

An award-winning journey begins

BOOK

Random Passage

by Bernice Morgan

Breakwater Books, 269 pages

BY ANDY POTTER

These days random journeys are rare events; very few of us cast off not knowing where we're going or how we'll survive when we get there. Only last century many migrants crossed the Atlantic with little knowledge of their destination or fate.

Bernice Morgan's first novel, *Random Passage*, tells the tale of one such migrant family. The Andrews, inhabitants of a soft, settled Weymouth town, are forced to ship off for the "English Coast" of the Newfound Land in the early 1800s. They have heard that it is a place where one can "walk for a hundred miles on land no man owns, pick berries and fruit without anyone saying nay, hunt deer, catch in their own hands silver fish that swim right up onto beaches," a place blessed "with sunshine, misty rain and warm fogs that roll in over the hills like a veil."

The history of Newfoundland reveals that many a seaborne migrant landed by chance, whether due to the vagaries of the sea or the whim of a captain. The Andrews are no exception; their passage abruptly ends when they are dropped at a fishing post on the French shore of the island, on a rocky headland that itself resembles an island. The Cape Random hills are black; fog rolls in with icy abandon. It is autumn, they have no food of their own, and the post storekeeper has none to sell.

So begins Morgan's account of one family's struggle to take root on the Rock. Their life seems destined to be nasty, brutish and short. But the Andrews survive their first winter — and struggle on. The reader is privy to trials and woes, injuries and starvation and death. Yet the tone throughout is optimistic, uplifting. Morgan's message of perseverance and the value and pleasure of hard toil and solidarity is unabashed. It succeeds because she refrains from pulling heartstrings; on the contrary, she allows the unpretentious intricacies of Cape Random life to weave their own spell. The story proceeds at its own pace, one measured by the coming of ice, seals, spring, summer, cod, berries, hunting, winter. The reader soon falls into the same rhythm.

Historical narratives can be agonizingly realistic, yet Morgan does not burden the reader with a surfeit of extraneous particulars. She is a master of understatement and shadow. She paints the nuances of outpost life with the muted yet detailed brush strokes of a Rembrandt.

Random Passage's fictional territory is of course familiar (we've been there before; we've read our share of family sagas), and yet Morgan makes us see anew. It is a treat to read a simple saga and be transported beyond trials and

tribulations and small victories to familial territory as fascinating as the sweep of the heroic.

Editor's note: This is the first of two reviews by Andy Potter on the works of Bernice Morgan. In a week or two Andy will review the continuation of Random Passage, Waiting For Time, which won Bernice Morgan the 1995 Canadian Authors Association Award and the 1995 Raddall Atlantic Fiction Award for best fiction book in Atlantic Canada.



in concert

Blue Rodeo and Great Big Sea

In the McInnes Room of the SUB on January 20

MUSIC

Nowhere to Here

Blue Rodeo

WEA

Listening to a new Blue Rodeo album is in one way like listening to a Beatles album. The credits say "all songs Keelor/Cuddy" but just as you knew which songs were Paul's and which were John's, on the first spin of Blue Rodeo's *Nowhere to Here* I found myself dividing the disc up based on the vocalist for each track.

For the first four-and-a-half minutes, this record sounds somewhat like their previous, all-acoustic offering, *Five Days in July*. But the

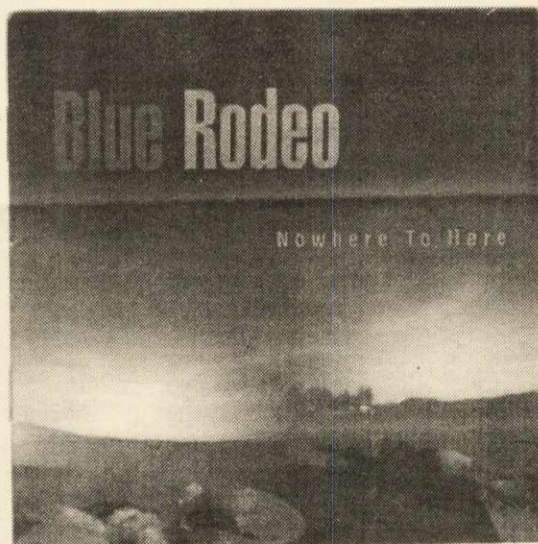
emotional buildup explodes before the first song, "Save Myself," is over. The song stops to breathe for a second, then the drums appear, the guitars clang, and Sarah McLachlan steps up to the mike to repeat the soulful chorus. McLachlan sticks around to do some more wonderful work on the bouncy "Girl in Green," as well as a third Greg Keelor song, "Brown-eyed Dog."

If the album has a weak spot, it is predictably to be found on some of the Jim Cuddy songs. "Blew It Again" and "Armour" are a little too much of the hurtin'/cheatin' genre. But it's hard to get too turned off, especially when you hear Greg lamenting about

how it "looks like winter's never gonna leave this grey town" on "Get Through To You."

