

York grad starts new national magazine

By DAVID McCAUGHNA

Alex Cramer, who graduated from York last spring, played a vital part in campus journalism during the two years he was a student here. He wrote extensively for EXCALIBUR and the various college papers, and last year founded and edited York's short-lived journey into creative journalism, THE SEER. He was a founder and co-editor of Toronto's underground paper HARRINGER. This summer he worked on The Globe and Mail.

Alex Cramer is on the brink of bringing out a new paper, EGG, that will have national distribution. In this interview, which took place last week at his Spadina Rd. flat, he explains why he is starting a new Canadian magazine.

EXCALIBUR: What kind of a magazine will EGG be?

CRAMER: It will be a hip paper, a paper primarily for young, open-minded people that is different from the daily press and the mass media. In Canada there is a large audience of people who don't believe everything they read in the mass media.

In all the papers and magazines of the mass-media you get one side of the picture. This is partly because of the pressure of advertisers and because middle-aged editors have lost touch with people under 30 and what they are doing. There is coverage of hip things but it is distorted. Sure, Life magazine will put out a special on the Woodstock Festival but that doesn't mean that they really understand what Woodstock means but rather they figure they can sell a special.

EXCALIBUR: In other words they simply cash in on the hip bit?

CRAMER: That's right. The writers we have are more in tune with what's happening. These people are young writers from the dailies and some of the best people from the universities and the underground. There are certain subjects that are taboo in the mass media. For us there isn't any subject that we're afraid to tackle. Advertisers will have absolutely no control over editorial content.

EXCALIBUR: What kind of articles are in the first issue?

CRAMER: There will be an interview with playwright John Herbert, a lengthy interview with Robbie Robertson of The Band, an article on beauty contests, one on a 326 lb. topless go-go girl, and a lot more.

EXCALIBUR: The picture for national Canadian magazines and papers has always been quite bleak. Do you think EGG has a good chance of succeeding?

CRAMER: I think the chances are good. We were lucky as we managed to get a national distributor so that the paper will be on sale in newsstands from coast to coast. We are coming out on newspaper format so the expenses aren't huge. For our type of readers I don't think it matters that we are not slick. What we are selling is content and not a bunch of glossy photos.

EXCALIBUR: Would you call EGG an underground paper?

CRAMER: In a sense ya, but the word underground connotes amateurish crappy articles about peoples' acid

trips. There are a lot of shitty underground papers just as there are a lot of shitty underground films. A great many amateurs who aren't very good use the underground label to excuse their lack of professionalism. We are underground in the sense that we will be dealing with ideas and stories which the aboveground press are afraid to touch.

Basically what we are trying to model ourselves on is a cross between the Village Voice and the Rolling Stone. These papers are considered the best in the States.

EXCALIBUR: That's a very big order.

CRAMER: Ya it is, but over the years I've contacted some of the best young writers and I think we can pull it off.

EXCALIBUR: Who do you consider to be the best writers in Canadian journalism?

CRAMER: In Canada I really dig Peter Gzowski, Robert Fulford, and Mordecai Richler. Richler really knocks me out; I thought his last piece in Weekend was fantastic. In the States I dig Tom Wolfe, Richard Goldstein and quite a few of the writers on Rolling Stone. I also like a lot of the writers on New York. Although generally I don't dig slick commercial magazines, I think New York is the best there is. Young writers can learn from these people.

EXCALIBUR: You worked on The Globe this summer; what did you learn from that?

CRAMER: I learned how certain articles are taboo. I learned that all writers have to slant their articles for the Establishment press to the point where the piece has absolutely no meaning; It's just a piece of shit. On the one hand they seem to offer a possibility of a satisfying career in journalism but they make you prostitute yourself.

Young writers starting on these papers are willing to compromise but the papers want you to produce everything on their terms, they're not willing to give in at all. They want everything 100 per cent on their terms; the young writer quickly becomes a hack.

The funny thing is that the newspapers are full of young writers who are 'radicals' but what the papers do is dampen their radicalism and channel all their creative energies into producing shit that justifies the status quo. Like at The Globe, they will take the young writers into the editorial board meetings and show you how "democratically" the whole thing is done; their implication is that the young reporter will someday become a top editor and wield all this journalistic power.

