

"I'm praying to the aliens."
—Gary Numan—

Muffins won't burn

Stuart Ross

Two Marthas. Two Muffins. And two Muffins stayed at home.

In December, I asked for an interview with one of Toronto's most exciting and promising bands. They had just been slammed in U of T's wimpy *Varsity*. So, a few days later four-sixths of the band headed up to our office.

Martha and the Muffins first played with their present line-up on May 10, '78, opening for the Diodes at the Colonial. Since then, they have captured a dedicated and enthused following in the Toronto clubs. Recently, they opened for the B-52's at the Music Hall. And their debut album on Virgin's Din Discs will be released in the first week of March. Their 1979 self-produced single "Insect Love/suburban Dream" has done well, considering the small amount of air-play it's received. It has no A-side — both sides say This Side Up. That must really confuse the radio stations.

Martha and the Muffins are optimistic about the local music scene. "There's a lot happening in Toronto and that's healthy," explained Martha Ladyly (keyboards and vocals). "There's a good audience here and a lot of excitement about the new kind

of music that's going on. And a lot of places to play. If (the Edge's) Gary Cormier and Gary Topp weren't around, the whole scene wouldn't be happening."

What they are not pleased with is the quality of radio programming. Aside from CFNY, complained guitarist and writer Mark Gane, Toronto stations just don't take advantage of the fantastic variety of music around. He sees the real key to a band's success as being radio play. "You can reach more people with one playing of one song for three minutes than Maple Leaf Gardens will hold in one night."

Said Ladyly: "CHUM wouldn't play 'Insect Love' because they said it was 'too disorienting.' I don't know what that meant. Maybe they were afraid it was going to upset housewives."

In their tradition of doing things somewhat differently than most bands, M & the M's haven't got a manager. They haven't really reached the stage where they need one, said the other vocalist, keyboardist and Martha, Martha Johnson. Especially during their recording stint in England, they heard some appalling horror stories about all the Malcolm McLarens running rampant. And Carl Finkle (bass) stressed, "We want to keep

control of what happens to us."

They also stress that they want to have a good time. When they play other cities, they want to have a chance to look around, not be stuck to a schedule forcing them to play a new town each night. M & the M's want to have the freshness and energy to give the audience their money's worth. They don't want to burn out.

They're atypical in other ways as well. "We don't like to go out partying a lot, we don't drink a lot, we don't do drugs or stay up all night," said Ladyly. "People think we're sort of odd that way."

Along with sax player Andy Haas and drummer Tim Gane, the band's influences cover a great deal of ground, from Cecil Taylor to Roxy Music. Mark Gane writes most of the songs, though the Marthas have also done some, and the entire band contributes to the arranging. The lyrics are often sharp, witty and surreal. The music holds many surprises as well, usually getting at least some of the audience onto the floor dancing.

M & the M's might very well make it very big. They're dedicated and enthusiastic. But they plan on keeping things in perspective. "We don't want to get into that star mentality. That's



Adrian Boot

the ruin of people," said Martha Ladyly. And Martha Johnson continued: "But that's not to say we don't want to sell records and make money."

See Martha and the Muffins in action at the Edge on February 8 & 9, and watch for their album. Two Marthas. Four Muffins. All for the price of one band.

Poetry jam grand slam

Frank McGee

Anyone who didn't attend the opening reading in the York Poetry Series missed an exciting two hours of poetry. About 35 people filled Sylvester's Lounge in Stong College Tuesday afternoon to hear York writers Clark Blaise, Hedi Bouraoui, Frank Davey, Bernice Lever, and Miriam Waddington read from their old and recent works.

Hedi Bouraoui, Master of Stong College, began the reading with six of his poems, two of which were in French. Bouraoui's poems were eloquent and didactic, especially "Song For a Child" and "Peace."

Miriam Waddington, whose new book *The Dissidents* will be published in the Fall, made death the theme of the poems she chose to read. She also injected some comments on CanLit between poems. One problem, according to Waddington, is a lack of intelligent critics. Critics,

she explained, rely too much on "life out of books," not understanding the personal experience in poetry. For this self-proclaimed Tolstoyan, "artist truth."

Bernice Lever, editor of *Waves* magazine, gave an animated reading. Her light, ironic selections dealt predominantly with the theme of womanhood. The duality of the housewife's



Davey in progress

Konald Ramage

role was the message of her concluding poem, "Beauty of a Woman."

