

Hanif Kureishi's Buddha: all that Raj

by Simon Chung

Now that children of the '70s have grown up to become today's songwriters, designers and authors, we are suddenly overwhelmed by assorted rehashes of the era: sideburns, pseudo-psychedelia (a la Lenny Kravitz), Lady Miss Kier's platform shoes. All of a sudden the decade once considered a drab hangover seems anything but boring.

The decade is also starting to make its appearance in literature as a new generation of writers pen their first novels — often based on childhood or adolescent experiences. Hanif Kureishi has done just that in his first novel (just released in paperback), *The Buddha of Suburbia*.

Best known for his brilliantly acerbic screenplays *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, Kureishi again examines the English-born Indian in this deliciously witty novel. Unlike the two screenplays, both set in Thatcher's England, *Buddha* uses mid-seventies London as its backdrop.

The protagonist Karim Amir is born of an Indian father and an English mother (like Kureishi himself), and grows up in the suburbs of South London. As the book begins we find Karim bored out of his mind with the stagnancy of the suburbs, unaware that his life is about to change forever.

The first sign comes from his father, a non-practising Muslim civil servant who suddenly becomes an avid Buddhist. The reason for this apostasy is soon apparent: he has been invited by the charismatic and upwardly mobile Eva to lecture to her social group on the mysteries of transcendental meditation. When, inevitably, Dad falls in love with Eva — and Karim in lust with her son Charlie — his secure suburban home is doomed.

From South London our picaresque hero then ventures forth

book

The Buddha of Suburbia
written by Hanif Kureishi
published by Viking Books
284 pages, \$11.95

into post-swing London, where he encounters a motley assortment of colourful characters — including Charlie, an unsuccessful rocker who literally jumps on the punk bandwagon at the first opportunity and finds phenomenal success in America after changing his name to Charlie Hero. Sounds suspiciously like Billy Idol, doesn't it?

There is also the shallow and pretentious theatre director, tellingly named Shadwell. Shadwell casts Karim in a West End production of *The Jungle Book* as the Indian boy Mowgli, complete with loincloth and phoney accent.

Despite his adventures, Karim remains essentially unhappy and confused. And who can blame him? Added to the usual chaos of teenagehood and the ordeal of a broken home is the difficulty of growing up in racist England. Born and bred in South London, Karim is, in his mind, just as English as the Queen (who, after all, is German); but to the English he is merely a "paki" and a "nigger."

Racism is rampant in Kureishi's England. Every day at school (before he stops going), Karim is lucky if his schoolmates let him leave with a few minor flesh wounds. And there is the father who won't let Karim date his lily-white daughter. Racism also comes in subtler forms: the way Shadwell embarrasses Karim by making him put on an Indian accent.

Indians have been affected by two hundred years of colonialism. Even today, forty years after the collapse of the British Raj, culture is still defined by many Indians as how much Shakespeare one knows. At one point in *Buddha* a new ar-



rival from Bombay announces he is into "the classics."

"You don't mean that Greek shit? Virgil or Dante or Homo or something?" Karim inquires. The reply: "P.G. Woodhouse and Conan Doyle for me!"

Curiously enough, one of the few Indian characters who seems truly at peace is Karim's father, the

Buddha of suburbia, whose interest in eastern philosophy turns out to be genuine. Transplanted to a foreign clime, he returns philosophically to the mystic East and finds solace there. There are even disciples who flock to him for advice, all of them lost suburban souls.

In a way that's what the '70s were all about: that ceaseless and

desperate search for identity and meaning which eventually degenerated into the nihilistic anger of punk.

Through the rootless and confused Karim, Kureishi allows us to experience that equally rootless and confused era. It is as evocative of the '70s as his two screenplays were of Thatcher's years.

MWH is OK, OMD is DOA

By Ira Nayman

music

Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark
Sugar Tax
Virgin Records
Men Without Hats
Sideways
Polygram Records

surprisingly good pop with a hard guitar edge.

Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark, by way of contrast, has approached the problem of the diminishing interest in synth-pop by renewing their commitment to it.

"Sailing on the Seven Seas," the first single off their latest cassette *Sugar tax*, is a catchy little pop tune with a good beat and a so-so hook.

"Pandora's Box (It's a Long Long Way)," the second single, is a catchy little pop tune with a good beat and a so-so hook.

"Then You Turn Away," the third cut on the cassette, is a catchy little

pop tune with a good — well, you get the idea.

