modernists who for years spurned the building's fruity classicism now genuflect before the richness of its materials and details. With a newly illuminated top, the building joins the architectural light show of eccentric spires that is New York's crowning glory.

Mr. Helmsley knows a good building when he sees one. But like all successful realtors, he sees them whether they exist or not, and right now, he envisions one on the parkland of Tudor City, which he owns. He has generously given one building back to the city. In the new case, an even better gift would be no building at all. Any developer can make a skyscraper, but only God can make a tree.

The New Collectors

The recent flurry of art thefts raises the question, what does the thief do with a Rembrandt or a Cézanne once he's gotten it? It cannot be broken up for parts like a Cadillac or used as collateral like securities. The answer seems to be that the paintings are winding up in the hands of potentates of organized crime. We would like to think that these tough guys, in the sunset of their careers, are enlarging their souls by musing over Rembrandt's rabbi or Cézanne's apples. But experience surely teaches that the mere possession of beauty has no sure redemptive effects. Think of Goering. The passion for collecting is often just another expression of rapacity and ego.

Yet in that may lie hope for the public. Just as the collections of earlier robber barons found their way from mansion to museum, so perhaps in time will hot paintings, too, in return for suitable recognition. At the very least, that would improve security. Who would dare steal anything from the Lucky Luciano gallery?