

The Excalibur interview

# Fulfilling the mandate to serve all women artists

B. TAYLOR

The Women's Cultural Building is a feminist art collective which operates out of the queen St. area in Toronto. The WCB is currently running a Festival of Women Building Culture featuring films, theatre, video and other cultural media. The following interview is with Cynthia Grant, a WCB collective member and one of the Directors of *Nightwood Theatre*.

**Excalibur:** Why was WCB organized?

**Cynthia Grant:** A number of women artists and cultural workers came together in 1981 to discuss their needs. This also coincided with the closing of the Pauline McGibbon Centre which certainly we had felt was not fulfilling its mandate in terms of serving women artists. We also wished to come together in an interdisciplinary context and create a cultural context for women in Toronto.

**Excal:** What's the mandate of WCB?

**C.G.:** Our basic mandate is to sponsor a range of activities which will reflect the specific and unique achievements of women in the arts through whatever forms possible: publications, exhibitions, film screenings, panel discussion and through various media.

**Excal:** What did you see as the problem with the Pauline McGibbon Centre?

**C.G.:** I think that what was disconcerting to us was, although its mandate in theory was to create a context for women's art for the community, we felt that it was not upholding the mandate. As well, some of us had found it inaccessible.

**Excal:** How is WCB set up?

**C.G.:** It attempts to operate as a collective.

**Excal:** What were some of the activities you organized prior to the Festival?

**C.G.:** Significant action included a panel discussion around Judy Chicago's dinner party (published in the December issue of *Fireweed*), we also held a benefit in November 1982 with the *Parachute Club* for the defense fund for women who had been picked up for spray painting 'Disarm rapists' on the sidewalks. The time for action is obviously now

--the methodology employed will vary with the circumstances. For example, the terrorist kit (which was sold at International Women's Day) is a tongue-in-cheek kit to be carried along when you're on your terrorist pursuits. WCB supports a variety of women's actions.

**Excal:** What are some of the problems you're attempting to overcome?

**C.G.:** The Status of Women last year commissioned a report and now we don't need to speculate as to the levels of which women are employed in the arts and the access they have to these positions. The theatre is one area I'm most familiar with; what you find is that as budgets increase

the number of women who are employed as playwrights or directors diminishes. This is common to a number of areas. It is possible to do an objective analysis and question why this has happened and how that can be rectified. I think the automatic response to this question within the arts is that the arts are liberal, with respect to women, and that's just not true.

**Excal:** Why is WCB set up as a women's groups separate from other organizations?

**C.G.:** Many people in the group work within other structures, for example A-Space, *Fuse*, other galleries, etc., but we thought that beyond that we had to come together to address

issues of particular concern to us. The focus of discussion with a women's collective can analyse the societal structures without ignoring the gender factor in history. There's been some interesting discussion in the group around the issue of patriarchy often with respect to class analysis.

**Excal:** Do you encourage feminist content in art?

**C.G.:** We encourage it, we don't wish to be prescriptive, but we do wish to be selective and begin to address work within a feminist context.

**Excal:** What are some of the upcoming events in the festival?

**C.G.:** This weekend we open *Narratives*, a visual art show which has been selected through open submissions, at the Headquarters.

Also at the Headquarters on Saturday and Sunday will be *Abusive Images of Women* which is produced by Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media, from San Francisco. The current Storefront shows are at the Rivoli, Queen Mother, Cameron House. The Cameron House installation is a newspeak, a demonstration that shows how media attention to women falls under predictable categories. Also, *Women and Architecture* opened at ARC last week and is showing until April 15.

**Excal:** How can interested women get involved?  
**C.G.:** There will be a major open meeting after the festival. Also, women can call us at our headquarters (864-0891) or on the Feminist Hotline (534-1682).

## Film festival by women, for women-- docu-dramas to animation to fantasy

*Womanfilm* is a film festival which is being sponsored by the Women's Cultural Building. The festival runs next weekend at the Bloor Theatre.

"They vary in formation from documentary, docu-drama to animation to fantasy," says Jannine Stewart, one of the organizers of the festival. Stewart is also a fourth year York Visual Arts student. "The films are from all across Canada, the States, one from France and one from Germany," said Stewart.

"We're starting from a broad basis--films that are made by women," said Stewart. "Defining female sexuality by women rather than accepting a traditional definition by men and the difference between sexuality and pornography," is the focus of one film by Barbara Hammer, according to Stewart.

"One film that will probably be controversial is *Madame X*, which is showing Thursday night. What happens is this woman who is a pirate sends out invitations to all women to give up their security but also the ultimate boredom of their ordinary lives for high adventure on the sea," said Stewart. *Madame X* was produced by Ulrike Ottinger, a German film producer.

Laura Sky, a "very renowned social documentary filmmaker for the last ten years," is also being featured. Her previous films include *Good Monday Morning* which deals with the problems women face in offices with digital display terminals. *Breaking The Silence* by Sky will be shown at the festival on Saturday. It is a work in progress which deals with women and nursing. Sky will also be involved in a panel discussion about *Womanfilm*. This discussion takes place Saturday night.

The organizers have chosen themes for each day of the festival: 'Freedom, Imagination and Fantasy' on Thursday, 'Premieres' on Friday, 'Filmmakers Afternoon' on Saturday and 'Featuring Features' on Sunday.

An evening or afternoon of films costs \$4 for students, unemployed or single mothers and \$5 for others. An overall pass is \$10 for students, unemployed or single mothers or if it is purchased at the Women's Cultural Building Headquarters. If it is purchased at any other outlet (Women's Bookstore, SCM, DEC, Pages, This Ain't The Rosedale Library), it is \$12. For further information, call the WCB Headquarters.

## EXTRACKS

The Yardbirds  
The Yardbirds  
Epic Records

ROMAN PAWLYSZYN

Finally, here's a Yardbirds re-issue done right. The Yardbirds, of course, were among the most influential bands out of England in the 1960s. They were the first to include extended solo "rave-ups" in their shows, they pioneered the use of fuzz boxes and feedback, and they were playing exotic chant-like psychedelia long before George Harrison ever laid eyes on a sitar. And they wielded the hottest young lead guitarists in the land--first Eric Clapton, then Jeff Beck, then Jimmy Page. But they never made it as big as they should have, and their records have had a hard time staying in print.

Which makes this disc so essential. What we have here is the complete, unbastardized form of an album they recorded in 1966 with Beck (released here as *Over Under Sideways Down*), with its original British cover. And as a bonus, Epic has tacked on two extra cuts: "Happenings Ten Years Time Ago" (one of two Yardbirds songs extant with both Beck and Page), and the extremely rare "Psycho Daisies." Of even more interest to Yardbirds collectors, two of Jeff Beck's solos are being heard here for the first time since the mono version of this LP was deleted in the late-'60s. Beck's searing solo on "Hot House of Omagarashid" is brilliant, but for whatever reason, has never before appeared on a stereo issue of this record--including the original British release. Somebody at Epic cares about details.

Listen to Beck's feedback freak-out on "Lost Woman," or his delicate violin imitation on the dreamy "Turn Into Earth," or the frenzied Beck-Page solo break on "Happenings." Let the late Keith Relf win your favour with his charmingly ingenuous comb-and-tissue-paper voice, and his lyrics, which span the intellectual gamut from girls to drugs to money. You'll be a believer.

What's left to say? If you care at all about the music of the '60s, this album is a certified, had-to-have-it-last-week, must buy.

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