

# Miracle Man and Wonder Woman

**CONCERT**

**Scarce**

January 20 and 21  
Birdland Cabaret

BY TIM COVERT

It was even better than I thought.

The two shows that Rhode Island rockers Scarce put on at the Birdland this past weekend were some of the finest hours the club has seen in its brief existence. Guitarist/vocalist Chick Graning — fully recovered from his June brain hemorrhage — was back on stage and wailing away as he, hyper-intense bassist/vocalist Joyce Raskin, and newbie drummer Joe Propatier put on a killer show. Mars We Love You opened the evening and Coyote's searing rock, albeit not as flawless as usual, got the audience in a mood of high anticipation for Scarce.

On Saturday night, Scarce played a high-intensity set that included all six songs off their 1994 *Red* EP. The audience was very familiar with these songs and sang along at every opportunity, moshing like crazy as each familiar riff began. "All Sideways," "Scorpion Tray," and "Days Like This" featured Chick, while "Something" was done very spiritually and had the crowd mesmerized. The new material, including the exquisite "Rains of Kansas," was of the same quality and were warmed up to very quickly.

Nattily dressed in classy attire — as always — Scarce were irreplaceable onstage. In front of Joe's manic drumming, Chick and Joyce were incredible to watch and they gave the performance their all. At times, Joyce was a blur as she thrashed back and forth like an animal to the tunes. Yet when she stepped up to the mic, the sound was sweet and light — a perfect foil for Chick's scratchy, urgent tone.

The eternally-building "Dozen" was superb and when Joyce and Chick sang the break into the same mic it struck me as to how much the two loved playing together. They were feeding off of each other's energy and their voices sounded even better when harmonized.

The Birdland was packed and the crowd, with the exception of a few inexperienced moshers, bobbed wildly to the fast tunes and swayed happily to the sweeter bits. The band obliged the crowd with two encores, the second one being the sweetest. The crowd had been shouting for the band to do "Hope," a wildly popular tune from the *Red* EP, since about halfway through the show and as the band reappeared for the second time Chick stepped up to the mic.

"All right, motherfuckers — you asked for it!"

And they launched into "Hope" as an exhausted crowd were suddenly invigorated and launched themselves into one another. Oddly enough, I think that as at the '94 pop explosion, the show-ending version of "Hope" was played by ear by the drummer. Scarce were amazing



Chick — fully recovered — and rocking with Joyce and Joe

then as well.

As if the crowd were so exhausted by their exertions the night before, Scarce played an acoustic set on Sunday to a melodic, appreciative audience. Opening act Al Tuck's sweet, apologetic, folk music did a lot to set this mood with an endearing set as did the flickering candles on each table of the Birdland.

Dressed in their street clothes, a stripped-down Scarce played several songs including a beautiful "Rains of Kansas." With Chick on acoustic, and Joe playing a snare drum with brushes and using a rhythm egg for accompaniment, the band was captivating. The unusual tone of the vocal harmony was more distinct and Joyce's fantastic bass lines were discovered at their slower pace. It

was kind of odd to see her hair stay neatly tucked behind her ears though, as only 22 hours earlier it had been sweatily plastered to her face. Joyce's version of "Angel of Montgomery" was stirring and the majority of the audience simply sat and absorbed the splendour of the evening. I can't say that I liked the band better electrically or acoustically because the shows were both so amazing.

Rebecca West followed Scarce for a relatively mellow set and tried out some new songs that they are recording for their new album. Scarce played a short electric show afterwards that I missed because I was too tired. Those who attended either of the shows on the weekend were privileged to witness some of the best rock around these days.

## Utopian ideals

BY ZACK TAYLOR

**BOOK**

**The Unconscious Civilization**

by John Ralston Saul

House of Anansi Press, 1995

When it came out in 1992, John Ralston Saul's *Voltaire's Bastards* was a surprise best-seller. Luckily for Saul (and to no surprise), few people made it through the six hundred pages. Critics belched muted praise for the dense work, and the heavy sales gave him international notoriety as a philosopher without the legitimacy of an academic position.

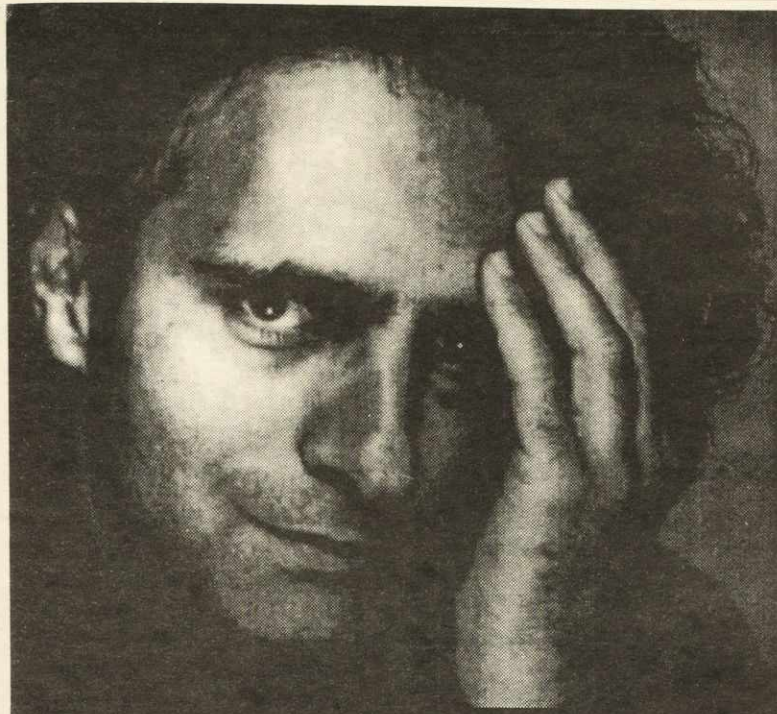
In *Voltaire's Bastards*, Saul attacks what he calls the "dictatorship of reason" in European thought. Pure reason, unchained by the philosophers of the Enlightenment, is a chimera. With thought — and hence action — detached from morality, unfettered reason has brought us such twentieth century dehumanizing wonders as Soviet industrial communism, the assembly line, and mass warfare.