If Blue Rodeo isn't your favourite Canadian rock band, it's not because there's something wrong with them...

MILTON HOWE



MUSIC

up

Great Big Sea

Warner

Of all the celtic rock bands in all the Keith's-serving, smoke-filled, tightly-packed pubs in the world, Great Big Sea has got to be the best. There are great traditional bands and great rock bands, but this Newfoundland quartet have combined the two as smoothly as Spirit of the West, with more emphasis on the traditional aspect of the music.

Up, released in the McInnes Room last October, is a shining example of this incredible talent. Opening with the raucous Slade



cover "Run Runaway," the record ventures into beautiful original ballads such as "Fast As I Can" and "Something To It," and goes purely traditional with the Newfoundland squeeze box tunes, as in "Dancing With Mrs. White." A number of tunes feature the witty story-telling style of many a traditional song while tracks like "Chemical Worker's Song" tell the tale of tragedy. The best tracks are the ones that showcase Great Big Sea's rock-influenced ideas of traditional music. Their roughed-up version of "Mari-Mac" smokes like no other version I've heard. Back in October, bassist Darrell Power said that "blowing the dust off a blast from the past" is a part of their show and they do it like no other.

As a testament to their talent, Great Big Sea was recently nominated for five East Coast Music Awards.

Up is an album that fits in on your stereo at home, at a kitchen party, and on stage, opening for Blue Rodeo this weekend. Milton (see left) would disagree with me but I would pay 19 of my 20 dollars to see Great Big Sea.

TIM COVERT

the box

As it does every year, CKDU is holding its annual funding drive February 2nd to the 9th. This year the goal is to raise \$45,000 — about one third of the station's budget — so start saving your loonies. Don't forget that there are lots of cool prizes being given away. CKDU is one of the pillars which supports our thriving music scene and to deny them a few dollars is akin to wiping away all the work they've done to support the diverse, musical Halifax community. Remember, it might not always be your cup of tea, but drink up — you might find an exotic flavour you like even better.

The Crispy Crunch Couple Search Booth is at the SUB this week starting today and running through Sunday. Let's get some more Blue-nosers on TV — soon we shall have complete control of the airwaves. Hahahaha! And be creative. Who knows — the next Crispy Crunch Couple could be me and Elroy Jetson.

Those of you who were in town for the New Year's Eve show at the Birdland with Li'l Orton Hoggett will be aware of the charity fund-raiser they attempted. With sales of Li'l Orton Liqueur and Popcorn — and the opportunity for three dollars to have your picture taken with Hoggett and Ol' Glory — a grand total of \$9.50 was raised after costs. I am told Hoggett and his Ten Cent Wings will sometime soon head off to the casino, as promised, to gamble the money into a charity windfall. We wish them luck.

At the Dalhousie Art Gallery this coming Wednesday, Jean Renoir's short film *The Little Match Girl* will be screened at 12:30 and 8 p.m. Admission is free, donations accepted.

Also at the Art Gallery, until the 25th of February, are the following shows: *Body Language: Contemporary Figure Works from the Permanent Collection*, Marilyn McAvoy's *Silent Room*, and book illustrations by Black Cultural Centre Curator, Henry Bishop.

Rumours abound as to whether Halifax's Sloan are in the process of recording a new album or not. Murderrecords, the Sloan-run record company, will not confirm or deny the rumours but have indicated that any project will include drummer Andrew Scott, currently living in Toronto.

NSCAD's Anna Leonowens Gallery is showcasing many works this week and next. Among them are the *Selected Students Drawing Exhibition III* (Jan. 23-27), Bruce Barber and Kill Young Yoo's *Action and Cognition* (Jan. 16-27), Vanessa Paschakarnis's *new works*, and Samuel Harvey's *Tulipiers*.

Jan Zwicky will be reading from her poetry collection, *The New Room*, in The Sun Room at St. Mary's University, 5920 Gorsebrook Ave. The reading is tomorrow, the 19th, at 8 p.m.

the turquoise ten

CKDU 97.5 FM

tc	lc	wo	cc	artist	title	label
1	6	3	◆	Ashley MacIsaac	Hi How Are You Today	A&M
2	5	NE	◆	Four the Moment*	In My Soul	Atlantica
3	1	5		Various Artists	Swarm of Drones	Ashphodel
4	19	4		Brian Eno/Jah Wobble	Spinner	Gyroscope
5	18	4		Julian Cope	Presents 200 Mothers	American
6	2	3	◆	Rhythm Activism	More Kick	Les PagesNoires
7	10	4	◆	Loreena McKennitt	A Winter Garden	WEA
8	-	NE	◆	Sully	Sully	OneHanded
9	23	2	◆	Download	Furnace	Cleopatra
10	3	6	◆	Bob Wiseman	Accidentally Acquired Beliefs	WEA

*: Local Artist
cc: Canadian Artist

re: Re-Entry
lc: Last Chart

tc: This Chart
ne: New Entry