

# Petra - Unseen Power



In my January 17 commentary on Chagall Guevara, I described Petra as ignoring their roots as a work of acoustic art and "evolving into Nelson." Needless to say, I wasn't being altogether kind. Listen up, because never again will you hear me say this about a published commentary: I TAKE IT BACK and I'd like to publicly apologize to Petra for the insult. Petra, however, is a highly metamorphic and evolutionary entity. Every album is different and one needs a historical perspective to fully evaluate their current position, therefore:

The band started out in 1972 as a melodically mellow yet lyrically lackluster coffeehouse three-piece with Bob Hartman as vocalist. Eventually, in three very wise moves, they ditched Hartman as singer, acquired a keyboardist and secured vocalist Greg X. Volz. Amidst (and potentially because of) these transformations, the credits of Petra's albums since 1976 turned into fruit flies: when one dropped, another one or two, usually named John, popped up.

In 1984, a failed attempt to make Christian music more mainstream was taking place and Petra became a part of it. The Christ was taken out of their aural Christianity and the Kraftwerk-like, lyrically wimpy *Beat The System* was the result. After a world tour, a live album was released which marked the end of Greg X. Volz's direct involvement with Petra.

Upon Volz's resignation, a brand new vocalist was found. John Schlitt, first heard on *Back To The Street*, provided a refreshing contrast to Volz, whose voice is deeper (although his falsetto-squeaks provided occasional contrast) and much less prone than Schlitt's to imitate Rod Stewart.

Coupled with the then-relatively recent acquisition of John Lawry as keyboardist, Bob Hartman had some major adjustments to make in his writing. The tendency to show off both Lawry's prowess and the return to gospel-preaching lyrics lend a quality to their work that the group had never before encountered: BUBBLEGUM. Hartman turned out some brilliant ballads, but the fact is that Petra is NOT a ballad band, and they had to come to realize this over the course of four albums (not counting *Petra Praise: The Rock Cries Out.*) The 1990 release of *Beyond Belief* showed a return to hard rock, but, despite its becoming a classic amongst adolescents everywhere (for example, if you play it at Green Hill Lake Camp, everybody within a twelve-mile radius will be singing along by "Creed"), by the fourth track, something special was evidently missing.

*Unseen Power* has managed to clinch that something. Every single song is eminently superior to its counterparts in Petra history. In fact, there are some new items that are very different, but seem to be just what Petra was missing: the fusion of rock and Southern gospel in "Who's On The Lord's Side" has proven itself an ideal child; "Hey World," a new anthem for the Compassion International third-world children's charity, is Petra's first flawless yet non-overproduced-sounding ballad; and "Dance," an infectious and catchy bop, will go down in history as the dance music Amy Grant should have had recorded for her kid to boogie to in the first place. Even the ballads come off sounding correct and uncontrived.

A refocusing has obviously taken place in the music. Bob Hartman has finally taken some time off from writing everything in sight as he has on most of the albums, which has given him more liberty to write higher quality songs. This has put Hartman in the position of having to come up with equally illustrious lyrics, a position which he has ever so eloquently filled. The messages are much clearer than on *Beat The System*, but much less overt and dull than on the first few albums. There is, however, some difference in style evident. The John Elefante/Hartman songs have a harder yet highly melodic edge (with the exception of the ballad "Hand On My Heart"), while the purely Hartman songs, while maintaining a certain element of the Elefante efforts, have more of a vertical slant than a horizontal one. In addition, two songs are missing Hartman's hand entirely: "Who's On The Lord's Side" is by a Rev. Timothy Wright, and John Lawry's fine work is on display in the mellifluous, fluid ballad "In The Likeness Of You."

Amidst all of this experimentation, the band holds up remarkably well. Schlitt's voice, though highly abused, performs far more than adequately, giving Rod Stewart and Bryan Adams a run for their money, and the musicians complement one another but never dominate each other.

