

NOVEMBER 7, 1975

Wrack n Roll

by Alex Berry

Fred Frith Guitar Solos Virgin /Caroline Records C1508

Virgin records and guitarist-composer Fred Frith must have a lot of faith in their audience. At the moment, the record industry is at one of its most unproductive periods - few new artists are being signed and disco music has captured the public ear - but they have issued an album of uncompromising individuality against all current commercial trends. Although Guitar Solos has not yet been released in Canada, I'm given to understand that it's achieved quite a considerable success in England, where Frith is a "cult figure" as leader of Henry Cow, an excellent and very accomplished jazz-rock group.

With Henry Cow [who have released three excellent L.P.'s in England, while only their first came out here], Frith showed himself as a total musician, playing classically-inspired acoustic guitar, composing much of the group's best material, demonstrating a very individualistic violin style, or showing off a hot and flashy McLaughlinesque electric lead. But for his first solo effort he has largely dropped his formal influences and gone towards playing a sort of total free jazz. Playing it very unusually, too - he uses just one guitar, a number of electrical devices, alligator clips, pieces of glass, steel slides and fingers; doing it all live and largely spontaneously. The technique is not new - Syd Barrett and Jimi Hendrix expounded the basic concepts in the mid-sixties - but it has never been as stunningly carried off as on this unique album.

The record opens, appropriately, with "Hello Music". It's a bouncy piece, using Beefheart sprung rhythms and contrasting guitar tones as the means to create a little musical joke, which ends with a quick Charlie Parker quote as a punchline.

"Glass c/w Steel" sounds at first like a conceptual statement on time - Frith's guitar sounds alternately like a gong and like clockwork. But it segues into a piece with ritualistic implications - playing a voice-like slide sound against staccato bass figures to create a very tense, musky atmosphere.

"Ghosts" sounds mostly improvised - its excellence lies in the "what will he do next" suspense created. The last piece on side one, "Out of Their Heads [on Yocoweed]" sounds like it might almost be a tribute to Syd and Jimi, combining one's eerie harmonics with the other's explosive and diffuse electric leads. The title might explain, but it might as well refer to a crazed pack of elephants. The music actually sounds like a crazed pack of elephants at one time but fades into a Dopey-the-Dwarf style march.

Side Two opens with a more restrictively organized number. "Not Forgotten", played on an old Gibson jazz-acoustic, is quite in the contemporary style of formal composing.

"Hollow Music" is also more standardized, sounding much like one of John Fahey's more airy numbers. "Heat c/w Moment" recalls memories of the buzzy, modal pieces often heard in the beginning days of English experimental music.

The final piece "No Birds" is an unqualified masterpiece. It opens as magnificently as any Floyd epic, moving through the kind of opulent undersea landscapes hinted at in Hendrix's "1983". Frith develops amazing trumpet and cello sounds from his electric guitar, sketches out an orchestral scenario, then proceeds through some opaque melodies and some end-of-the-world walls of noise culminating in an echoed lead guitar workout worthy of Frank Zappa. Another clockwork classical motif is introduced, and the piece ends with some pastoral chording.

Absolutely Astounding Record.
Too bad it's not for sale in Canada.
Esoteric?
I say, I say.

The BRUNSWICKAN - 19

IN FLANDERS FIELDS

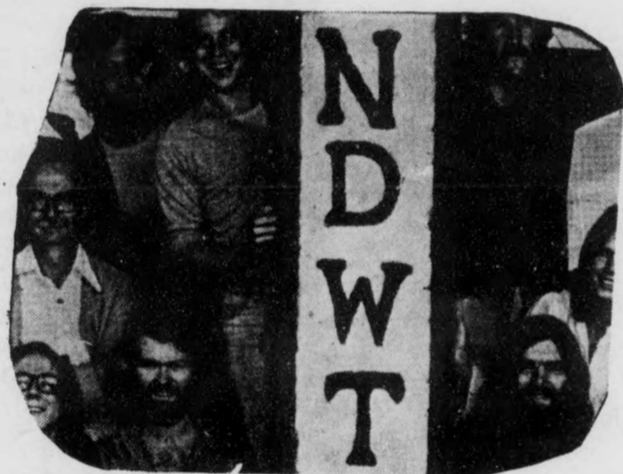
In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrels with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

John McCrae

Toronto's NDWT presents



Donnelly trilogy

Secret societies, logging bees, murder, shadow plays, spinning tops, barn burnings, jigs and reels, horse races, medicine shows, are just a few of the exciting elements and incidents that make up the Donnelly trilogy, which will be presented by the Toronto-based NDWT Company from Mon., Nov. 17th till Wed., Nov. 19th at The Playhouse. The three plays, written by poet James Reaney, and Shakespeare's Hamlet are being presented in the Fredericton engagement of their coast to coast tour by sponsor Theatre New Brunswick.

