

Four-Alarm FIRESIGNAL #20

FAlaFal used to be published thrice yearly in fire sign periods (April, August and December) as a public service for founding members and dear friends of **The Firesign Theatre** from the East Coast Derisational Hindquarters of the Natural Surrealist Party, etc. etc. It was free of charge and freely reproduceable, and ye conduit's name was Elayne Wechsler. Three and one-half years have passed since then, and letters still trickle in at the long-since-closed post office box in Manhattan. The name is now Elayne Wechsler-Chaput, the address whence this originates is 1747 65th Street, Brooklyn, NY 11204, and I would still appreciate letters, news clippings, FT-related writing and artwork, requests for press kit and other material (see Page 2) and any donations to the above address. TFT news mostly supplied by Sparks Media [Michael Packer] and Phil Proctor. Copywrite 1993 Pen-Elayne Enterprises.

No. 20 of ?

SUMMER, 1993

This Is Worker Speaking...

Well, it seems like way too long (or too short, depending on my nostalgia tolerance level) since I've done one of these, but karmic duty wouldn't let me go. Not only have I continued to receive requests for FAlaFal from folks who've heard about us everywhere from The SubGenius High Weirdness By Mail to Rhino Records but, after a somewhat dry spell of a few years, during which the Four Or Five Ones pursued individual and semi-collective endeavors and Michael Packer and Jim Middleton published two Firesignals in their SPARKS! magazine (thanks for keeping the flame lit, guys!), things - and people - are starting to come together again. As I'm given to understand, it all started at Phil Proctor's wedding, when the four of them... Oh well, more news in the "Rumors Behind..." section, the way it useta be.

I don't know if I can get my finances together to put out another FAlaFal this year, although I'd like to try. Michael has faithfully kept up the mailing list to where we number 500 now, and, with the double-postage I know I'll need to resend FAlaFals to those of you who've moved since '89, mailing costs alone have run me over \$150 (that's not including printing, labels, etc. etc.). If I hadn't have accumulated lots of overtime bucks during May (Hell Month) at my job - well, let's not talk about money, it's so... gauche, don'tcha think? Suffice it to say that donations, as always, are appreciated but NOT necessary, although if you could spare a 29¢ SASE, it would certainly weigh in favor of potential future issues! I'll try to get the next one out around September...

For obvious reasons, this is an abbreviated issue, but we hope to give you enough news, services and enjoyment to pique your interest the way we used to! Welcome back to us all!

Rumors Behind the News

The Firesign Theatre has reunited! Yes, dear friends, the 4/24 2-hour show in Seattle was, in Phil Proctor's words, "surprisingly successful," beginning with a 2½-minute standing ovation and garnering some nifty reviews (see pp. 2-3)! PP was recently interviewed (5/13) by our roving (well, MI-based) correspondent Michael Packer on WGUV, where he also revealed:

- There are plans for an "Illusion of Unity" tour (so called because it compiles TFT's "greatest hits" into a cohesive whole, of a sort) in October and/or November, including cities like Chicago or Detroit, and culminating in a California show that may be taped for HBO or Showtime (and eventually released on home video). [As a side note, if anyone out there knows a booking agent interested in having TFT perform in your venue, please contact us and we'll pass the info along!]

- They are in preliminary discussions with Columbia about a new "end-of-century/millennium" album, and have been offered studio time in the Seattle area by rock groups such as Heart and Pearl Jam, Firesign fans all. Also, a new 2-record compilation should be coming out on CD in October/November (company unspecified).

- Phil Proctor said he is keeping busy doing cartoon voices and acting jobs; Peter Bergman produces radio spots for upcoming movies, among other things; Phil Austin will be writing and appearing on Chevy Chase's new talk show this fall; and David Ossman has numerous radio projects in the works, including plans for some "noir" stuff.

In other news, Phil Austin has completed the radio script for "Down Under Danger," in which one presumes ND doesn't have such a g'day, mate, and Michael's planning on finishing recording in mid-August! For more news than we give you on p. 3, write Michael at P.O. Box 3540, Grand Rapids, MI 49501!

