

Another Robbins novel

Tom Robbins
Jitterbug Perfume
Bantam Books

review by David Jordan

Tom Robbins' first novel, *Another Roadside Attraction*, won him a huge following among N. America's anti-establishment literati. His next novel, *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*, inspired no less than four country and western songs, and his follow-up *Still Life with Woodpecker*, made the N.Y. Times bestseller list.

Fans who have eagerly awaited his next novel will be disappointed by *Jitterbug Perfume*. Robbins still has that irreverent wit that made his early novels so entertaining, but in the decade or so since his first novel he has picked up nothing in the way of depth or artistic finesse.

Jitterbug Perfume follows the meanderings of Alobar, a heathen king born somewhere around 900 A.D. who is convinced that there is more to life than a short reign of pillaging and raping. Alobar ducks out of the ritual execution that awaits every heathen

king upon the appearance of his first grey hair, and somehow finds immortality.

Interspersed among the adventures of Alobar are chapters from another plot, involving three modern day *parfumeurs* who are in search of the ultimate perfume, which Alobar alone holds the recipe for.

The plot of *Jitterbug Perfume* is a quest without a destination, an *Odyssey* with no trials or tribulations. Alobar's goal is never defined: "I am looking for something," he announces at the outset of his epic voyage, and that is as close as the novel gets to any thematic purpose. We are scintillated page after page with Robbins' verbal dexterity, but there is no narrative tension to bring the 350-page string of witticisms to life.

Bad puns follow Alobar through the centuries like a lingering stench. While passing through the 17th Century, Alobar notes that "the populace was beginning to put Descartes before the horse"; referring to medieval beer, he remarks that "perhaps a taste of it today would leave us sadder Budweiser." Amusing, yes, but even Rodney Dangerfield couldn't pull off 300-plus pages of lousy puns and get away with it.

Even more disturbing is the overt didacticism in *Jitterbug Perfume*. Robbins did a lot of homework in preparation for this novel, and he wants to make sure that we are all

aware of the fact. For example, we get a short lesson in history, beginning with "Virtually all marriages in the Middle Ages were arranged between strangers..." This is the dry voice of a historian, not a novelist. Add speeches extolling the 1960's ("the sixties constituted a breakthrough, a fleeting moment of glory..."), the significance of masks, the evils of science, the glories of drugs... and the effect is excruciating boredom. By the time they get to the five-page discourse on the spiritual significance of the four elements, or Dannyboy's seven-page theory of evolution, even the most devoted Robbins fans will be tempted to flip a few pages.

Dr. Dannyboy, extoler of the virtues of drugs, strikes awfully close to home. His discourses on the wonders of peyote and marijuana bring to the surface a theme that was more artfully woven into the plots of Robbins' earlier novels. When he launches into yet another reminiscence of the beautiful sixties, his listener remarks, "Fine. You were probably more interesting then. I understand everybody was."

Robbins certainly was. His latest novel shows absolutely no artistic development over a ten-year apprenticeship. *Jitterbug Perfume* is all surface; once the jokes die, there's nothing left.

Small, happy moments

Our Town
Studio Theatre
through December 8

review by Dean Bennett

"You've got to love life to have life
and you've got to have life to love
life"

These prophetic words from *Our Town's* stage manager nicely sum the feeling of Studio Theatre's version of Thornton Wilder's classic.

In *Our Town*, Wilder places the tiny community of Grover's Corners, New Hampshire under a microscope of poignant vision, and with his pen cleanly dissects the surface vernacular from the heartfelt tenderness that lies underneath. The play looks specifically at two families — the Gibbs and the Webbs. As the show progresses, we see their moments of triumph and despair but, more importantly, we see the little things, the everyday things that we all take for granted.

When added up, though, we find these

moments constitute the happiest moments of our lives. *Our Town* begs our release from a vortex of self-absorption and materialism.

Brian Currah's staging is bare bones: some chairs, a few tables, and a couple of ladders. But *Our Town* revels in its own simplicity. Props never detract from what is truly important — the people themselves.

The lighting is particularly effective in capturing the mood of the play. The family scenes are bathed in warm hues of orange and yellow. The cemetery stands saturated in a pool of steel blue light.

The acting stands out not for individual performances but for the feeling they give to the play as a whole. The actors exude a mystique of sincerity. *Our Town's* inhabitants are forgettable on first meeting, but they stick with you. Days after the performance you find idioms of their speech still rolling over in your mind.

The play refuses to overwhelm you with new ideas. Rather, ideas reach down and tap something that is already inside you. A subtle tugging of the heartstrings makes Studio Theatre's *Our Town* a success.

Capaldi's rock 'n roll mission

Jim Capaldi
One Man Mission
WEA

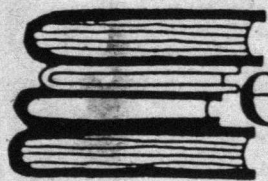
review by David Jordan

Neil Young may see a rock and roller's fate as a choice between burning out and fading away, but others continue to develop, honing their musical talents to a tight level of professionalism.

Jim Capaldi shared the writing credits with Steve Winwood in the British jazz/rock fusion band, Traffic in the late '60s and the '70s. Now

Capaldi has resurfaced with a solo album, backed by such notables as Carlos Santana.

Though his musical and technical skills have developed, Capaldi's mind is still back in the days of rock stardom and groupies. Such sexist lines as: "I've been watching you for a long time/I've been thinking to myself I'd like to make you mine," will offend anyone who cares. But if you can accept the hardened personality of a veteran rocker, this album is (at least musically) richly rewarding.



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The Album Playlist is based on Airplay - a combination of programmer preference and listeners' requests. Tune in every Sunday at 12:00 for the **Alternative Countdown** - the favorite albums, EP's singles and tapes.

TOP 15

1. Tito Puente — El Rey (Concord Jazz)
2. Flipper — Gone Fishin' (Subterranean)
3. Keith Jarratt — Changes (ECM/WEA)
4. Code of Honor — Beware the Savage Jaw (Subterranean)
5. Frankie Goes to Hollywood — Welcome to the Pleasure Dome (ZZT/MCA)
6. Billy Bragg — Brewing up with... (Go Discs)
7. Ini Kamoza — Statement (Island/MCA)
8. The Del Fuegos — The Longest Day (Slash/WEA)
9. Palais Schaumburg — Party Vous Schaumburg (Mercury)
10. Art Blakey — New York Scene (Concord Jazz/A&M)
11. The Go-Betweens — Spring Hill Fair (Sire/WEA)
12. The Dirty Dozen Brass Band — My Feet Can't Fail Me Now (George Wein)

13. Marc Almond — Verm in Ermine (Some Bizarre)
14. Hunters and Collectors — Jaws of Life (Slash/WEA)
15. The Raincoats — Moving (Rough Trade)

EP's, SINGLES, TAPES

1. Rain Parade — Explosions in the Glass Palace (Enigma)
2. Jerry Jerry & the Sons of Rhythm Orchestra — The Happy Nun (Tape)
3. Robert Whitt — Work in Progress (Rough Trade)
4. Malcom McLaren — Madame Butterfly (Charisma/Polygram)
5. Rain Parade — Explosions in the Glass Palace (Enigma)
6. The Fall — Oh, Brother (Beggars Banquet)
7. Art Bergman — Emotion (Tape)
8. Orange Juice — Lean Period (Polydor)
9. Alien Sex Fiend — Dead and Buried (Anagram)
10. Omni Garage — That is True (Tape)