Who or what are the Donnellys? In the last 100 years, many an errant Ontario youngster has heard the warning: "If you're not good, the Black Donnellys will get you". The forty-year saga, that started in 1844 when James Donnelly, his wife, and the first of their eight children arrived from Ireland and took up residence in Biddulph Township, 18 miles outside London, Ontario is pure Canadian legend. It is a story laced not only with murder and violence, but with joy and determination. The Ireland the Donnellys had left was not much different from the one reads about every day. The same war of religious hatred was being waged. There was a self-protective secret society called the Whitefeet that rode at night, terrorizing their enemies, mainly English Protestant landlords and officials. Families who did not take sides were also targets of the night. Their enemies called them Blackfeet.

This was the situation James Donnelly thought he had left behind when he arrived in the New World. Other Irish immigrants to the same area, however, brought with them the Protestant-Catholic hatreds of the old sod. Donnelly refused to participate in the power struggles and became ostracized and discriminated against. The Church and state conspired against him and he

fought back. Soon all of Biddulph Township was full of tales of barn burnings, cattle killings, beatings and eventually murder.

At a logging bee, James Donnelly and an enemy fought for an hour until Donnelly killed his foe with a wooden handspike. He hid in the area for two years, sleeping where he could, managing to do his own farming dressed up as Mrs. Donnelly, she becoming pregnant with their eighth child. Finally he gave himself up, and was sentenced to hang. His wife gathered 3 petitions and walked forty miles to Goderich to present the petitions to the Governor General. James Donnelly's life was spared but he was sentenced to seven years at Kingston Penitentiary. Once out of prison, Donnelly was given some broad hints that he wasn't welcome in Biddulph. In 1867 when "neighbors" burned his barn to the ground, the family swore that nothing short of death would drive them from the township.

In the 1870's, the Donnelly boys operated a stagecoach line in competition with the line run by another Irishman who did business with the ruling clique. Whimsically, they called their new venture the Opposition Line.

Special by-laws were passed that made the toll gates on the only road passing through the town of Lucan in Biddulph Township closed to the Donnellys. In typical fashion, the family fought back.

The mood of violence escalated leading to the 1879 murder of Michael Donnelly in a Waterford bar. Legend has it that the pool of blood surrounding Donnelly as he lay on the hotel bar floor created a stain that no scrubbing could remove.

The destruction and mayhem culminated the next year. On February 3rd, 1880, a vigilante committee stole into the Donnelly farmhouse at midnight, murdered five of them in their beds and

burned the house down around their bodies.

The legacy lived on though. According to folklore, the ghosts of the murdered Donnellys managed to slay several of the killers before the year was out. The principals in the Donnelly slaughter were known, but no jury dared convict any of them. The Vigilantes were never brought to justice.

Citizens of the area kept telling themselves there was something supernaturally diabolical about the Donnellys. Somehow, all local misfortunes of the previous decade became the work of the 'evil' family - everything from bad crop years to natural sickness. The historical reality of the story was almost lost to the more colorful legend. James Reaney, a professor at London's University of Western Ontario, winner of three Governor General's Awards, and one of Canada's better known writers, became fascinated with the Donnellys in the 1960's. The result was the Donnelly trilogy, three dramas that traced the saga of the family from 1844 to 1880.

From the beginning, Reaney worked in close collaboration with Keith Turnbull, one of Canada's best-known young directors. An acting ensemble was also created and Bill Glasco threw the full energies of his Tarragon Theatre from Toronto into the project. The first play of the trilogy, Sticks and Stones, opened to tremendous acclaim in late 1973. It was allowed nearly a year later by The St. Nicholas Hotel, again a smash hit. Early this year, Handcuffs, finale of the trilogy, opened and, if anything, the success was even greater.

The group of actors that Turnbull assembled has stuck together, taking the name of the NDWT Company, and that group is on a Canada Council sponsored national tour, featuring the entire trilogy plus a new production of Hamlet.