

# Curmudgeon Quebecer takes on uptight Ontario

By Margaret Heading

Did Greg Gatenby plan these two opposites to read back to back for a reason, or was it just a happy accident?

Another question: When you've got a giant like Mordecai Richler who, let's face it, everybody came to see, why bother having anybody else up to read at all?

Last Tuesday night I went to my first reading at Harbourfront. Something I've been pointedly avoiding for a long time. Instinct told me that because it's writing and writers and 'littrachah,' the audience and the tilt of the evening might be fussy, precocious and very cerebral. It came dangerously close to that Tuesday night.

Greg Gatenby opened the evening doing stand up advertising for all the folks slotted to read at Harbourfront in the weeks to come. So while Gatenby is flapping his gums at the podium, I'm watching Mordecai who has come in to the Premier Dance Theatre just like everybody else and taken his seat like any one of us, only he's got a glass of ice water. Ice water? Yes Mordecai - you're in Ontario now and there's no smoking either.

Okay. We're all clapping now. Alice Boissonneau, a pretty woman in her fifties with unapologetic greying long hair arranged eccentrically, is walking daintily across the stage to begin reading from her new book. There is no hello from her, no acknowledgment that she is about to share an intimate moment with hundreds of people. She clears her throat, fiddles for a moment and then begins to read in the voice of a retired teacher.

Each of her sentences ends in a period that tells you: "Don't go anywhere, I'm not finished yet."

Alice Boissonneau's book is one long, long list of what has gone from Toronto. It's an exercise in descriptive writing that could have used a tad more editing.

There are a few charming stories, but for the most part, Alice takes us on a tour of Toronto in the 50s by stringing together quaint similes: "She smiles brightly, like a rippling stream men fish in," and "Her clothes were crumpled, like a pile of dirty laundry," or "There she is waiting, like a dream that..." Blah blah like a blah blah blah.

I'm thinking, maybe I'm too hard on this woman, too excited to see Mordecai. So, I turn to the fellow sitting next to me to say something

## READING

**Harbourfront Reading Series**  
Alice Boissonneau and  
Mordecai Richler  
Harbourfront  
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like, "Some writers should not read their own stuff" - but he's asleep.

I turn my attention to Mordecai. He's all over the place in his seat - left foot over right knee, right foot over left knee, sitting forward, sitting back, head cocked left, right, front and centre, thumbs twiddling or tapping against lower lip, now bending over for more water, now sitting back again. He smokes and he likes a drink, but this is Ontario. No smoking, no drinking. Just sit there like you're in class and be good.

Why do I mention it? Because this man is often photographed with his big fat cigar and a drink - tools of his trade. Because I'll just bet Alice Boissonneau does not smoke or drink anything stronger than spritzers. Because somehow this smoking/drinking issue seems to represent one of the vital differences between Ontario and Quebec. In one corner Alice represents Ontario with her book about Toronto, and over in this corner, Mordecai, with his book about Quebec.

And finally, because as a smoker, drinker, writer, and out loud reader, it can't be easy sitting there with a glass of water knowing you're next. You're next, no matter what you've written but in this particular case, the natives could be hostile. Get the picture?

Just as suddenly as she began reading, Alice is finished. Intermission. A



Mordecai Richler dropped by Harborfront last month to sample pure Ontario air and water and read from his new book, *Oh Canada, Oh Quebec*.

lot of us go directly to the designated area for a drink and a cigarette.

Mordecai heads backstage. Fifteen minutes later we all file

back in for round two and Greg Gatenby does it again. More advertising. I barely hear him. A voice inside is screeching "Shut up! Shut up and get Mordecai up!"

I turn my gaze back to Mordecai. Okay, the jacket's coming off. The sleeves are getting rolled up. The glasses come off and go back on again. Finally, at long last, Greg Gatenby is introducing Mordecai and telling us he will read for twenty minutes, then there will be a question period. "Questions," he cautions, "not statements." So we're all yuk yukking as Mordecai lumbers across the stage to the podium with his book in one hand and his glasses in the other. He looks tired, his clothes are rumpled, like a... no, I won't do that to you.

The old pro begins with a hello and a disparaging comment about all the attention he's been getting lately. He's warmed us up and launches into reading from the first pages of his book, *Oh Canada, Oh Quebec*. It's about language laws turning into foolishness, the boys drinking and smoking in Woody's bar, taking a light approach to what should be done in Quebec, and a very funny story about Sinclair Stevens and his wife Noreen.

