

Stonemans versatile at Horseshoe Tavern

By TERRY KELLY

Mrs. Stoneman bore 23 children; 13 of them lived. One has been nine times national fiddle champion of the United States of America and the other surviving members played Toronto's Horseshoe Tavern last week.

Mr. Stoneman was a man of some considerable fame himself. He was the third country artist to record, hobnobbing it from the ancestral seat of Galax West Virginia to New York where he did 'the Sinking of the Titanic'. This hit, and it was a big one, helped him develop a philosophy that his heirs still follow. "Any song that tells a story will interest people, if a song has a story to it then it will catch on."

So they retain his name, style and ethos, 'Stoneman music,' not Bluegrass but similar, a rougher twang, fast fast picking but perhaps more drive, coarser. They're great on songs like 'Savoy Mountain' which their father recorded in 1926, especially Patsy Stoneman, one of the older sisters who didn't join them until three years ago. Before that she'd spent 15 years farming in Mississippi. Now, in her pantsuit outfit every night, she finds this playing and travelling a rest, a holiday from what she used to do.

"I don't like the kind of country music that's well, pessimistic I guess. You know, 'sittin in a barroom drinkin, lost my baby,'" she said. She seems to enjoy herself. On one song, very fast, she shoved Jerry Munday, the only non-Stoneman in the group, though he's like part of the family now: "Ah play it jelly belly."

Patsy is the one who is best on the old songs, 'The Wreck of the Old 97', her face with that very flat level stare and her mouth long and thin as she sings that flat level music that seems without resonance, without dimension, even and consistent in the pitch and poetry of the sound.

Brother Jim plays the string bass. He tapes his fingers and plays the bloated scratched big fiddle very exuberantly, leaning back as he flails it, one leg cradled, riding in a whorl in its side. They all lean back that way when they sing their old Stoneman music, that nasal keen with the throat muscles stretched, the sound thin and stretched.

Donna Stoneman is on mandolin and she's always moving on stage, laughing and jumping and small, her movements half square dance and half diminutive gogo girl that's pert and tiny. She says some purists don't like their style because some of their instruments have electric pickups, like her mandolin, but she doesn't claim to be Scruggs and their group has always stressed entertainment. They probably wouldn't have been able to play the Fillmore West if they played straight bluegrass, though she said that what they do isn't anything except Stoneman music, Stoneman style. She herself likes all types of music, jazz, pop etc. but she's always played with her family and did her first show with them when she was 13.

"Traditional music is still alive and many of the groups that do it make a decent living," she said, "but they never get a really big big hit, you know. It's still there, even the way it was, in North Carolina and West Virginia, and of course there are dedicated bluegrass fans, but it takes a hippy group, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band for example, to make some of it really big and reach a larger audience. Sure people

like Bill Munro(e) and the Osmond brothers are getting the recognition they deserve, but they've been there a long time. You know I think some of those true bluegrass fans hate us cause we've always had pickups."

They've put out 12 albums but they've been dissatisfied with producers who tried to make them change their style.

"We're used to singing together and if a fella says, 'you stand over there and you stand over there' and arranges the tunes then it isn't us. The albums where we've had control, well I guess two of the best are 'In all Honesty' and 'California Blues', an old Jimmy Rogers tune."

Van Stoneman, guitar player, singer and MC is the youngest member of the group; he's also the biggest. He's a bit worried because he's starting to get too fat since he stopped "tearin her up" after shows. But he's healthier now. He has been married for 14 years.

"Don't you find it difficult being on the road so much?" I asked. "No," Donna said, "being a family I guess we can take a bit more from each other."

"Did you find it difficult getting back to music after being away so long?" I asked Patsy.

"I never did get away. Come Saturday night and I just knew it was time to go pick, no matter where I was."

Their gig at the Horseshoe lasted one week, not as much money as one night stands, but much more comfortable. And the Horseshoe is a good place to play; acts get from \$1,500 a week to \$1,000 a day and more, and country music has been alive and well there for 24 years.

Jack Starr has been owner all this time. The thing about it is that business is steady, he says, and steadily growing, though of course it depends on the act. Canadian talent is popular, some of them easily as big a draw as Nashville Acts. Stompin' Tom Connors was there earlier this fall and Roy Pane is coming in at the end of November. Van Stoneman says the people who listen to country music are the best kind of audience, friendly. The place doesn't have the hardness of a lot of downtown bars and there's no cover or minimum Monday to Thursday.

The thing about this music is that it isn't just American. Where it started, that whole Appalachian isolation, stretches from the Maritimes down, and the rural experience or whatever — the feel for this kind of sound — has its reality from not just where it originated, but from the kind of place. It wasn't just Tennessee or Beckley, W. Virginia. As much Mount Forest, Ont., as Greenville, Arkansas. It may have more of a form where seclusion was more extreme, but the landscape of bitterness, artistry in illiteracy, escape from numbing work, is more of land than location. Now country music has as its landscape assembly plants in Oshawa and Detroit, and bars in Nashville. The Stonemans do a tribute to pop, they play modern songs, imitations of Tammy Wynette, and they reach for and have the same listeners. But you can hear another source, almost gone now, especially when Patsy sings.

