

# York loved Oscar

By ALEX PATTERSON

Saturday, February 15 was a night for the history books of York University. It was then that our illustrious Adjunct Professor of Music Oscar Peterson played a benefit concert for his old Alma Mater at Roy Thomson Hall. The Professor and his trio filled the place—with both beautiful sounds and 2,800 appreciative listeners—and raised \$25,000 for the establishment of the Oscar Peterson Scholarship for Jazz Studies in the Department of Music.

York President Harry Arthurs served as the opening act for the group with a brief introduction, in which he remarked on the profusion of billboards and print ads around town proclaiming "Oscar Loves York." "And," he added, "York is just crazy about Oscar!" Then, without further fanfare, Canada's foremost jazz musician arrived on stage, color-coordinated with the hall in a grey tux and black bow tie. He sat down at his shiny black nine and a half foot Imperial Bosendorfer Grand and launched into the assured rhythms and digital dexterity for which he has been famous since his Carnegie Hall debut 35 years ago. With assistance from his superb accompanists, English drummer Martin Drew and the astounding Danish bassist Niels-Henning Orsted, the opening number flowed in the space of a couple of bars from subdued elegance to the kind of boogie-woogie that would set a corpse's toes to tapping. Orsted's bass runs exhibited effortless virtuosity and allowed Oscar the opportunity to mop his already-gleaming brow. Like Oscar's solos, they elicited spontaneous applause and jewelry-rattling from the (mostly older) audience. This was feel-good music at its most infectious, with tones as big and round and warm as the Professor himself.

The next few tunes slipped through many moods and time signatures; now as tasteful and restrained as the cool, grey contours of



"No . . . you don't say . . .!" Peterson seems as comfortable in York classrooms as in Roy Thomson Hall.

Thomson Hall, now soulful enough for a southside Chicago nightclub. One Oscar introduced as "The Gentle Waltz," which turned out to be just that; another was a mid-tempo exercise of often astonishing technique and varied timbre, ending with a brief, humorous quote from Duke Ellington's "Don't Get Around Much Anymore."

Ellington's influence on Peterson surfaced again in the show's second half, as some introspective noodling unexpectedly modulated into "Take The A Train," which in turn gave way to Oscar's imaginative variations on that theme. The presence of George Gershwin was also felt that night, in the shape of the composer's angular melodies, chunky chords and swaggering syncopation. There was a musically daring exploration of the darkest colors of the lowest dozen of the 88 keys, Peterson's fingers carefully articulating each note for maximal effect, which stood out among his many fine monologues of the two-hour performance.

Also featured was a piece entitled "Nigerian Marketplace," from his work-in-progress "A Suite Called Africa." As Peterson said in his

recent *Excalibur* interview, his aim is not to reproduce African music, but only to incorporate it into his own musical terms in the form of inspiration. Accordingly, "Nigerian Marketplace" is informed with a sense of ethnicity, but not dominated by it. The mysterious melodies and odd phrasing which the composition provides for the bassist eased the listener into the thrust of the piece. And thrust it did: the tempo quickened and the sound thickened into a lushness not often produced by a mere three players.

The finale was a rollercoaster ride of fascinating rhythms and just the right touch of dissonance that brought the concert to its crashing conclusion. Oscar tickled, massaged, and pounded everything out of the piano that it had to give in a medley that featured much Ellington but was still unmistakably Peterson. Our newest faculty member takes obvious joy in making his music, and never more so than when he's rampaging and exuberant like this. The concert was an unqualified success, and Oscar is always welcome to serve as York's cultural ambassador anywhere he likes.



## What Benefit hosts live lit, music and lafs

By PAULETTE PEIROL

If the thought of attending a poetry reading makes you want to invest in earplugs, take heart: this Wednesday's *What* magazine Benefit promises much more than poetry, and ventures beyond that ominous verb "reading" into the realm of performance. The participants will include over 15 local writers (playwrights, novelists, poets and storytellers), World Improvisation Comedy Championship winners the "Out of the Way Players," and 'ska' band "The Cleaners" (formerly "Eat the Pope").

This may be the most eclectic literary line-up that Toronto has witnessed in years, and many of the performers are from York.

*What* magazine, founded and edited by York (and *Excalibur*) alumni Kevin Connolly and Jason Sherman, was launched last fall at a 'Meet the Presses' event. The tabloid is published six times a year, is free of charge, and is intended to provide an accessible literary forum for both innovative writers and readers. So far, in only three issues, *What* has doubled its circulation (to 10,000 copies) and has increased its advertising revenue by 100 percent each issue.

The benefit, if successful, will barely cover the printing costs of

*What's* April 1 issue. Lee's Palace has donated their space for the benefit, keeping only bar receipts as payment. Performers are also offering their talent free of charge.

Editor Kevin Connolly describes the impetus for the benefit as striving to provide "a physical context" for the magazine to bridge the cerebral gaps between author, page, and reader. "You need to create not only a magazine but a mental geography," he stresses.

While the *What* Benefit derives its topography from a diverse variety of writers, "the performing as well as the writing isn't by definition done for academics or literary people," says Connolly. "The performance should go beyond the page and deal with the arena of the stage." To this end, *What* editors sought writers who could "translate" their work into performance and give a lively reading. Connolly cites York professor Fred Gaysek, reading at the benefit, as a poet who uses music and personnas in performance and draws from a broad variety of topics "from B movies to politics."

"There are a lot of silent boundaries around literature," Connolly says, "as if poetry has become a dead popular art form, paralytically passive." *What* editors Connolly and Sherman have taken an aggressive stance against this disparaging image by not limiting themselves to a specific set of editorial mandates. "The fact that we publish people who have been writing for 20 years and two years, without disclaimers, says something," notes Connolly, "the age factor is often a huge consideration in writing. Yet a lot of writers do their best work when they're younger. *What* has managed to avoid 'theme' issues, a set political orientation, and an exclusive focus on a particular form of writing. "People from the outside often can't figure out what we're about, so we try instead to show them what we aren't," Connolly stresses.

*What* has developed a broad network of writers largely through the efforts of its newly appointed contributing editorial staff, made up of Brian Dedora, Stuart Ross, and jwcurry, who has "a detailed index of every small and large press publication here" Connolly says. The editorial board, implemented in the February issue of *What*, will change on a rotating basis each year. They meet to discuss the magazine in general, and each issue in detail, looking at its design and assessing new features.

Taking literary risks is an integral aspect of *What*. Their "Workshop" section in the first issue, for example, did not evoke much response. "I still think it's a good, but premature idea," acknowledges Connolly, "first you need to develop readership, then get letters submitted, and then readers will respond . . . yet the whole magazine, in a sense, is a workshop." Other new features which have been successful are the guest editorial "Commentary" column and Nicholas Power's column "Readings."

Connolly and Sherman picked the *What* Benefit line-up from authors they know personally, contributors, and writers who have developed a reputation for being good performers. The readers "are all performers . . . not your typical readers," says Connolly. They include *What* contributors Frank Davey, Fred Gaysek, Crad Kilodney, Mark Laba, Lillian Necakov, Nicholas Power, and Jim Smith, as well as contributing editors jwcurry, Brian Dedora, and Stuart Ross. Also reading will be poets Victor Coleman and Lola Lemire-Tostevin, playwrights Margaret Hollingsworth, Dolly Reisman, and Tom Walmsley, novelist Susan Swan, and prop comedian Martin Putz. Rounding out the readings will be comic performances by the Out of the Way Players.

Tickets for the March 5 *What* Benefit at Lee's Palace can be reserved by calling 461-4994.

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