

# Entertainment

*I'm definitely not what you would call a disciplined writer.*

## Playwright walks on the *Thin Edge*

by Suzanne Lundrigan

Playwright Connie Massing is a tad on edge.

"Being in rehearsal is very conducive to oral fixations. The actors get to move around, but I have to sit and watch."

Traditionally, Massing starts smoking during rehearsal of the play and quits on the evening of the premiere. Massing looks at the cigarette sheepishly, "Traditionally."

Her current nicotine fixation comes on the heels of the production of *The Thin Edge*. Massing chuckles, "It's a little hair raising, but I almost enjoy rehearsal more than the performance. It's a lot easier to do rewrites during rehearsal. You write for so long in a vacuum. It is great to hear voices speaking the lines. Things jump right out at you. It becomes abundantly clear when the script needs work."

*The Thin Edge* is written in a 40's style. "...sort of like the old movies. The central character, Sam, is a fashion editor. She is investigating Elaine's story. Elaine has gone in for a make-over and comes to a bad end... not a murder or a robbery, but a bad end. I'm not going to tell you any more," Massing chuckles.

Massing is concerned about people's overwhelming interest in images. "People buy into the myth of the body beautiful. It is almost a defense mechanism. We grab hold of an image." *The Thin Edge* looks at this trend.

Massing graduated from the U of A's M.F.A. program in 1983. "I've been working

off and on since. I don't make a living at it yet, but it is my primary focus." She smiles, "Thank God for government grants."

"I'm definitely not what you would call a disciplined writer. I call disciplined sitting down and writing for four hours every day. I've had a great deal of work lately and looming deadlines tend to keep me in line," explains Massing.

Writing doesn't necessarily come easily to Massing. "I find that some days go better than others. It is interesting that on the days when I'm really struggling, you know, banging around the house avoiding the computer, I'm actually more productive than during those periods when I'm 'inspired'."

The cruelest thing you can ask Massing is "How many pages did you get through today?"

"It's a fixation we have from school. We're always looking for tangible results: exactly what do you have down on paper. Really it's the front end part of writing, the thinking, which is important."

Confidence in her writing has come with time. "I say this jokingly, but you learn to write scripts that are director-proof. When you first start, your scripts are rife with stage directions. For example, you'll instruct the actor to cross the stage and look at the dog (tenderly)," Massing chuckles.

"An actor is going to play against something like that. Eventually you realize that if the script is strong, it will be interpreted in the way you had intended."



Playwright Connie Massing, graduate of U of A's M.F.A. program.

photo Suzanne Lundrigan

## Tale of miner's unrest is lucky strike

**The Great Strike**

Alex Callinios and Mike Simons  
Socialist Worker (United Kingdom)

by Ken Hui

On March 1 1984, Britain's National Coal Board announced its twenty-fourth coal pit closure, that of Cortonwood colliery in South Yorkshire. This incident led to the longest labour strike in the history of the British working-class movement.

The coal miners' strike of 1984-5 was a struggle of epic proportions and the political ramifications in Britain far out-stripped those of recent labor strikes in North America.

The book *The Great Strike* by Alex Callinios and Mike Simons records in great detail the causes, events, eventual defeat and final lessons of the British miners' strike of 1984/85.

Being a publication of the Socialist Worker, the book is not exactly impartial in the information it provides, though both the government's and workers' sides of the issue are dealt with. Overall, the book is worth reading.

Callinios and Simons open with an exploration of Thatcherism which they view as a new form of capitalist rule based on a direct ideological appeal to people. Its success is backed up by a strengthened repressive state apparatus. The Tories learned their lessons from the downfall of Edward Heath's administration which was a result of the miners' strike of 1972. Rather than enforce wage control as her predecessor Heath had, Thatcher decided to use mass unemployment to discipline the workers. Under Thatcher the Tories chose to stabilize inflation at a cost of mass unemployment. Thus, corporations kept the share of national income as profits they had held in the 1960s while the unemployed were left to bear the brunt of the recession.

Callinios and Simons paint Thatcher as a right-wing vassal, shifting the balance of the class forces decisively in the capitalists' favour.