This sort of argumentation has made Saul, a relatively unknown Canadian author and intellectual, pretty hip. His attack on reason endears him to post-modernists while lefties adore his assaults on the international development strategies and the agenda of the radical right. He jumps from the Jesuits to Richelieu to Robert MacNamara and back again without missing a beat, producing a *Lipstick Traces* for the philosophically minded.

The *Unconscious Civilization* follows up key themes from *Voltaire's Bastards*: the cult status of rationality and the loss of individualism. This time out, however, he rearranges his ideas into a single package. Our politics and our society, which since the Reformation and the Enlightenment have been based on the rights of the individual, have fallen into corporatism. By this Saul means that legitimacy lies with groups and interests, not the individual citizen.

This may sound like the New Right, but it's not. Saul's remedy is not the radical plebiscitarianism of Newt Gingrich and Preston Manning. Instead, he reminds us that the government remains the only tool which all citizens of a country hold in common. The wave of anti-government sentiment sweeping the West today is misdirected. The real culprit is the citizen, who has allowed his or herself to get swept away into "corporations."

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## Gifted Kureishi wields pop culture like a knife

*The Black Album* is the long-awaited, second major work from British author and screenwriter Hanif Kureishi.

Nearly three years have passed since Kureishi's first novel — *The Buddha of Suburbia* — arrived, receiving critical praise and significant promise for one of Britain's best young writers. It has been translated into over fifteen different languages, and has been banned in as many countries.

**BOOKS**

**The Black Album**  
by Hanif Kureishi  
Faber & Faber, 1996

Many of you are familiar with Kureishi's screenplays, even if you are not familiar with the writer himself: *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, *London Kills Me*, and *My Beautiful Laundrette*. The *Buddha of Suburbia* has since been transformed into a four-part BBC television mini-series with David Bowie providing the soundtrack.

*The Black Album* follows Shahid Hasan, a young Pakistani University student, living and studying in London, England in 1989. Shahid is colourfully moved through worlds of sex, lust, psychedelic drugs, and the underground music scene of Soho in a journey of self discovery and ethnic identity.

One of Kureishi's great talents is his ability to completely absorb his reader within his wonderfully drawn characters. The array of emotions projected from each character are so overwhelming that the reader is instantaneously engrossed and is a part of the character's evolution. Each character is painstakingly drawn with an artist's precision; even the most minute character has a spine and is integral to the progression of the novel. Kureishi's characters are altogether real and lifelike, and whether you like or dislike them, his creations are alive amongst the pages.

Shahid is quite brilliant as a character — I believe he is probably a mirror of Kureishi in his youth — and he is both terribly innocent and emotionally aware. As a reader you can really reach out and hold Shahid because he is so real; his various personal dilemmas are other-worldly, yet they have a ring of reality within them.

Shahid's brother Chili, the flamboyant nocturnal misogynist, and Deedee Osgoode, the professor of popular culture and Shahid's lover, are both deeply intoxicating because of the depth and effort that went into their development. My favourite character is Strapper, the cockney drug dealer whose language and demeanour is so realistic and representative of London youth.

Kureishi uses the popular culture of London in 1989 as the backdrop for *The Black Album*. Shahid can be seen walking through the streets of Ealing, Knightsbridge and Marble Arch in search of some "E" and the illusive underground "Rave" (hey Ravers, discover your roots). Bands like The Stone Roses, Inspiral Carpets, and The Charlatans UK set the backdrop for Kureishi's urban fairytale.

Kureishi is one of the few authors I know who can weave popular culture into the frame of a novel, and still capture the emotion of the period. Popular culture trends are useful measures of time in most Kureishi projects, and *The Black Album* is no exception. If pop culture is your schtick, then this is your book, and you may want to check out *The Buddha of Suburbia*, which chronicles Teddy, Mod, Punk, and Retro within its own brilliant storyline.

The real brilliance of this novel lies within its glorious storyline and the web of characters between the pages. This for me is the mark of a great novel, especially when I compare my alternatives in the academic world — ugh.

*The Black Album* is an incredible addition to Kureishi's growing repertoire, demonstrating the versatility of this young author and his unique gift in storytelling and character development.

Mark Farrant