After Lever read, the audience was given a taste of Frank Davey's "manuscript in progress." The nostalgic and humorous poems dealt with growing up, adolescence, and "men, women, and what happens when they get together." Along with portraits of his parents in "Wooden Sidewalk" and "Toilet Seat," Davey read about sex education in "The Books" in which a genitalia chart looks like "a vegetation map of Vancouver Island."

The reading ended with Clark Blaise's 14-part short story, "Man and His World," which dealt with contrasts between the pictures in Canada and India.

Peter Robinson, the moderator and co-organizer of the series with Janet Patterson, said the goal of the York Poetry Series is to give students and teachers a chance to read their poems and prose publicly. Anyone wishing to read should leave a note, along with one or two poems, for him in the English Dept.

The informal atmosphere allows audience and readers to exchange ideas, whether about poetry, baseball or whatever. Depending on its success, Peter Robinson hopes that the York Poetry Series becomes an annual event.

Readings are held every second Tuesday at 4 in Sylvester's Lounge in Stong College. Beer is available. Bring along some of your poems for the open reading.

Aw, shit!

The price of *The Year The Expos Almost Won the Pennant!* by Brodie Snyder, which was reviewed in last week's *Excalibur*, is \$2.50, not \$12.50. So sorry.

Good breath

Mark Monfette

The 300 or so who attended the Talking Band's production of "Worksong" last Friday night probably left Burton Auditorium with a different impression than when they entered. Generally perceived beforehand as experimental, the band proved to be theatrical traditionalists, if not conservatives.

The five-member New York troupe seems to have ignored the trends of the twentieth century, preferring instead an imaginative realism that relies heavily on sound rather than action. Perhaps because of their stylistic "novelty," their production was very effective and well-received.

The play itself, composed of a number of very brief and

thematically-related scenes, attempted to show the rise of American capitalism and industrialism and the effect on the lives of the element at the bottom of the pyramid: the workers. John D. Rockefeller and Frederick Winslow Taylor vs. the little man. While the premise of March Kaminsky's text is basically true, he tended to simplify the issue. We are left with the bad, bad capitalists and the oh-so-exploited, of-so-good workers. Heart-rending stuff—but not precisely true.

Where the Talking Band succeeded very well was in reminding the audience what a magical and liberating effect words can have on the imagination. Not an easy accomplishment.

Off York

Vital Arts

West Coast poet, novelist and playwright Tom Walmsley will be "Writer-In-Residence-for-a-Day" on Saturday the 19th at This Ain't The Rosedale Library, an alternative bookstore at 115 Queen E. Walmsley, without a doubt, is one of the most controversial and powerful writers working today. He is the author of *Dr. Tin*, winner of Pulp Press' 2nd International 3-Day Novel-Writing Contest, and also the play *Something Red*, now at the Tarragon Theatre.

On that topic, we'd like to mention that *Something Red* is a fucking good play, and all those reviewers who panned it must've been at the wrong play. They seem to have lost all sense of comprehension and judgment. There are some acting problems, but there's also some great performances, and the script is superb. Besides, Al Waxman walked out halfway thru, so it must be good.

Your Friendly Neighbourhood Ent. Eds.

Theatre

Coming Through Slaughter by Michael Ondaatje chronicles the life of cornet player, ghetto philosopher and lover extraordinaire Buddy Bolden. It takes us from the start of his career as a New Orleans jazz musician in the early jazz era, to his eventual ascent into madness. The music is performed by Jim Galloway and the Metro Stompers. Arden Bess plays Bolden, and the play is directed by Paul Thompson at Theatre Passe Muraille. *Slaughter* is redolent with Real Life and the risks that Thompson takes with nudity and violence, coupled with the emotional risks taken by Bolden, make it a startling production. Bibi Caspari performs ably with an oyster.

Barb Mainguy

Music

Some searing, sexy, avant-garde new-wave disco (whew!) comes our way from ZE Records. James White and the Black's *Off White* is a highly innovative album that screeches to be heard. White does most of the vocals on songs like "Contort Yourself" and a great version of Irving Berlin's "(Tropical) Heat Wave." Stella Rico joins him on "Stained Sheets." Her 'singing' is unforgettable. His band has the perfect balance between anarchy and control. The instrumentals, with White on alto sax, are reminiscent of Carla Bley's work, and should definitely be straight-jacketed. If ZE comes out with more like this, we've got a lot to look forward to.

Oh, yeah. The cover is amazing.

Stuart Ross

