

Quest for Justice

by Bruce Fanjoy

*Twenty years in prison I'll spend
For a time I went to visit a friend
I'm just a victim of circumstance
I'm just a victim of circumstance*

A song fills the 75 seat theatre across from the Kentucky Fried Chicken on Main St. in Wolfville. The seats for now are empty, that is except for a greying, bearded man sitting in the front row.

The man is Jack Sheriff, founder and driving force behind the Kipawo Showboat Company, an amateur theatre group. The song has been written and composed by Francis Hawley for Sheriff's current, and most ambitious project, *Trial of Bruce Curtis — Quest for Truth and Justice*.

Sheriff, a full-time English professor at Acadia University, has a subject that is certainly touching a nerve in this province, if not the rest of the country. It's the true story of an 18 year old from Mt. Hanley, Annapolis County, who, on his first trip away from home, became embroiled in a situation he couldn't handle and is now paying the steep price of twenty years in an American jail.

In the summer of 1982, having graduated from Kings-Edgehill High School, Bruce Curtis went to visit a school friend's home in New Jersey. Unknowingly he became a guest in a home fraught with domestic violence. When the violence erupted Bruce was innocently caught up in it and accidentally killed his friend's mother while fleeing the bloodbath. His trial has been described by many as a judicial farce and raised many questions about the state of the judiciary in America.

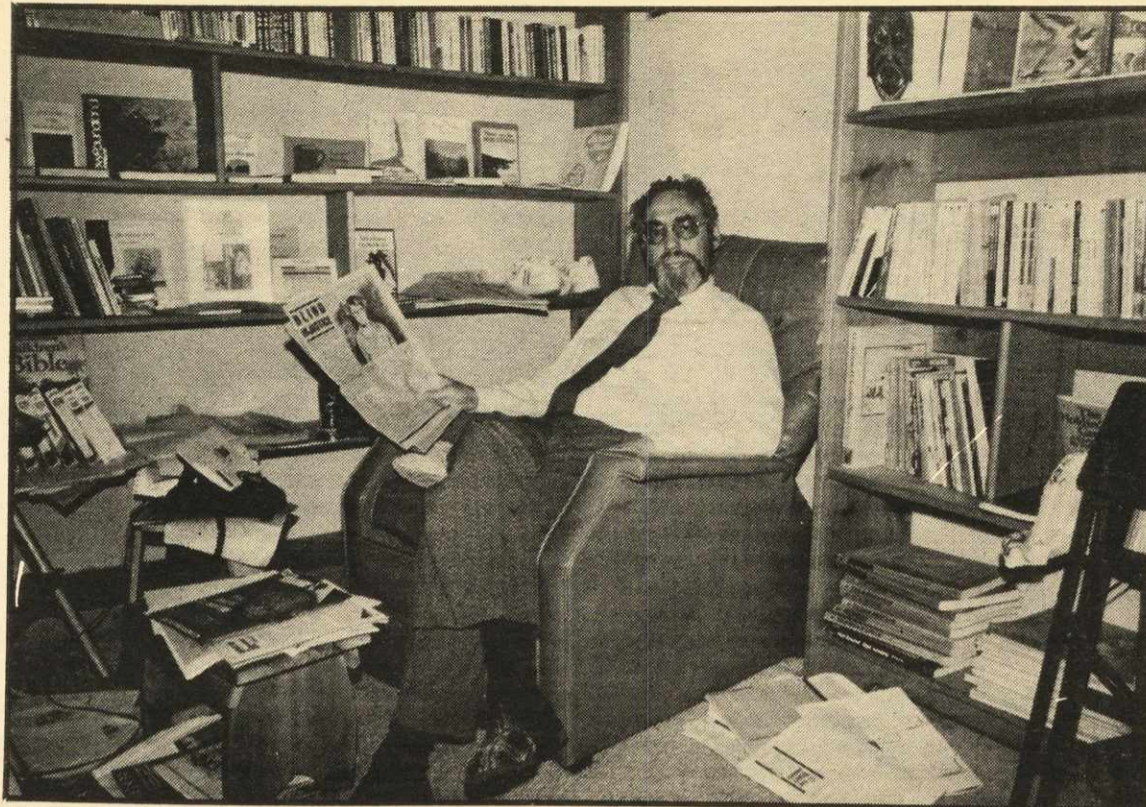
"There is a lot of interest. Everybody wants to see this one," says from his cluttered office in the building.