Those few pages are hysterical and all he's really doing is quoting other people. Plain and simple. Mordecai's getting all the laughs and taking all the flak when in fact it's the folks like Noreen and Stink - oops, he means Sine Stevens, and the boys at Woody's who are saying all the funny stuff.

Ah, but it's the tone of voice isn't it? You can say anything but it's the tone of voice that's telling the story and that's what gets Mordecai in trouble. The gimlet eye and the, "get this will ya," tone of voice.

## Landing: Looking to the skies for inner peace

by Ira Nayman

### F I L M

**In Advance of the Landing**  
written and directed by Dan Curtis  
produced by Cygnus Inc.

Curtis explores the world of UFO believers, from the guy who has turned his house into a mass of machinery in order to beam radio signals into outer space to the followers of Uriel, a 90 year-old woman who claims to have contacted aliens in past lives. By avoiding voice-over narration, Curtis

allows them to tell their stories in a non-judgmental way.

Unfortunately, you'll find your attention wandering after the first hour or so, because the different stories are actually the same story in different guise. All of the UFOlogists seem to be searching for meaning, for something that will elevate their humdrum lives.

Curtis' analysis of the UFO phenomenon seems deadly accurate: even as the world seems to degenerate into chaos, these people hope that the aliens will bring with them a much yearned

for plan for order. It is no coincidence that Uriel's Uranius Academy of Science believes in changing the world through Buddhist-like chanting, or other UFO enthusiasts talk about aliens in messianic terms.

Moreover, many of the sincerest UFO believers are widowers and loners; the guy with the radio equipment, for instance, poignantly says that his obsession with UFOs has made it more difficult for him to attract women. At its most basic, the need to believe in UFOs seems to be a need to make a meaningful connection with another being.

Curtis uses clips of old science fiction horror films, where the aliens are portrayed as ugly and evil, as an ironic counterpoint to his subjects' more hopeful attitude. Although it is an interesting device in the beginning, it soon becomes overused. Curtis might have done better if he had utilised some of the films which portray aliens as messiahs: from *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (clips of which are shown out of context) to *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *ET*.

*In Advance of the Landing* would also have been a better film if Curtis had included an interview with a UFO debunker, somebody who is skeptical about the existence of UFOS, or at least a sociologist who could explain why people need to believe so badly. Not only would a little bit of controversy have made the film inherently more interesting, but it would have broken up the pro-UFO testimonials, helping the film flow better.

As currently conceived, *In Advance of the Landing* would have made a better hour long television special than feature length film. But that hour is fascinating.

*In Advance of the Landing* will be screened at the Revue Cinema from June 16 to 18. For more information, check Festival Magazine or phone the theatre at 531-9959.

## Charlatans are destined to be this generation's Smiths

By Prasad Bidaye

After a troubling year of guitarist changes, nervous breakdowns and post-Madchester dis-hype, The Charlatans return this spring with their second album, *Between 10th and 11th*, an exciting release determined to destroy their reputation as a retro-organ band.

Keyboardist Rob Collins overcomes his Hammond handicap and experiments with early moog twiddles, pedal-grunge enhanced organs and midi-piano loops. New guitarist Mark Collins proudly distinguishes himself with innovative melodies that equally complement the keyboards.

This is not the same band that debuted with the repetitive *Some Friendly* two years ago. One wonders what actually happened between the 10th and 11th.

Producer Flood may adequately answer that, who's list of gems include Depeche Mode, Nitzer Ebb, Curve, and now The Charlatans. In

## REVIEW

**The Charlatans UK**  
Between 10th and 11th  
Polygram Records

former projects he demonstrated an ability to bring out a crispness and precision from the client, that leads to perhaps a near-perfect recording.

On *Between 10th and 11th*, the drums are played sharp, bringing forth rhythms that do not necessarily lean on the funky drummer ethic. Performances on "Subtitle" and "Tremolo Song" stand out in particular. Similarly, Tim Burgess' vocals are clear and reverb-less, to prove that the wispy pretty boy can sing, and for that matter, write.

The Charlatans are destined to be one of the great bands for this generation, as The Smiths and New Order were for theirs. But it's always funny to see a band so marvelously hyped put out a brilliant album when they're almost forgotten.



The 90 year old founder of Uriel's Uranius Academy of Science claims to have been contacted by aliens in her past lives. She may also be the only person alive who knows where Elvis is.