The angst isn't typically teenage, although love is its main object (for a band that sings so often about love, OMD has surprisingly little that is original to say on the subject). Even a song which attempts something different, like "Pandora's Box" — based on a true story of an actress who, after some success in the 1930s, died obscure and penniless in the 1980s — is undercut by an unsophisticated approach and lack of empathy for its subject.

The only track of more than passing interest is "Apollo XI," which is a sampling of the technobabble of Mission Control in Houston, so familiar to those of us who grew up with the Moon launches of the 60s. Unfortunately, one interesting song does not an album make.

If you were a synthesizer band in the eighties, how would you cope with the musical realities of the nineties? Synthesizer music has been overtaken and largely replaced by samplers and "back to basics" movements — the "new folkies" — have made synth-based music largely redundant.

Recent releases by two former synth bands offer different solutions to this problem.

Montreal's Men Without Hats has approached the diminishing popularity of synthesized music by abandoning the instrument entirely, replacing it with a heavy whirl of guitars. Their latest cassette *Sideways* is ragged and full of jangling rough edges, a departure from the smooth sounds of their seminal work *Folk of the Eighties, Part III*.

In a way, MWH has offered an inadvertent critique of the whole synth-pop movement. Instrumentals off the recent album, especially "The Van Der Graaf Generation Blues" and "Harry Crews" are energetic and can be appreciated for their obvious connection to real musicians.

An older instrumental like "Eurotheme" on the other hand is efficient and somewhat soulless (like the technology which created it); it can be appreciated for its craft, but it's not emotionally compelling.

Despite the band's change of direction, *Sideways* manages to keep the best aspects of MWH, particularly Ivan Doroschuk's provocative and often funny lyrics. A song like "Everybody Wants To Know" (what life's about) is not profound, but it does offer something more than teen angst. "KENBARBIELOVE" is an interesting mix of religion, drugs and plastique love.

Sideways is marred by a totally unnecessary cover of "I Am the Walrus" and a general devotion to The Beatles ("KENBARBIELOVE" — "Can't Buy Me Love" — get it?). But it is



This is a test. For the next 60 seconds, stare into the mystical pattern and tell us how you feel about synthesized music. This was a test. If this had really been 1985, bands like OMD would still make sense.

Fear Under the Umbrella

by Stephen Balsky

Under the Umbrella is a collection of nine plays, late-night cabarets and readings by writers and actors from their own works. The series has three alternating programs and is sponsored in part by CHRY, York's radio station.

The one-act plays are complex, creative, intense and, most important, dark. They touch upon human fears and horrors ranging from wife-beating to insanity.

Chaotic outlines the traumas experienced by various patients of an emotive psychiatrist. Each character spews forth emotional and mental problems in lengthy soliloquies; dark lighting accents the dreary mood.

Chaotic sports the best performances in the series, which compensates for any shortcomings in the plot.

Veronika Hurnik is mesmerizing as an obsessive woman with a death wish for an unfaithful boyfriend. Her monologue is so convincing that one shudders at her words.

Equally good is Martha Ferguson as a sexually frustrated woman who uses temptation to fulfil an otherwise empty life. She is perfectly sultry and steamy, yet able to reflect the troubled woman inside. Ferguson masterfully pulls off a difficult role.

Director Jordan Patterson's innovative lighting and blocking add to the intensity of the play.

theatre

Under the Umbrella
written and directed by various artists
Theatre Centre

Ladies Dance Hall is equally dark and brooding, although it doesn't display the energy or dramatic range of *Chaotic*.

In this play, a submissive wife named Honey is dominated by her brutish, savage husband, Dick, who not only orders her around but beats her into performing sex with him.

Her only solace is to hang out at a swinging singles club, where she befriends a rebellious lesbian, Athena, who aids her in her crusade against her abusive husband.

Lee Bari, who plays Honey, is only mildly convincing — her performance seems forced. When she complains of the mess her life has become, she does not effectively evoke pathos. Likewise, Leslie Kelly isn't totally convincing as the extroverted dancehall; her hatred for men seems contrived.

Ladies Dance Hall does effectively use music. Whether it is the bouncy beat of techno-pop or the ragged, raspy voice of Janis Joplin, the tunes are more reflective of the mood than the characters.

The Under the Umbrella festival runs until August 4 at the Theatre Centre. For more information, call 348-0394.