

ARTS

Ex Libris



by Geoffrey Jackson

A friend of mine has made the observation that in all of my writing for the *Gateway*, I have yet to produce a damning review. Reflecting upon this I realized that I have been rather free of the sort of venom normally associated with critics. I guess it stems from the fact that I never have possessed the sort of masochism necessary to read bad books or see bad films. What is more, I have developed a fine instinct for avoiding both.

But why should my illustrious editor be the only man who gets to vent his spleen at will? I have been missing out on all the fun. With such a bloodthirsty thought in mind I intend to take a run at my favourite over-rated author, Kurt Vonnegut.

Kurt Vonnegut: It seems, for some, that the literary world begins and ends with this man. This alone could be bearable if it were not for the flock of damnably cute imitators he has begotten. Something has to be done about it!

Let's take a case in point, his major opus, *Breakfast of Champions*. I first read this fairy tale for adults when I was in junior high school and at that time found it amusing. Years later I opened the cover again only to find the book a rather laboured, kitschy melodrama.

It tells the story of Kilgore Trout (Vonnegut's legendary, trashy science fiction writer) and his efforts to attend an arts festival in Midland City. It also tells us of Dwight Hoover, a man driven insane by one of Trout's stories, and Eddie Key, a hapless idiot negro, and Bunny, a homosexual piano player, and Bonnie, a breaststroke champion waitress, etc. etc. etc.

But this is misleading, the most important character in *Breakfast of Champions* is Kurt Vonnegut. He is throughout the work, digressing, offering observations, commenting upon the novel. He even goes so far as to place himself right into the action, graced with all the powers of a god-like narrator.

The book is profusely illustrated with allegedly whimsical drawings of such diverse subjects as beavers (of both kinds), assholes, dinosaurs, lambs, peas, ad infinitum. These sketches are supposed to full of childlike innocence and wisdom. I found them merely childlike.

Vonnegut gathers together his cast of weird characters, shakes them around, and records the results; all the while making self-deprecating comments. Superficially, it sounds clever, with all his playing with fiction and reality; pointing out how preconceived even the most spontaneous of fiction is.

But the novel lacks depth. Everything is so pat; the cast of freaks are all set and tidy, as real as comicbook heroes, and the fate they meet is very self-consciously inevitable. A book like this deserves, perhaps, a small cult audience; people who will appreciate it for its limited merits. It does not deserve to be acclaimed as a "great American novel". This sort of experimental stuff has been done before, and since, much better: Françoise Sagan's *Scars on the Soul* is one example, Kobo Abe's *The Box Man* is yet another.

I do not really dislike Vonnegut intensely. Some of his work, like *Slaughter House Five*, has some fine moments. I just think that his deliberately childish style of prose gets far more respect and admiration than it should.

And worse yet are the imitators he has spawned. If the likes of Tom Robbins or Richard Brautigan were to vanish from the book racks I certainly wouldn't lie awake at night with remorse. I suppose there is room for such pseudo-fairytale prose in our libraries but let's keep it in perspective. The thought of Kurt Vonnegut winning a Nobel prize for literature should make anyone feel uneasy.

Up and Coming

MUSIC

Doc Watson; SUB Theatre; Sunday Feb. 7; 7:00 and 9:45 p.m.; tickets at Mike's and SUB Box Office.

Well, it's not every day a musical legend comes to Edmonton. The concerts by this renowned country and bluegrass guitarist should be good.

Musician's Chamber Music Appreciation Society McDougall Church; Monday Feb. 8, 8:00 p.m.; tickets - \$4.00 (\$2.00 students).

The groups will be presenting quartets by Mozart (K 464 in A major), Britten (Phantasy quartet for oboe and strings), and Brahms (opus 51 no.2 in A minor).

GALLERIES

Photos by Theodore Saskatche Wan and Suzy Lake; SUB Art Gallery; Feb. 4 - March 7; Free admission.

From what I can tell from the press release, Wan takes pictures of himself dressed up as a patient in his "Hospital Series" of photos. Lake also takes pictures of herself in "self-portraits" which emphasize a position of vulnerability and

the photographic medium's potential for self-exposure.