It took Petra twenty years to create a forty-one minute, forty-one second masterpiece. Happy birthday, fellas. You've given yourselves and the world the best possible birthday present you could ever give. God love ya.

commentary by Beverley R. White

# Happenings

Still on display at the **UNB Art Centre** this coming week (until Feb 12) are the two exhibits *Re-Emergence* (Craig Schneider's 15 clay sculptures incorporating found objects and trash), and R.M. Vaughan's *Decorative Flair*, a series of collages and paintings exploring pop culture. Also at the Art Centre, on February 6th at 7:30pm, a film entitled *Projections: Krzysztof Wodiczko* will be presented. The film discusses the work of this Polish born Canadian Artist. A panel discussion will follow the presentation of the film, and the public is invited to take part in this. Admission is free. As well, during the months of February and March, the Art Centre will be hosting the Canada wide travelling exhibition called *The White Line*, a series of 73 wood engravings by 32 Canadian artists covering the period 1945-1990. The White Line opens on February 16 at 2:00 pm. The UNB Art Centre is open weekdays from 9:00am to 5:00 pm and on Sundays from 2-4pm. (Located at Memorial Hall on the UNB campus).

**Theatre St. Thomas's** production of *Cloud 9* opens tonight (Friday, January 31) at 8pm in the Ted Daigle Auditorium, Edmund Casey Hall, STU, and runs until February 8th. The play is a controversial look at relationships between men and women, men and men, and women and women. Director Ilkay Silk says "It's also about sex, work, mothers, Africa, power, children, grandmothers, politics, money and-if you're ready for this--Queen Victoria." Tickets for the production of *Cloud 9* are \$6 general admission and \$5 for students. *Get out and see some real entertainment for a change, people - it's on for a week - ed.* Also up the hill, it's **Creative Writing Week** at STU (Mon, Feb 3rd to Sat, Feb 8th). St. Thomas students and members of the Fredericton Community are being invited to take part in a postcard writing contest that focuses on the theme of love. All you have to do is come up with a story about love that will fit on the back of a postcard (limit of 150 words). Entry deadline is February 7, and winners will be announced on Valentine's Day. The week will also include public lectures and workshops - for more information please contact Patricia Thornton, department of English, at 452-0644 or Mari Giberson, public relations, at 452-0521.

**Gallery Connexion** has a busy slate this month. On February 1st, at 8pm, Montreal flutist and composer **Don Druik** will be performing. The recipient of eight Canada Council grants in performance art, music, and video, Druik has also been resident artist at the Banff Centre, Concordia University, and NSCAD. Also at Connexion, an exhibition entitled *Inside-Out* by Montrealer **Natalie Jean** opens on February 2nd at 2pm. Jean brings together the related idioms of sound, image, and movement. She will be performing at the opening. As well, the nationally recognized installation artist **Jamelie Hassan** will be speaking about her work on Thursday, Feb 6th at 12:30pm. Her juxtapositions of photographs, ceramics, drawing, text, video and appropriated objects prompt new readings of many established beliefs. Gallery Connexion is located behind the Justice Building on Queen and York, and is open Tues-Fri 12-4pm, and on Sundays from 2-4pm.

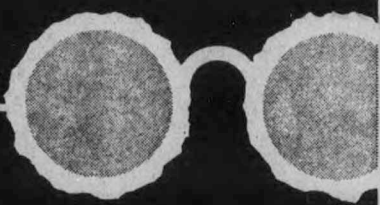
Friday, January 31st at 7:30pm sees the **Banff Festival of Mountain Films** presenting "Best of the Festival", a film fest showcasing some of the year's best mountain and adventure films. Over three hours of film, from mountaineering and kayaking to environmental and wilderness themes. Tickets to this lively and unique event will be available at the door (McLaggen Hall rm 105), starting at 7pm. Admission is \$10 (\$8 for students with ID). All proceeds go to the **UNB Rock and Ice Club**.

The **Overseas Chinese Students Association** presents its *Chinese New Year Banquet* on February 1st (Saturday) at 6:00pm in the SUB. Come enjoy the sights and sounds of China in this gala evening celebrating the Chinese New Year. Tickets are \$9 member/ \$10 non-member/ \$5 children, and \$11 at the door.



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"Remember to store condoms in the freezer when you're not using them!"

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