

Opera fails to show Stalin's oppression

By KEN KEOBKE

It's serious. She's a killer. Katerina murders her father-in-law, helps kill her husband, and later pushes her rapist/lover/fiancé's girlfriend off a bridge. Katerina then commits suicide, leaping after her victim into the freezing waters. So what was everyone laughing about?

Part of the humour comes from Dimitri Shostakovich's wonderful score. In the first act of *Lady MacBeth of Mtsensk*, currently on stage at the O'Keefe Centre, a furious and visible rape/loving scene ends with a sole trombone drawing out the deflation of rapist/lover Sergey's erection. Elsewhere the music is less successful; when Katerina's father-in-law brutally whips Sergey, the rhythmic wooden tic-tocs don't mirror the horror of what is happening.

Part of the humour in the Canadian Opera Company's production may have resulted from a translation that leaves the singers flinging out such less than immortal lines as "... you are the rat." and "... I am tired, get me some mushrooms to eat" and especially Sergey's line on the unexpected arrival of Katerina's husband: "Now we're really in shit!"

One might pretend that Russian opera comes out of a literary tradition that is kinder to melodrama and needs not explain how a nice protagonist has brought such misfortune upon herself. But one suspects that much of the problem lies at the feet of the director.

Shostakovich intended the work to show the horrible conditions of pre-revolutionary opera. Whether or not he was successful is debatable; Soviet leader Joseph Stalin made personal condemnations of the work in the pages of Pravda. Regardless, the director of this production failed

to provide the stifling sense of oppression that might have driven Katerina to strike out against the enslaving patriarchy.

The stage, rented from San Francisco, attempts to create a sense of this darkness through a collection of crude buildings made of dirty boards, dominated in one scene by a set of massive wooden scales. But the scales are never used in a metaphorical weighing of justice, and a conspicuously open room on stage right, was never used at all.

Some of the stage business, particularly with the chorus and the fight scene between the surprised lovers and Katerina's husband, was well choreographed but again failed to provide the darkness of the piece. The persecution scene in the police station was more like a mellow meeting of the Seven Dwarfs.

The music unintentionally stopped audience appreciation; as the curtain lowered at the end of each scene, the music welled up and those trying to listen hushed the applause of the rest. Annoying swarms of firefly flashlights lit up to check the program notes; there isn't a current recording of the opera in print, and most people are unfamiliar with the work. Even the fact that it was sung in English wasn't a help when so many words were lost or drowned out.

Despite its problems, there were some fine performances, particularly by Mary Jane Johnson in the role of Katerina. Conductor Richard Buckley was a joy to watch, his enthusiasm with the baton matching the power of the music.

Lady MacBeth of Mtsensk continues in repertoire with *The Merry Widow* until February 7th.

MUSIC

Tragically Hip
Tragically Hip

By DAVID BINSTED

When Gordon Downie sings in the opening song, "You're a top ten Kingpin in the borders of your hometown," he isn't just fantasizing about stardom. The debut album for the *Tragically Hip*, released on Rock Records, a subsidiary of RCA Records, is the number three selling album in Kingston this week, and the "Small Town Bring-down" debuted at number twenty-seven on the local top-fourty chart.

All this "hoopla" could be attributed to local support (similar to Glass Tiger in Newmarket), but after your first listen to the album, one gets the sense of a band destined for greater things.

The Tragically Hip are produced by Ken Greer of Red Rider fame, and their sound is classic Canadian rock (ie: Max Webster/Honeymoon Suite), combined with the feel of southern rock from United States (ie: Georgia Satellites). The sum is something which borders on pure originality.

Thematically, the album is fairly tame as girls lost love, and visions of success are the subjects that the band emphasized. But musically there is a wealth of talent of which The Hip are only beginning to realize.

The song "Killing Time" begins with a standard rock and roll attack, then casually eases into a melodically captivating conclusion, which becomes the band's trademark for the duration of the album. "Cemetery Sideroad" and "I'm a Werewolf, Baby" are competent space fillers, but the Tragically Hip come into their own on the closing track "Highway Girl," which belts out a three chord chorus with the ability to motivate anyone within earshot.

All in all, The Tragically Hip are a straight ahead rock and roll band

with aspirations certainly not out of their grasp. The album has been released nation wide as of January 15th.

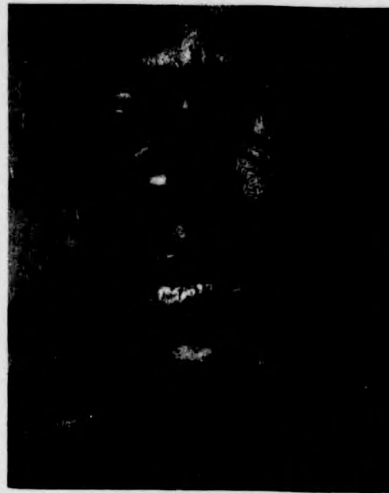
Siesta
Miles Davis

By PAT ANDERSON

It has become quite easy to discuss a new record by Miles Davis as just another fusion/funk excursion. But *Siesta*, music for a film of the same name, has proven to be the exception rather than the rule.

Most cuts present Miles soloing over pleasant flamenco guitars, bass clarinet, synth, and rat patrol drumming. The overall sound of the album is very reminiscent of the earlier *Sketches of Spain*. If you are familiar with Davis' work from this period (1959) you will undoubtedly recognize familiar elements in the new record.

Written, produced and almost entirely played by Marcus Miller on



The incomparable Miles Davis.

a variety of instruments, with a little help from Miles and a few others, *Siesta* is quite an accomplishment even though the drumming at times appears mechanical and programmed.