EXCALIBUR: You left to avoid all this?

CRAMER: Yes. I realised that at 26 I really only have a couple of years of creative powers left and if I stuck on The Globe I would calcify my ideas. I think that most young writers are at their peak in their mid-twenties and they need a lot of freedom if they are going to produce their best stuff.

EXCALIBUR: What future do you see for the young Canadian writer?

CRAMER: I think that the basic role of the young Canadian writer is to show that the Canada depicted by Nancy Greene, Expo and The National Arts Centre, is a myth. I



Alex Cramer

mean, most Canadians are afraid to ask themselves fundamental questions about their country.

EXCALIBUR: How did you take to your two years at York?

CRAMER: York is a joke. The problem with York is that you get a lot of professors doing such pedantic research and studies and they still think of themselves as intellectuals. Many of the students who go there think that college life is going to be exactly like an old Fred MacMurray-Virginia Mayo movie and the funny thing is that they try and re-enact it. That is what they're trying to do with their football teams, their stadiums and their big buildings.

EXCALIBUR: Why did you start THE SEER last year?

CRAMER: Because I thought that EXCALIBUR wasn't asking the questions that should be asked. I wanted a paper that looked as much outside the university as it dealt with campus life.

This kind of pertains to hipness and the way the mass media tries to merchandise hipness. Their definition of hipness is the superficiality of it — the granny glasses, the bells, the posters — they don't understand that there is something behind this. Anyone can buy hipness at a boutique, if you've got the bread.

One theme I was constantly dealing with in THE SEER was this artificiality. Because students are short-changed. If these students want to be hip then they have to get into Godard, Bergman, Mayall, Genet, and all the others. The problem is that the mass media treats artists like these as mere fads — one year they're in, the next year they're out, even though they are producing great stuff.

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Cast reads like the cinema's who's who

A Lovely War combines vaudeville with satire

By STEVAN JOVANOVIĆ
Oh! What A Lovely War is, on one level, a musical, quasi-vaudevillian excursion through World



French colonel (Jean Pierre Cassel) happily leads his musical comedy cavalry off to be slaughtered.

War One. On another level the movie becomes a piece of anti-war propaganda and satire of the same order as Lester's How I Won The War.

There is no distinct story line in Oh! What A Lovely War unless you consider World War One as a story. However, Richard Attenborough's production hangs together with several pervasive themes.

The movie finds its continuity in the literal interpretation of several metaphors commonly applied to war. Literally, a war theatre is presented. The war also becomes a game, complete with scoreboard. The war is presented as a circus midway with an officer appropriately selling tickets and manning such games as shooting galleries. Each of the countries involved in the war is personified by a leader who keeps us posted on his country's actions at numerous elegant soirees.

The cast of Oh! What A Lovely War reads like a who's who in the history of cinema. Some of the stars include Laurence Olivier, Vanessa Redgrave, John Mills, John Gielgud and others. However, in the same manner as The Longest Day, none of the stars are really allowed to develop their characters although they all do excellent cameos.

Among the stars, Maggie Smith deserves a special plaudit for her

interpretation of a music hall bawd, a far cry from Miss Jean Brodie.

Despite the various themes, characterizations, songs and devices of the film, I feel it could have been a much swifter, much more powerful movie than it was. In places it seemed that Attenborough was preoccupied with the pageantry and regalia of war. There were several very formal, official sequences which dragged.

Several scenes, I'm sure, were presented simply for the pomp and ceremony of the occasion. The ceremonial scenes will probably prove quite interesting for those who have been to war but unfortunate for the underprivileged like myself who have never had anything to do with the military.

One weakness of the film was the fact that it was trying to do several things and not quite succeeding in any of them. The film is both a pleasant piece of nostalgia and at the same time a bitter commentary on war. Those themes, juxtaposed, detracted considerably from each other although the film did manage several moments that were both emotionally and politically poignant.

Yes, the film is worth seeing, but it will probably find its rave reviewers only among those who sang the songs and fought the battles.

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