



Smoke gets in your platter...

Snowaxe Ramm Cockburn: Fun at the Warwick

Inner City Front
Bruce Cockburn
(True North/CBS)
●●● 1/2

On the front cover of Bruce Cockburn's first record—now almost 12 years old—there is a colour illustration. Set against a smoggy industrial city backdrop is a large book, big enough for its front cover to be an open door. On page one of the open book, a road winds down into a placid, green, country landscape. "Step into the earthy world of a Canadian Folksinger," the cover seems to say.

On the front of *Inner City Front*, Bruce Cockburn's 13th record, Bruce is sitting slouched over a table in a working-class bar populated with soldiers. He is smoking a cigarette, drinking beer, and fitting in perfectly. The entire photograph is taken through a distorted, fun-house lens that makes everything seem twice as seedy—of Warwick Hotel calibre. Cockburn has made quite a transformation since "Going to the Country", (the first song on that first album), but he is as adept and convincing in his new stance as he was in the old.



Inner City Front seems to strongly reflect recent changes in Cockburn's life: his divorce, and his subsequent move from the rural locales he has always favoured, to the inner core of Toronto (he lives above a store on Spadina Ave.). As its title suggests, the album is partly an examination of urbanity, and of the songwriter's coming to terms with city life—its pleasures, and its pains. **Sings Cockburn:**

*All's quiet on the inner city front,
I don't know why I should but I
feel content.*

For Cockburn, the inner city has inspired a new spring for his songwriting.

Some of the most direct and trenchant of the album's songs are about the disillusionment of love. "You pay your money and you take your chance/When you're dealing with love and romance," comments the watcher of the city about his "friends all numb with love." In "The Strong One", the discarded lover

leans on a friend for support: "When I was a torn jacket hanging on the barbed wire/You cut me free/And sewed me up and here I am." "Isn't it hard to be the strong one?" asks the crossed lover in his weakness.

Musically, this is Cockburn's rockiest album yet. He plays electric guitar throughout (except on "The Loner", the one beautiful bow here to the folkie days), and at times, he gets pretty raunchy. The songs are all boffo, particularly "The Strong One", with its electronic new-wavisms, and "Radio Shoes", a wonderful jazz-rock concoction of the sort that Bruce ought to be doing more of.

It has been a long way since that first album, and Bruce Cockburn keeps on changing, making him one of Canada's more precious commodities. With *Inner City Front*, he has what is easily his best platter since *Joy Will Find a Way*. It sure is different, though.

Roman Pawlyszyn

We're All Different
Snowaxe
(Rio)
●●

Here comes Snowaxe, Canada's latest graduate of the David Lee Roth School of Vinyl Brutality. A power trio consisting of Paul Yanuziello (drums), Ed McDonald (guitar and vocals) and Ian Nishio (bass), Snowaxe is the new band in town—loud, brash, full of enthusiasm and dedicated to breaking the sound barrier with screaming chords and a pulse-pounding beat.

These boys play well together, and it's hard to fault them on their style or technique. All have firm control over their instruments, and Ed McDonald's voice is better than most in this genre.

The real problem lies not in their music (it's typical, hard-hitting rock and roll), but in the lyrics. The words are a lyrical limbo, following no real path, with no recognizable themes of consequence. "Gotta leave my real life behind/Cause I'm a rockin' rollin' fiend/Gotta tell my lady can't see her/Cause I'm a rockin' rollin' fiend." And: "Harlem's screamin' pain baby/It's screamin' pain/No matter where you go/It will be there, heh!"

Only two cuts rise above this mediocre blend. The first, "Rosie", is a splendid mixture of soft lyrics and fast guitar, and the second, "Understandin' Man", is a powerful, fast-paced love song with the best guitar riffs on the album.

Unfortunately, at times Snowaxe attempts to be a cross between Led Zeppelin and Van Halen, but lacks the former's lyrical style and the latter's macho, powerhouse delivery. As well, any new ideas that may be in their material become quickly lost

beneath a barrage of "babes", "yeahs", and "ohs".

If the 'Axe can learn to write lyrics as proficiently as they can play music, then perhaps they'll find their own voice. Until then, regardless of what their album cover says, they're no different from any other heavy metal band out peddling their wares this year.

Lloyd Wasser

Dragon
Ken Ramm
(Jackal)
●● 1/2

This debut from Toronto guitarist Ken Ramm promises much, what with its line-up of such local cream-of-the-croppers as Ted Moses, David Piltch, and all three members of FM. As it turns out, *Dragon* is something of a let-down, a project which Ramm will hopefully draw upon in the

future as a guidepost to his artistic maturation. It is an okay album, but one on which the potential very obviously outweighs all else.

The big problem here lies with the arrangements. Many of the songs are really nothing more than fragments, melodic fragments that are repeated over and over again with no true development. Ramm's melodies are very tuneful but, unfortunately, he takes them nowhere, and after an album's worth they all start to sound rather interchangeable.

Solos are annoyingly brief—with players of this calibre, it's a shame they weren't given more space. Still, (Bathurst) Ben 'Manor' Mink manages to bow some nice notes on "Charpit Rhumba", and Michael Stuart has a short, sweet turn on soprano sax on "Cathay".

The music on *Dragon* is quite pleasant, if undemanding. It has the

same kind of pop-fusion feel as an L.A. Express, or a Jeff Lorber Fusion—a safe innocuous feel. In places though, the music threatens to break through its pleasantness and heat up, but it never really does so for long; therein lies the disappointment. Well, there's always a next time, Ken.

RP

RATINGS

- Buy or die
- Swell
- Totsy-hotsy
- Buy socks instead
- Doodly-squat

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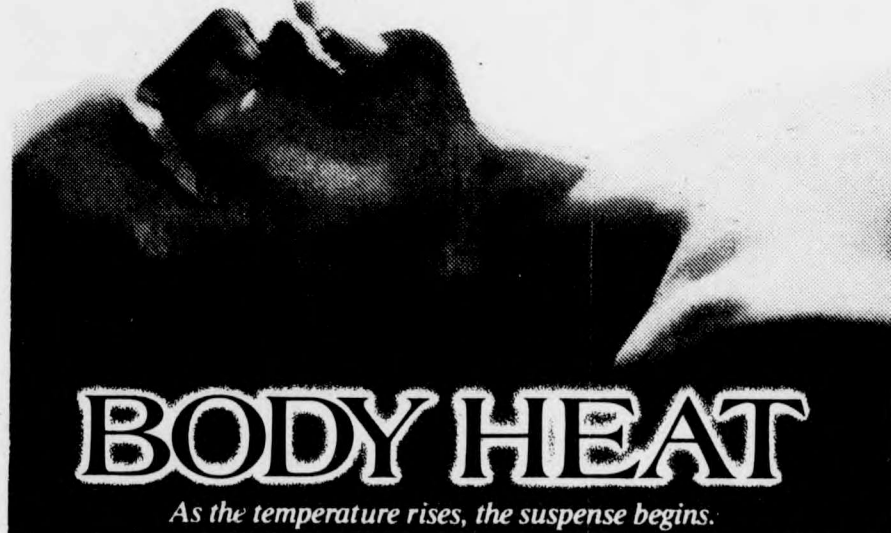
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