Quote of the Issue:

"We were so far ahead nobody could see us, and now it's like we've caught up with ourselves." - Phil Proctor

BEING THERE

The Firesign This Time

BY TIM APPELO

Firesign Theatre's hip clowns make a comeback. Or is it a flashback?

FOUR PLAY:
(clockwise from left) Ossman, Proctor, Bergman, and Austin rehearsing "Nick Danger" in Seattle

FASTER THAN a speeding Robin Williams, a quartet of brainy clowns called the Firesign Theatre erupted from hippiedom 25 years ago. Its first 10 records sold a then-impressive 1.5 million copies and became a staple of underground radio and campus parties. Firesign routines, notably "We're All Bozos on This Bus," are a happy (if hazy) memory for the generation that inhaled. In 1987, Garrison Keillor explained that he was moving to Denmark so he could be "just another bozo on the bus." With its radio-based constituency waning, however, the group was dumped by its record label in 1976 and wandered on to solo projects; eventually the Firesigners stopped performing together in 1981.

Phil Proctor, 52, Peter Bergman, 53, Phil Austin, 51, and David Ossman, 56, celebrated their 25th anniversary April 24 with a reunion show at Seat-

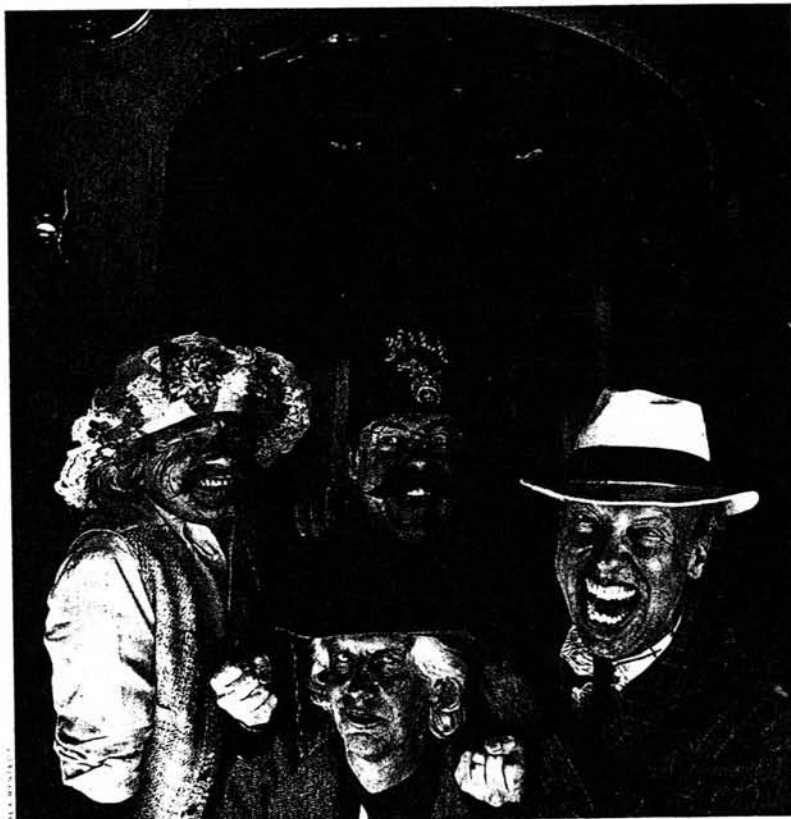
tle's 2,900-seat Paramount Theater, far from the media glare of Hollywood. The sold-out crowd at the "Illusion of Unity" show included Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen and members of Pearl Jam, Heart, and the Flying Karamazov Brothers. "It was like a higher-grade version of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*," said Microsoft's Nils Von Veh. Fans shouted along with the dialogue of beloved routines like "Nick Danger, Private Eye."

And the Firesign whimsy is charming a whole new generation. "We played *Don't Crush That Dwarf, Hand Me the Pliers* on the Lollapalooza bus last summer," said Pearl Jam drummer Dave Abbruzzese, 24. "It's the wittiest political satire I ever came across." Seattle resident Harry Anderson of *Night Court* marveled after the show: "A guy in front of me had his 9-year-old along, as if to say, 'This was *my* generation's *Ren & Stimpy*.'"