Your guess is as good as mine.

Calgary Emerging Artists; Ring House Gallery; Feb. 4 - 28; admission free.

LOCAL ENTERTAINMENT

by Alex P. MacDonald

Entertainment Director

This weekend in Dinwoodie, Sat. Feb. 6, 1982 we have two bands. Informer and The Bing Jensen Band. Informer are a dance band. High Energy music enhanced with a strong keyboard influence. The Bing Jensen Band will open the evening. They are on the same track as Doug and the Slugs. Rife with parody and cynicism, the band's music and stage show is blatant but effective.

In RATT Feb. 4, 5, 6 (cover - \$2.00) we have Tom See and White Noise. Tom has done alot for blues in Edmonton although he doesn't write blues. Energy and a good stage presence are part of the show. The band is tight the sound is clean and bluesy at the same time. If you want some fun this weekend come to RATT.

My big show for the year is on Feb. 20. The Minglewood Band. Minglewood has been hitting the road for years. To many Maritimers, Minglewood is next to God. Their basis is blues, the premier is rock, but the approach very original. The band comes on hard and strong. Don't miss it: in Dinwoodie Sat. Feb. 20.

DIRECT DRIVE

James L. Stevens

The MeninBlack
THE STRANGLERS
(Stiff Canada) Attic Records RIP 2004

Although this LP was released last summer, I felt it deserved some mention. *The MeninBlack* ranges from bizarre to devastating in what it presents and how it presents it. The album still has the rumbling, crunchy bass sound that the band has had since 1974 and then some. Their sound has been enhanced by high-powered keyboard work and lots of staccato drumming. Cranking up the volume to play this music will really get the windows shaking and the peakers jumping.

The album starts off with "WaltzinBlack", a menacing and extremely unusual tune that is not meant to be played late at night when you are home alone. The music is haunting enough, being based on a carnival style tune with ominous overtones. Eventually the most outlandish vocal track is introduced. It has fantastic effect and I have yet to hear anything I can compare it to. It is followed by "Just Like Nothing On Earth", a pounding tune with a ripping bass line and, again, a very interesting and imaginative vocal track.

Then, after a mediocre cut, "Waiting For The Men In Black" pulsates into life. It is a very intense song with rhythmic keyboards and pounding drums. Side one closes with the instrumental "Turn The Centuries; Turn", which never reaches the climax it seems to be building towards. I found it to be a little disappointing when the music began to fade out and was still waiting for the tune to peak. It is unfortunate that side one ends this way, especially because side two begins with a mindless little ditty that I found easy to forget. The two best cuts from the second side were, from my point of view, "Thrown Away" and "Manna Machine", both of which are heavy with keyboard work and hooky bass lines.

Many may find this album - through its lyrics, its music, or both - to be somewhat depressing. Admittedly - it does have some 'heavy' lyrics and the music is not very up-beat, but I found the album to be great listening. It is not an album that I will soon tire of, due to its unique treatment of vocals and it's overpowering tone. If you are tired of the same old top 40 schlock, I would recommend this as a good album that you could sit down and give a listen to.

For Those About To Rock, We Salute You
AC/DC
(Atlantic Records)
WEA Music XSD 11111

The working-class simplicity with which AC/DC present themselves may seem mundane, but it is much more honest than most of the 'back to the roots' new wave outfits. Their entire album is played with three chords, played in the same key, and played at one speed, fast. It is power chord and guitar solo heaven; it is for those who want the heaviest metal money can buy.

The music virtually explodes off the vinyl. Each cut is ripped through with and awesome force that is generated by the savage guitar playing of Angus Young and is ferociously driven home by drummer Phil Rudd. *For Those About To Rock* is so heavy metal that it may just crash straight through your turntable.

The image is completed by the ranting and screeching of Brian Johnson, who would have us believe that he is actually singing. I bet that Wendy O. would have a tough time matching his incoherence.

The production and engineering on this LP is superior to their previous releases and makes it one of their better albums. I found the best cuts on the album to be "Put The Finger On You," "Inject The Venom", and the title track.

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got what it
takes...

there's no life like it.



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