One wonders if Davis is embarking on a new direction in his multifaceted career. This, of course, may be a one-shot deal and after kudos have disappeared, the listener will once

more be inundated with a barrage of fusion music. The signs are there, however, that he is coming in from the cold, albeit, a very lucrative one. He has even dedicated the album to Gil Evans, "The Master," who was responsible for orchestrating *Miles Ahead*, *Porgy and Bess*, and *Sketches of Spain*—three notable early successes. This album is certainly worth listening to a few times even though it is not vintage Davis.

Burned
Hype

By J. KAY DESIGNS

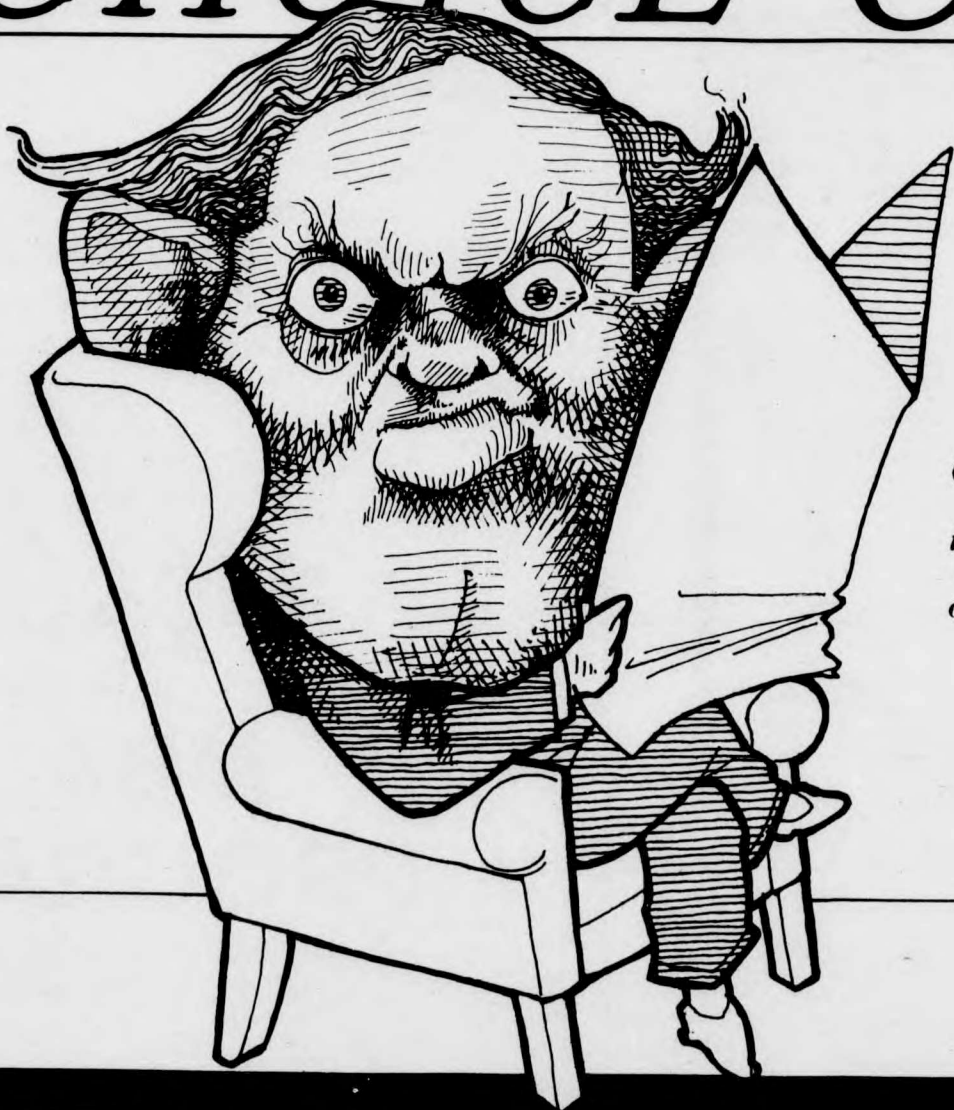
The original band Hype started out in 1983 and consisted of high-school-aged youngsters who recorded their first punk-rock album on an eight track in a basement. Since then the band has come a long way. Their most recent release, their second album *Burned* is a much slicker, better produced, and better packaged product.

After the release of the first album which, according to Hype guitarist John Barbisan, "no one really liked," he said and his younger brother Dave joined Hype to give a new edge to an otherwise "machine-like" sound. Barbisan, whose musical influences include classic rockers such as The Who and Led Zeppelin, used his style of playing to shape Hype's musical style to where it is today.

Independently, Hype pressed a modest 2000 copies of *Burned* which proved to be insufficient to meet demand. In the United States, album sales have already reached 2500 and calls for a second pressing of the disc to service Europe and elsewhere have already been made.

Reflecting on the role of the band in the punk scene today, Barbisan says that the bands is not in the hardcore scene at all. Hype is not a threatening band like many punk bands, and their persona is not so important to them either. Future plans for Hype include the release of another album and a tour throughout Europe this summer.

CHOICE · CRACKS



On reading that Randolph Churchill had been admitted to hospital for the removal of a non-malignant tumor, Evelyn Waugh remarked "How typical, that with all the advances in modern medicine they remove the one thing from Randolph Churchill that isn't malignant."



Generations past often cracked wise. So make the wisest crack of all. Crack a Pepsi and enjoy our series celebrating irreverent wit that endures.

