

## It's only rock and roll (but I like it)

by Chris Morash

(Mushaboom Weekly Advertiser) Last night the Mushaboom Civic Arena saw a reunion of the popular Rock And Roll combo, "The Monarchs," treating Mushaboomites to an energetic 3 hours of R&B tunes from the early 1960s. When asked after the show if he yearned for those simpler days, (group leader and singer) Parker replied cryptically, "Hello tomorrow, to H-I with yesterday!" leading this reporter to think that alleged drunkenness and riotous living earlier in the band's career may have had some long term effect on the band members.

"This isn't just music, ya know," we are told at one point during John Gray's *Rock and Roll*, playing Sept. 19-27 at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium. Rock and roll has always been more than just music; it is a manic celebration of the insane beauty of being young and full of energy. Gray's *Rock and Roll* not only celebrates the vibrancy of youth, but also laments its eventual loss in a funny, unsentimental play that traces a rock band's rise and fall in the mythical Nova Scotia town of Mushaboom.

Like the characters who people Bruce Springsteen's best

work, the members of The Monarchs—Parker, Brent, Chink and Manny—fear that their best years will be over by the time they reach twenty. Chink at one point asks, "How come it's all goin' by so fast? Ain't there no brakes on this thing?" Eventually, however, all of the band, as well as Shirley, their devoted disciple, come to the realization that there is life after rock and roll, even though it may be unsatisfying.

Only Screamin' John, a world-weary rock n' roll martyr, manages to stay forever young, James Dean style, dying in "Mushaboom's most spectacular car crash." Eric Peterson (remember *Billy Bishop Goes to War?*) plays Screamin' John like a leopard, slinking across the stage, hissing his lyrics with lethal cynicism. In a word, Peterson is riveting.

If Eric Peterson is The Actor in *Rock and Roll*, then Frank MacKay is The Singer, delivering the goods in a rich, powerful voice that's been a mainstay of the music scene in this province for years. When The Monarchs are at their peak, exploding with raw energy, and MacKay is running through the audience, he is as much a spirit of rock and roll as Screamin' John. It is also heartening to see that in addition to

being a superb singer, MacKay, especially in the quieter scenes, can hold his own as an actor.

In fact, one of the best things about *Rock and Roll* is that there are no weak links in the cast; all are strong performers. Babs Chula, as Shirley, was both convincing, and, when she finally unleashed her voice, showed that she can really soar. Andrew Rhodes (Brent), Jay Brazeau (Chink) and Alec Willows (Manny) all turn in performances that show they can act and rock with the best.

E. Don Zacharias' scenographic set and Nick Cernovitch's lighting have a raw, Brechtian theatricality that capture the rough edges of true rock 'n' roll, as well as the claustrophobic pressures of living in a small town. Especially memorable is the young lovers' bed-mobile, the hind end of a car that shows what cruising is all about.

Perhaps my only complaint about the entire show would be a technical note; much of the dialogue spoken over a musical background tended to become lost. This is something that should not happen in a room with acoustics like the Cohn.

From Halifax *Rock and Roll*

heads out on a tour that will take it across Canada; if you've ever felt an adrenaline rush from hearing an electric guitar scream, or ever wondered what happened to the dreams you had at 16, I'd advise you to catch this show before it leaves town.



## News bias exposed in Media Monopoly

*The Media Monopoly*  
by Ben H. Bagdikian  
Beacon Press, 1983  
283 pages

Review by Geoff Martin

In *The Media Monopoly*, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Ben Bagdikian describes two disturbing trends in American mass media in the last twenty-five years. These are the impact of concentrated ownership and the effects of mass advertising on the form and content of media.

There are presently 25,000 radio and television stations, book publishers, magazines and newspapers in the United States. "If each of these were operated by a different owner there would be 25,000 individual media voices (which) ... would almost guarantee a full spectrum of political and social ideas distributed to the population ... Today fifty corporations own most of the output," Bagdikian writes.

In the introductory chapters the author studies the degree to which the biggest media concerns in the United States are either owned or influenced by large enterprises. The most common link between media and large American corporations is ownership: For example, a cluster of New York banks and financial institutions hold controlling shares in the New York Times Co., *Newsday*, McGraw-Hill, Dow Jones, Time, Inc., ITT, CBS, ABC, Prentice Hall, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, ABC,

Knight-Ridder, RCA, Thomson newspapers, Westinghouse, Cox, Reader's Digest, Harper and Row, the Washington Post Co., Xerox and the Tribune Co.

And that's only scratching the surface. Bagdikian also documents many more examples of this sort of ownership, and of cases in which a member of the Board of Directors on one newspaper chain will sit on the Board of other large corporations.

The *New York Times*, the most respected American daily, which owns a number of magazines of its own, shares board members with Merck, Morgan Guaranty Trust, Bristol Myers, Charter Oil, Johns Manville, American Express, Bethlehem Steel, IBM, Scott Paper, Sun Oil and First Boston Corporation.

Most importantly, Bagdikian's research indicates the negative results of these connections. A wealth of anecdotes on the interference in mass media by corporate masters drawn from a diverse number of sources is one of the strengths of the book.

The story related about Senator Joseph McCarthy is worth retelling. In 1950, eager for a campaign issue, U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy accused then Secretary of State Dean Rusk of allowing 205 "Communists" to continue to make policy in the State Department. McCarthy claimed he had a list naming these "Communists" to which he was referring.

Recently William Randolph

Hearst, Jr., who ran the Hearst newspaper empire at the time, admitted that his friend McCarthy told him that no such list existed.

Hearst could have printed the admission that McCarthy had no names and prevented 5 years of "loyalty" furor in the U.S., yet he decided to use his newspapers to collude with McCarthy for his own political purposes. This is but one of the anecdotes in Bagdikian's book.

One of the most interesting portions of the book is the chapter which deals with the Gannett newspaper chain, which was started in the 1920's by Frank Gannett. Gannett is the largest chain of news dailies in the United States, with approximately 88 papers and almost 4 million daily circulation, yet it is an almost unknown institution.

The evidence in *The Media Monopoly* is critical of chain ownership of newspapers. When a chain takes over a paper, there is less local news, more syndicated opinions and news, a higher percentage of advertisements and higher costs for advertising.

Finally, he deals with the transformation in North American media which had been caused by the dependence on mass advertising.

At one time in television there was some intelligent programming (i.e. Kraft Television Thea-

tre, etc.) with corporate sponsorship written by reputable authors. There has been a definite shift away from this type of programming and towards programming designed to put viewers in a "buying mood."

The uniform blandness of programs today makes people more receptive to short 15-30 second commercials. The culprit in this case is mass advertising, which the corporations found was more effective in selling than was the older "sponsorship" idea.

It is important to remember that the situation in Canada is worse than in the United States. Thomson and Southam each own over 20% of Canadian daily news circulation, with other smaller organizations owning much of the rest.

Many of Bagdikian's recommendations for heading off the coming crisis are presently enshrined in Jim Fleming's (now

Judy Erola's) controversial newspaper bill.

Yet I think it is apparent that any government or legislature which tries to pass such a bill will be thoroughly defeated, if only because they can expect almost all of the national media to attack them on every front.

The book is well-written and very convincing, and hopefully will be regarded as the best non-fiction book of 1983. Its one weakness is that while it is well-documented, passages are not footnoted (references are done page by page), and this makes it harder to check.

The sort of problem that Bagdikian is writing about is inherent in the book itself. It was published this year by Beacon Press, a small independent which cannot give the book publicity on the scale of one of the "big" publishing houses, such as Random House.