The title, *Trial of Bruce Curtis*, has an intended double meaning. While Sheriff incorporates facts from the actual trial (he is armed with 900 pages of court transcripts), he does not intend the play to focus on court proceedings.

"To me it's a detective story. Like all great novels, great plays, or great pieces of literature, it's an exploration into human nature and human motives. Why do people do the things they do?" says Sheriff.

Sheriff has been working on the play since May. Twice he has been to Bordertown Correctional Center in New Jersey to speak with Bruce Curtis, the second visit prompting a major rewrite. He has spoken at length with Jim and Alice Curtis and the other characters in the play. Unfortunately, on neither trip was he able to talk to Scott Franz, Bruce's friend who, in turn for a lighter sentence, testified against Bruce. For the most part, Scott doesn't give interviews. While not ruling out any more changes, Sheriff is confident, "I'm feeling comfortable. I think what we have now is fairly workable."

Sheriff is no newcomer to theatre, having established his theatre group in Wolfville in 1958. This summer he won first prize in a national playwrighting competition organized by the National Multicultural Theatre Association for a fictional story, *A Mitzvah for Yaakov*.



Jack Sheriff discusses his latest play, *Trial of Bruce Curtis*

Dal Photo - Bruce Fanjoy

Sheriff is not terribly concerned about expenses and admits to not having a budget.

"There are costs. I've printed hundreds of versions of the play, all these things add up but who's counting," he says. "For 25 years I've been absorbing expenses, that's what my salary's for; not to live it up but to do the things that are important... and I'm doing what's important."

The play will be refined and performed in Kipawo's Wolfville theatre, but Sheriff is hopeful of taking the play on the road. While not committing himself to a date, a likely stop would be Halifax, possibly Dalhousie. Says Sheriff, "I would take it right into Bordertown if I thought it would do any good."

The facts of Bruce Curtis' story have intrigued more than just Jack Sheriff. The story has attracted two Toronto authors. One, Harold Crooks, has a grant from the Canada Council and the second, David Hayes, has a contract with Penguin books.

In the words of Francis Hawley, the song and Bruce Curtis' story continues:

*Now I spend my time thinking
About the way it could have been
A couple of weeks sitting 'round a pool
Talking to a friend
Never dreamed I'd be sitting behind bars
Yes, you never know who your friends really are.* □

Blood and Cantsin Gig

By Gillian McCain and Ken Burke

Under his polka-dot Russian-style hat, Monty Cantsin stands calmly onstage, the banana he's eating clutched in one of his seven-finger gloves. As the tape pumps out, electropop with a french accent, it's time for him to sing his theme song—a sort of "Hey, hey, we're the Monkees" of the avant set. "I am a Neoist," he chants...

Monty Cantsin, a performance artist and avid prophet of Neoism, performed a show at the S.U.B. on September 14 along with local alternative artists Roland Blinn (the Raw Fish Man) and the Misery Goats.

"I want to die in a Teepee
I want to die in an Ice Show
I want to die for FUN!"

Monty's antics on stage featured a blend of performance, music, song and video. The stage is set up with two mikes in front, screens in back, and television sets on both sides of the stage. The show began with Cantsin and his female sidekick (a kind of Walk on the Wild Side debutante who was never introduced) filmed in an anonymous location looking fashionably bored. As the audience continued to watch the television sets we see Monty and his Accomplice in Art looking heart-broken as an unidentified voice talks about "the unforeseen death of the artist". He was fresh from "Blood Campaign", "his retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York" (he wishes) when the tragic event took place—however they've got "the best Monty Cantsin imitator, Monty Cantsin and the First Aid Brigade."

The music is pretty average Quebec synthesizer-rock and is unfortunately taped. Monty (who could pass for a flashier French-Canadian David Byrne) sings songs with captivating lyrics like "I want to die in a teepee/I want to die in an ice show/I want to die for FUN!" As Monty sings and his pseudo-go-go girl dances, images are flashed on the screen behind them. At one point we see lines from their lyrics like "Every six minutes must be total joy/Every six minutes must be a new orgasm" and then in huge letters "MORE MORE MORE MORE MORE". That seems like the basic philosophy—Anything goes... Live for the Moment... Life is boring but have fun anyway...

