

Genius in high gear—The Night of the Iguana

Neptune Review—**The Night of the Iguana**
by Frank McGinn

When I like Tennessee Williams it is because he has stuck the perfect balance between melodrama and symbolism. This is not always the case. Some of his plays are as hysterically active as a weekend in Bedlam, and makes as much sense. Others are as burdened with symbolic content as undergraduate poetry, and about as amusing. But when Williams is really cracking, when he is earning his title as America's greatest living playwright, the symbolism is a light which illuminates the souls of some vividly desperate characters.

Williams was racing his genius in high gear when he wrote **The Night of the Iguana**, Neptune Theatre's latest production. The story is set on the veranda of a rustic and Bohemian, to put it kindly, Mexican hotel perched on a hell between a rain forest and a still-water beach. As the play opens a panting, wildly distraught man staggers up the steps and collapses on a hammock. He is the Rev. T. Lawrence Shannon, the tour guide for a busload of lady Baptists who want their money back, and he has come to the hotel, as he does every 18 or so months, for a nervous breakdown. He likes the view and the company of Fred the manager, a good fisherman and a good man.

Only this time Shannon is

not permitted to slide into the luxurious escape of madness. Fred is dead and his widow, a rapacious sensualist, wants Shannon sane and kicking and all to herself. Also unexpectedly present are a genteel New England spinster and her grandfather, at 97 years young the world's oldest reciting poet. They have no money but they have spirit to spare. The grandfather is struggling to finish his first poem in 20 years and the spinster, a quick-sketch artist named Hannah Jelkes, quickly perceives Shannon's hard-won inner decency and won't let him surrender it without a fight. Throughout the long night that follows, the two women use their distinct and distinctive weapons to help Shannon overcome the spook that is his constant, and only, travelling companion.

This is the melodrama, and a very compelling one it is, too. Will Shannon, that blaspheming idealist and corrupt innocent, spin-out forever in a spiritual nose dive or will he level off at the last minute and accept the solace offered by the two women? The symbol which translates this ordeal into universal terms is the iguana, an edible lizard which has been caught and tied up under the verandah. We know that the iguana is a symbol, is, in fact, the symbol because it is several times referred to as "one of God's creatures at the end of his rope." Its persistent crabbling to break free is

matched by Shannon's tormented straining at his spiritual bonds and it becomes clear that the theme of the play is endurance unto freedom. All of the major characters are creatures at the end of their rope and their persistence in the face of dismal fortune and failure is Tennessee William's triumphant truth.

Under John Neville's direction, Neptune's **The Night of the Iguana**, almost fully realizes the great potential of the play. For some unknown reason, Neville has eliminated four minor characters, two German couples honeymooning at the hotel. Described by Williams as "all pink and gold like baroque cupids of various sizes", they are splendid physical specimens who seem to be there to contrast the disarray of Shannon and his ilk. The play is set in 1940 and their Nazism—they sing marching songs and listen ecstatically to Battle of Britain reports on the radio—represents the insensitivity and cruelty which is the flip side of the main characters' painful awareness and compassion. Their absence is easily absorbed but their presence might have made the play's point more emphatically. And in the widow's role, a mature Bette Davis part if ever there was one, Neville has cast the relatively young Nicola Lipman. She succeeds in making the lusty lady a valiant and pathetic figure but it is an



uphill job, as she lacks the necessary years to make her lechery faintly ridiculous. But mainly, deftly, Neville captures the William's spirit, probably because he is working with an excellent cast.

As the beleaguered and crumbling-fast Shannon, Roland Hewgill sets the play's urgent pace from his first appearance. Sweating, twitching, and gasping like an exhausted puppet, his nervousness was so palpable that I caught it myself, and I was sitting in the last row of the balcony. At first his tense histrionics appear to be exaggerated but as the character is revealed, then skinned to the bone, they pay off in extra dividends of understanding. This is one sick man of the

cloth. He speaks with a soft, Southern accent, Tennessee Williams probably writes with a soft, Southern accent, and his civilized diction is an effective contrast to his troubled manner. Amanda Hancox is a tall, cool Hannah Jelkes, like a gin and tonic for the spirit, and Robert Walsh makes a very gallant and dignified oldest, reciting poet.