In fact, Firesign Theatre may soon join *Ren and Stimpy* on TV. "Illusion" organizer Richard Baker, who manages *Home Improvement's* Tim Allen, is hoping to produce a cable special. Steve Allen will host a Firesign documentary this fall on American Public Radio, and it was even approached by Lollapalooza '93.

Unlike such later comedy revolutionaries as *Saturday Night Live* and Steve Martin, Firesign Theatre depended on radio, and as formats became more rigid, their free-flowing comedy found itself with no outlet. But each member has been doing well on his own: In L.A., Bergman produces radio campaigns for movies (*Wayne's World*, *Dave*), and Proctor does voices for *Smurfs* and *Rug Rats*. On Whidbey Island near Seattle, Ossman produces such public-radio specials as 1988's *War of the Worlds* anniversary remake. Austin, who lives on nearby Fox Island, is talking to Chevy Chase about working on his Fox-TV talk show this fall.

But the soloists clearly crave the quartet. On Proctor's answering machine, Nick Danger's nemesis, Rocky Rococo, menacingly makes this solemn announcement: "We're *ba-ack!*" ♦



WHO AM US, ANYWAY?

If I haven't mentioned it enough yet, inestimable thanks to Michael Packer for not only maintaining the mailing list, but also keeping in contact with the members of The Firesign Theatre, shepherding the good news of the reunion and other projects (see excerpts from his interview with PP on P.1), initiating some of those projects himself, updating his TFT audiotape collection, subsidizing a great deal of the cost of this FAlaFal, and sending along some new items for our press kits! Among the gems which have now been added:

- "Nick Danger Returns in Pulp Radio" press release (Sparks Media)
- "Still Crazy After All These Years" by M.L. Lyke (P.I. reporter - some paper in Seattle; undated)
- "Firesign Reunion" w/ PB's picture, no author (Denver Post, 4/26/93)
- "Comedy troupe still wows audience" by Kathy Murray, Bee news svcs. (source and date unknown)
- "Firesign Theatre team reunites for anniversary show in Seattle" by Sean Robinson (Federal Way News, 4/23/93)
- "Relighting the Firesign" by Eric Scigliano (The New York Times, 5/2/93)
- "Back to Bozos" also by Eric Scigliano (Seattle Weekly, 4/25/93)
- "The Firesign Theatre: Forward into the past" - author unknown (The Olympian, 4/23/93)
- "Firesign's 25th anniversary a nostalgic love-in" - author unknown [good thing, too!] (AP, undated)
- Mobile Fidelity Sound Lab add for TFT releases on compact disc (call 1-800-423-5759 for catalog)

I also came into possession of the latest issue of Bjo Trimble's science fiction media newsletter SPACE-TIME CONTINUUM announcing the FT revival.

And many thanks to Ken Burke (see letters section) for sending the Fall 1992 issue of Motorbooty magazine (#6), featuring the 8-page article "The Firesign Theatre: A Young Person's Guide" by David Merline!

These items will all be added to the press kit list, which is available from me for a 52¢ SASE.

Thanks to the people on CompuServe and other electronic bulletin boards who are spreading the news about Firesign! If anyone on BBS's would like to send us FT-related mail, our CompuServe mail "address" (under "Elayne & Steve Chaput") is 72672,2714. What's yours?

Dear Friends...

Back Issues of FAlaFal (#1-19) are still available - send me a SASE for information on postage costs!

The Bears In Your Ears

As I mention at left, Michael Packer has put together a 7-page listing of his TFT audiotape collection, believed by most of us to be the most extensive anywhere. Please send him a 52¢ SASE for a copy of the listing and his payment terms! BTW, Michael also tells me that American Public Radio will be distributing a 4-part program about FT, to be hosted by Steve "He's a Genius" Allen, in September - check with your local APR/NPR stations! Of course, this will be added to Michael's collection after it's aired, as he will have access to the master for duplication.

Lastly, I have a respectable collection (probably 10-12 hours worth all together) of Firesign on video, and will dub stuff free for people who want to send videotapes and money for return postage. Send me a SASE first for the list, if you'd like.