His actions on stage seemed to be intended to shock the audience but the overall silliness of the events made one want to giggle, not gasp. During the course of the performance we see that Cantsin has many central themes (or fetishes), blood being one of them. During his donation of blood onstage (done fairly demurely—no risk of

slipping and gashing open an arm here), the couple on the television strips halfway down, cleverly splitting the interest of people in the audience—do you want sex (nudity but no sexual advances or connotations of the act) or violence (donating blood but in a non-violent way as possible)? One audience member mumbled, "He must be full of holes, man." After Cantsin's medical art was completed, his female friend rolled out some paper and held it as he tossed his own blood from a vial onto the 'canvas'. Canada's answer to Jackson Pollack? Very traditional avant-garde...

"We are not subjects to a life of science," he sings, predicting "an era of total change—of total ideas." "Try neoism," he offers, like a pitchman for Dristan at the end of a commercial. If this show was a commercial for Neoism, we're not buying. It just can't deliver the goods.

The local artists, on the other hand, were much more captivating without trying half as hard. Although Roland Blinn had amplifier and mike problems (his lyrics were almost indistinguishable) he managed to pull off an enchanting performance nevertheless. His music is raw without being sloppy and his guitar-smashing outburst was charming without being contrived.

"Try Neoism," he offers, like a pitchman for Dristan

The Misery Goats, newcomers to the alternative scene (this was only their second gig) played an impressive set full of verve and wit. Lead singer Paul Caldwell's oddball allure is irresistible. After tapping their drum machine and getting no response he mutters into the mike, "Slight problem—We've got fuck-all in sound". With his shaved head, colorless clothes, and semi-emaciated body he looks like a chic concentration victim. His stage presence seems to have been borrowed from the late Ian Curtis (lead singer of Joy Division) but even with the band's obvious influences their style remains unique. Before beginning *96 Tears* Caldwell says, in a deadpan voice, "This is a really cool tune", pauses and adds, "probably the best fuckin' one

we got". One of the highlights of their set was their version of Husker Du's "Books about U.F.O.'s" slowed down to the pace of an Iggy Pop dirge with an almost "I'm bored" Iggy vocal.

Rumor has it the band is discarding their drum machine and replacing it with a Real Live Drummer. If this is true the Misery Goats can look forward to being a prominent influence on the Halifax underground music scene.

Top Ten Videos

by Jean LeBlanc

Over the past three years the video industry has grown from obscurity to a multimillion dollar industry. Approximately 3000 videos have been created by this time and they are coming faster than ever. With an average cost of \$50,000 they range from a cost of one million dollars for Michael Jackson's "Thriller" to a reported five hundred dollars for Van Halen's "Jump".

I've chosen the following videos as the best because of their originality and innovation over other videos. That little something extra that places these videos above the rest was looked for.

1. Just a Gigolo/I Ain't Got Nobody—David Lee Roth

This video contains nearly constant and almost hectic action helping to keep the video interesting and everchanging. The video's strength comes from being the first video to reproduce segments of past videos and fusing them in an exaggerated and humorous manner. This format has proved so successful that it has been copied by Phil Collins in his video, *Don't Lose My Number*. The strongest point for this video is its humor. David Lee Roth spreads havoc throughout the television, video and music industries in an imaginative and hilarious way, from Billy Idol's self-electrocution to "Dave TV".

2. Don't Come Around Here No More—Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers

This consists of a very twisted version of *Alice in Wonderland*. It is special because of its strange and bizarre description of this story. The video contains scenes where Alice shrinks and is placed in a tea cup and another scene where she is turned into a "live" cake and is eaten by the band. Various details complete the effect of being in a weird land of makebelieve, an example of this is using pink flamingos as musical instruments. But the *piece de resistance* of the video is imaginative and deceiving use of the checkboard set.

3. Sweet Dreams (are made of this)—Eurythmics

This is a very imaginative and unpredictable video. Whether the Eurythmics are walking in pastures with cows, showing pictures of nuclear explosions or scenes where Annie Lennox seems to be thinking of taking over the world, the video seems to paint a rather gloomy picture for the future of man. The video's best point is its ability to shock the viewer, from Annie's blazing orange hair to Dave Steward's typing on a computer in a cow pasture.

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