The authors illustrate the Tory plot with the magnificent example of the 1981 removal of "pits closure programme". The withdrawal was a purely tactical retreat as Energy Secretary David Howell revealed four years later, "In those days, (coal) stock wasn't so high. The

country was not prepared and the whole trade union movement tended to be united all on one side." The Tories let coal supplies accumulate and then in 1984 when there was a large stock pile moved to close twenty 'uneconomic' pits. The Tories, sure that there would be sufficient coal to keep the electricity supplies moved when it was convenient to them.

Consumer affluence further crippled the miners' union. The strike was defeated because union leaders failed to stand by the miners. Refusing to implement a policy which would have halted the movement of bootleg coal and oil which were supplying the cities. As a result, consumers did not feel the effects of the work stoppage. Worse yet, the opposition Labour Party refused to support the miners, attacking both the police and the pickets when their own representative body became only a shadow of its former self.

The Labour Party's betrayal of its constituents, the miners, ensured the strike's defeat. Thatcher's political triumph was that she had achieved "the Americanization of the British trade union movement" to the extent that the unions became weaker, more bureaucratic, less politically influential and more closely policed by the court.

Nevertheless, union bureaucracies could not entirely suppress the miners' resistance as illustrated by the outbreak of the strike. Callinios and Simons consider the strike an event in which the miners were standing up against a society which puts private profit before social need.

Callinios and Simons admit that the Tories did eventually win but at tremendous cost, spending £26000 (Can. \$52,000) per miner to beat the strike. According to the authors, the British government in her fury, sprang into acts of meanness, such as denying miners' family welfare payments. One mining couple was even denied funeral benefits to bury their dead son. All the forces of the state were mobilized to break the miners' union and mining villages were occupied by paramilitary riot police. The court issued judgments against the miners. The mass media ran a campaign of misinformation and lies. When the *Financial Times* announced that the attempt to usher in national industrial

action had virtually collapsed, *Breakfast TV* claimed that the Blair Hal colliery in Scotland was working, in fact, normally despite the reality that the pit had closed years before. Callinios and Simons suggests that the onslaught imposed by the British Tories is comparable to the systematic weeding out of the suspicious militants under the guise of senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist crusade in 1950s America.

In conclusion, Callinios and Simons seek to draw the lessons of the strike so that the working-class can avenge the defeat in future. Thatcher's decisive superiority over the miners lay on her pursuit of a coherent strategy on behalf of her class. Trade union bureaucracy, from being a means, has changed into an end itself to which the interest of class, struggles was subordinated. The authors are openly critical of 'Scargillism' — by which was meant class-struggle politics after Arthur Scargill, the president of the

National Union of Miners. Lastly, the memory of the miners' strike is summed up by Callinios and Simons in Karl Marx's words:

"Working men's Paris, with its commune (The Paris Commune of 1871) will be forever celebrated as the glorious harbinger of a new society. Its martyrs are enshrined in the great heart of the working class. Its exterminators, history has already nailed to that of external pillory from which all the prayers of the priests will not avail to redeem them."

The book is highly recommended. To those readers without particular political beliefs, love of knowledge is a sufficient reason to read the book. Even to those who are no great admirers of trade unionism, the determination and heroism of the miners in strike cannot be denied. The British miners' strike of 1984-85 and its lessons have astonished the world and inspired million and an understanding of the subject is therefore more than necessary.

## Too much, too soon, too bad

**Agent**  
Self-titled  
Virgin Records

review by Scott Gordon

Nice haircuts, guys. Nice music, too. Great credits, as well, if you can wade through them. I wonder what the other guests thought about these guys when they recorded overdub tracks at the Granville Island Hotel in Vancouver?

However. This isn't really a bad album, but it isn't really a good album either. It sounds, unfortunately, like they rushed this album to completion without allowing time to work out the bugs because there is potential. It's hidden within the bass lines and the drums, ie. the rhythm section. This oft-neglected cornerstone of music comes through with flying colours and makes its presence felt. Unfortunately, the all too common and overused synthesizers ruin many of the cuts because they seem to be added as an afterthought to try and garner the dance music market.

"Agent's" music is not really dance-oriented; it follows in the vein of adventu-



rous driving rock. Probably the best cut on the album is 'Heartbeat', no relation to Don 'Stubble' Johnson. Other cuts have potential, but they are mangled by the keyboards and the production of Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter. I just hope Virgin Records will give these guys more time to polish their skills to find the proper place for the keyboards. If they do, they'll be competent, if not good. I'm waiting for their next album to see if they improve.