The tropical setting and lighting design are effectively done by Phillip Silver, who deserves special mention for his evocation of a tropical storm, complete with cloudburst. The deluge of rain is the most stunning stage effect Neptune has produced since the entire set collapsed on cue in **The Au Pair Man**.

Intro to a special rocker

by Gisele Marie Baxter

Review: Peter Gabriel,
Don't Remember

Perhaps we should consider

this limited-edition extended-play record a sort of thank-you to Canada for the strong support it has given Peter Gabriel as a recording and performing artist. Whatever the intent, this collector's item is a good introduction to an exceptional rock musician through some of the best of his recent work.

Peter Gabriel was the inventive energy behind the English band **Genesis** in its earlier days, but it was logical that he should leave. I somehow can't picture his creative fire being best served by the confines of a band structure. As a solo artist, he has more room to innovate; to discover new dialects for his musical language. The four tracks offered on this record demonstrate his success. From the jazzy introduction and the unique voice/synthesizer arrangement of the title track, to the melodic keyboards and gently powerful vocal of "Jetzt Kommt Die Flut", to the tribal, spiritual choral singing over the throb-

bing bass/percussion line of "Shosholoza", it is obvious that Gabriel's influences are of a fascinating variety. He has definitely been exploring African music and effectively translates it into his electronic idiom, using the synthesizer to enhance this innovation, and always respecting its percussive strength and beautiful melodic structures.

As well, Peter Gabriel is an intelligent, incisive lyricist. "When I try to sleep at night/ I can only dream in red/ The outside world is black and white/ With only one colour - dead".

"Biko", here in a remixed version, opens with the sounds of a rally, which soon fade into energetic percussion and the incredible, brilliantly layered synthesizer work which drives this song, the finest track on this record and a definite classic for Peter Gabriel. His voice achieves a most emotional strength as he relates the tragedy of Steven Biko, the black civil rights leader who was murdered in a South African jail three years ago. The menacing, sometimes eerie keyboard effects conjure up the horror many of

us felt at the only reaction of the South African leader to allegations that Biko had been murdered by the police: the death, he said, left him cold.

The vocals are beautifully harmonized, and Gabriel's own voice becomes an instrument in its own right, conveying a sense of anger, sadness, grief—yet also a sort of hope.

"You can blow out a

"You can blow out a candle/ but you can't blow out a fire/

Once a flame begins to catch/ The wind will blow it higher"

Three of the tracks on **Don't Remember** are otherwise unavailable in this country; the title track is on Gabriel's third solo album, along with one of the best singles of last year, "Games Without Frontiers". "Jetzt Kommt Die Flut" is a German translation of "Here Comes the Flood", an earlier Gabriel song. "Shosholoza" was recorded at the same time as "Biko", which was remixed especially for this release. "I Don't Remember" is a collection of vital material from one of rock music's most aware and creative artists.

Fallout frolic

Record Review: Chinatown
by Chris Hartt and Young

"Is Nuclear Power necessary?"—if it went into the production of this record it isn't! "Genocide is alive and breeding on the Planet Earth"—hopefully they'll start with the producers of this album. The liner notes also say, "While you listen the third world starves," so don't listen; the life you save may be your own.

"The Pirates of Propaganda—pedalling their inferior goods"—that says it all in a nutshell for this record. "Football is the most popular game in the world"—I think we've kicked Thin Lizzy around enough for awhile.

The record does have a good cover—it's quite beautiful. It

depicts Chinese Dragons. One is the TRIAD and represents the feared secret society of the East who may have decided to torture us all by supporting the production of this edifice. The colours of the cover would make the producers of Flash Gordon's collective mouths water. It livens up any room it enters.

As for the round piece of plastic inside the cover, I suggest you throw it away and frame the cover. We tried to find a use for this piece of plastic and found that as a frisbee it hurt your hands—as a plate the gravy leaked through the center—it didn't have much traction as a car tire—and it melted when we used it for a pot holder. As a record it just didn't.