

# John and Andrew's picks and pans of '96

John Andrew

**Best Album:** Beck/*Odelay*

**Worst Album:** *Hooked on Brown* (James Brown to dance music?)

**Best Concert:** Big Sugar (5th time, still going strong)

**Best Local Band:** Burnt Black

**Best Movie:** *Kingpin*/*Welcome to the Dollhouse*

**Worst Movie:** *Sgt. Bilko*

**Worst Trend:** Women with cigars

**Best Hangover/Recovery Spot:** My Couch

**Best Place to Get Smashed:** My Couch

**Best TV:** *The Simpsons* / *The trippy shit on YTV on Friday nights*

**Worst TV:** *Walker, Texas Ranger*

**Worst Thing About Dal:** Post 1965 architecture

**Best Thing About Dal:** The cheese

**Best Album:** Jamiroquai / *Travelling Without Moving*

**Worst Album:** *The Backstreet Boys* / *The Backstreet Boys*

**Best Concert:** Three Penny Opera at Birdland

**Best Local Band:** Huh?

**Best Movie:** *Trainspotting* (despite the hype)

**Worst Movie:** *Broken Arrow* (Christian Slater and John Travolta stink up the joint)

**Worst Trend:** Lounge

**Best Hangover/Recovery Spot:** The Fog City Diner

**Best Place to get Smashed:** I'm not particular

**Best TV:** *The Simpsons* / *MAD TV*

**Worst TV:** *X-Files* (I want to believe, but it just sucks)

**Worst Thing About Dal:** Too many humourless people

**Best Thing About Dal:** The Gazette Arts Section

# A family of secrets

*Mister Sandman*  
Barbara Gowdy  
Somerville House

Between the homosexuality of each parent, Doris and Gordon, the promiscuity of Marcia, and the seemingly simple Sonja, the Canary family is not your ordinary family. In Barbara Gowdy's novel *Mister Sandman*, the author easily finds humour in the double lives that the family members live and the secrets that they all keep from one another.

Gowdy kicks off the tale with the questionable and mysterious circumstances surrounding the birth of the Canary family's fifth member, Joan. Due to a head injury during birth, Joan is brain damaged. She doesn't speak, and rarely makes any attempt to communicate otherwise, only responding with the occasional animal sound. Despite her handicap, Joan proves to be extraordinarily intelligent and a wizard at the piano. Her quiet nature is disquieting and is constantly ques-

tioned by her family members, each of them realizing that Joan possesses powers they do not understand.

Although the plot revolves around Joan, her role throughout most of the novel is quite subtle. Instead, Gowdy plunges you into the lives of the other members, shocking us with the contrast between their double lives. Doris, the nervous and often loud housewife, is a hungry lesbian behind the scenes. Gordon, a caring husband and gentle father, reveals his secret and raging desire for men. Marcia, the school's whiz kid and all-around teacher's pet, has a risqué night life and soon realizes that she has "slept with so many boys [she has] lost count!" And then there is Sonja, who seems content and simpleminded, but who actually holds the key to Joan's creation. I must also mention Al Yothers, a youthful man with "gorilla nostrils" who plays a larger role in propelling the Canary's destiny than any one of the family members realize.

Gowdy cleverly takes you on a journey that holds your attention throughout. The Canary family eases you into their life, as the novel switches smoothly from family member to family member. At first, I thought I was in the know since I was trusted with a secret right from the opening — I was soon proven wrong. Bit by bit each family member tells you their tale, adding to their colourful pasts and revealing their most intimate thoughts. Gowdy uses this to build up to the nail-biting climax. You unknowingly end up rooting for the family, to not let their scandalous secrets tear them apart.

Gowdy masterfully weaves the web of this family's tale, keeping it hilarious and painfully honest from beginning to end. If any of you out there are looking for a light read with an addictive plot and wonderfully colourful characters, *Mister Sandman* will definitely satisfy your craving.

KAVERI GUPTA

# Credit where credit is due

Avacost  
Birdland Cabaret  
December 19, 1996

I have heard so much about this talented local band and at last I had a chance to see them when they played at Birdland over the Christmas break. It was an incredibly wet and windy Thursday night when I made my way downtown to see this quartet.

A fairly small crowd first saw an acoustic set by John Duggan, a friend of the band. He sang three songs by himself before being joined on stage by Avacost singer Peter Hubley. They did mostly cover songs like the Simon and Garfunkel classic "Mrs. Robinson" and the Beatles' "Help". Unfortunately their set lasted too long, nearly putting some of the crowd to sleep. It just went on too long without enough excitement.

Avacost would soon change that. They made the bar come alive. They must be one of the

most talented bands in Halifax. All four members — vocalist and guitarist Peter Hubley, drummer Mark Graves, bassist Christopher Warren Robert — know how to play their instruments and put on a fine show. For two hours they blasted out tunes from their lengthy back catalogue, including songs off their CD *A Peace of the Sky* like "Head Space", "Concurrence" and their opening song, "Aurora Borealis".

Their sound reminds me of bands like Yes and Rush, with vocalist Peter Hubley giving it everything he had. Everyone moved and grooved on stage, while the crowd helped Warren Robert celebrate his birthday with a rendition of "Happy Birthday". Robert is extremely gifted as the guitarist who has several unique talents, including the ability to make his guitar give out a saxophone type noise. But I could not get over the fact that Warren reminded me of a chicken. As he

played he moved about on stage constantly making funny faces. The best moment of the night was Mark Grave's drum solo. This was the first time I have ever seen anyone do a drum solo at Birdland (there are very few bands in the city who would be able to pull it off). Avacost deserve credit for trying when few bands would.

The band does have some problems that need to change if they want to become more successful and commercial. They appear to rely on their talent so much that a lot of their material suffers and they often stretch out their songs. For example, one of their epic-sounding and lasting songs, "Saturn", lasted nearly 25 minutes. It was difficult to pay full attention when listening to songs of this length, but overall the guys put their heart and soul into the show and next time they are playing downtown I'll be there to see them.

STUART MCMILLAN

**70s**

On January 25th, the Gazette is turning back the clock and turning up the volume - and you're invited. So turn up your butterfly collar and get ready to get down!