POSTMARK: DEEP SPACE

Hi Elayne:

May 10, 1993

Well, as said on the phone, I hope you DO put out the Firesign again, even if it's only a one-shot. I like the idea of doing it mostly as a compendium of copied articles and reviews. The Jerry Lee Lewis International Fan Club issues their 'zine in that fashion, and it's VERY readable, and one doesn't have to put up with too much fan boy writing...

I think it's a great idea that Firesign is contemplating a 25th anniversary tour. If all the old rockers from the baby boom generation can play the nostalgia circuit, why not the old rock comedians? (Are you as amazed at how interested our particular generation is in ITSELF and ITSELF only? I think we make it too easy for those cohesive tracking bozos.)

Last spring, one of Lorraine's [his wife] seniors stumbled upon his dad's copy of "Don't Crush That Dwarf." He was instantly transformed into a Firesign Fanatic 1st Class! So as a favor, I taped him all the Firesign material I had in my possession. (It was during this time I discovered that someone had filched my copy of Proctor & Bergman's TV Or Not TV. Which I miss.) Anyway, this kid spends hours digging these tapes and memorizing them - just like I used to when I was a teen. I finally met Jake at graduation...and instantly he started babbling in Firesign-ese, and I COULDN'T KEEP UP! There was a time in my life when I could recite every second of every Firesign Theatre lp, and have every voice and intonation intact! Now I'm just an old guy being trumped by a young guy on my own turf. This kid knows a valuable piece of my early history better than I do and I DON'T LIKE IT!

(continued next page)

(Deep Space cont'd.)

Actually, I'm glad the kid likes this stuff. But I am shocked at how Firesign is no longer a contemporary force with my peers. We all got lives now, and the exploits of "4 or 5 crazy guys" is now just an amusing sidelight, or a tenuous thread of an earlier obsession.

What's the point? I dunno - just thought I'd share. But, indeed, I'm glad the guys might tour. I'd like one shot at seeing them all together, live - to pay my respects to an important influence. Cop a few laughs, recall a few rhythms, and then go on with things again. How about you?

KEN BURKE
Black Canyon City, AZ

Dear Elayne: May 30, 1993

I have been a MAJOR Firesign Theatre fan since "Electrician." I started a circle of fans back in high school. Years later, around 1974, Proctor & Bergman did a show in Ann Arbor when I was a student there and was also writing music and concert reviews for John Sinclair's paper, the Ann Arbor Sun. Lucky me, I got a chance to meet and interview them the next day. Peter stayed in town for a few days after Phil left, and mentioned that he was staying at the Michigan Union. One day, I invited him to join me for lunch at Ann Arbor's great lunchtime experience Pizza Bob's, where they knew me quite well. We walk in together, and as soon as the counterman saw me he put my name on an

order slip, and when he saw who I was with he did a double take and then wrote "Peter" on a second slip. I was lunching with one of my personal cultural heroes, and people were noticing! It's one of my fondest memories, even 20 years later.

Peter and I were immediately sympatico. We talked for over an hour about a wide range of subjects. Over the next few months, he sent me some tapes of radio material, some of which I still have. A year or so later, P&B returned to Ann Arbor and did a midnight show at the State Theatre. Afterwards, Peter and I went over to a friend's all-night jazz show and did comedy riffs together between songs until dawn.

Over the years, as he stopped visiting Michigan we lost touch with each other. If you talk to Peter, please give him my best and ask why there aren't more CDs of their stuff available.

PAUL J. GRANT
Dearborn, MI

(Well, Paul, there's news about CD releases on page 3 and, since all the members of The Firesign Theatre also receive this newsletter, consider your message to Peter passed on!)

Folks, as I mention elsewhere, I don't know what kind of finances I'll be able to muster for future issues of FAlaFa, but I'm sure letters to the editor (and 29¢ SASEs for future newsletters) will sway me in a positive direction! Please, keep in touch! - ye conduit

Four-Alarm FIRESIGNAL
c/o Elayne Wechsler-Chaput
1747 65th Street
Brooklyn, NY 11204

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