The Plastic Orgasm —boredom fails to make yards

The Plastic Orgasm, LaVerne Barnes, McClelland and Stewart, 164 pages, \$6.95.

Thomas Haliburton invented Sam Slick, the Yankee peddler, as one of the typical Americans who were gyping and conning Canadians. If LaVerne Barnes is to be believed in her new so-called exposé of the Canadian Football League, the team owners are now, in the tradition of Sam Slick, conning the poor, dumb, innocent Yankee gridiron stars into coming to Canada.

The Plastic Orgasm is, according to the cover, "a candid look at the real game in Canadian football — the struggle for power, money and sex." Instead, it is a collection of secondhand anecdotes about crushing halfbacks, drunk tackles and racist southern coaches.

Barnes says in her introduction that she is disgusted with the Yahoos and superfans in the stands. Unfortunately The Plastic Orgasm offers no concrete criticism of football, its ethics, or how it is played in the pro leagues. Instead, what Barnes has done is play to the stands. With no substantiation and

rather dull stories of wild parties or snide remarks on the sexual prowess of football players, she has done nothing but reinforce the jock stereotype. There is no examination of the game for the serious person who loves it. There is only titillation of the fan in the worst tradition of the yellow scandal sheets.

She cuts everyone — the players, the coaches, the trainers, the owners and the press. She leaves the impression that she believes that any player who came out of the Canadian college system is a schnook. There is the sad, sad tale of the poor, beautiful, California girls who marry CFL imports and then waste away to become dumpy matrons in the suburbs of Regina and Toronto or the story of the college player from north by north eastern State who is conned into Canada by colourful brochures and given a prostitute upon getting off the plane.

Mrs. Barnes cannot make up her mind whether or not she likes the sport. She can't go all the way with her condemnation and therefore loses the points she could have

made. She says in one instance that the American college system leaves players mindless and then within a few pages, cuts up Canadians for standing up to a coach. She also seems to say, though it is never spelled out, that all those terrible things only happen here, never in the National Football League.

The Plastic Orgasm is a book only for the worst kind of bored suburban housewife who probably doesn't exist anyway. Whether or not you want to read something about football or support a Canadian publisher, forget The Plastic Orgasm, get a copy of last month's Maclean's and read the article by former Calgary linebacker John McMurty or wait and see if Dick Thorton writes his book. If you want a book on football and sex, go to any of the stores the morality squad raided last summer.

The Plastic Orgasm is dull, boring and doesn't say anything; it wasn't worth the time or money McClelland and Stewart spent on it, especially the way Canadian publishing is today.

Bowering brings poetry from Tarot cards

By JEREMY HILL

She kneels at water's edge
not to draw but to pour it into the lake,
water — does it come endlessly
from her two earthen jugs

as the stars above her
include her head in their circle?
Endlessly,
her naked breast in line
with the pitcher she tilts
that star-water from, silent lonely
and capable smile on her face.

This is an extract from Vancouver poet George Bowering's latest book, *Genève*. At the age of 37, Bowering shows impressive maturity in his writing.

Genève is a serial poem based on thirty-eight Tarot cards chosen "at random" by Bowering. Needless to say, the last card dealt was the card of death. He also avoided using numbered cards

and thus had only to work with kings, queens, valets and emotions. The purpose of this exercise was to offer the poet a medium through which he could make comments, usually introspective in nature.

The majority of poetry in this volume does in fact refer directly to the poet. He seems to be showing us how he can fit into the skins of the characters on the cards. In what ways does he have a kinship with the king of mirrors and if so, what is the substance of that kinship? If not, why not?

In terms of technique, Bowering is undoubtedly one of the finest living Canadian poets. His images are fresh, imaginative and strong, his style innovative, and his approach unique. *Genève* is published by Coach House Press in a beautifully done edition selling at \$3.00 paperback and \$6.00 hardcover.

CULTURAL BRIEFS

Clive Barnes at Burton

Last Friday night at the Burton Auditorium, New York Times Drama critic Clive Barnes said, "A critic shouldn't object to being criticized." Perhaps he was aware of the shortcomings of his lecture entitled, "The Arts: Affluence And Exploitation" in which he offered such profound and original ideas as, "North America is the most affluent society known," and hoped that someone would relieve him of the task of delivering a talk based on nothing but his own charm and wit. I am sure the less than half-capacity audience was responding more to his asides than to the serious content of his lecture in which he observed that people were watching more sports and that that man needed ritual to show him his place. Mr. Barnes also gave a rather light-weight resume of subsidy in the arts and the influence of puritanism, foundations, and the artists themselves in exploiting the arts.

During the question period, Mr. Barnes was more relevant when asked to comment on questions closer to his own experience. He thought, for instance, that the Stratford Festival was resting on its laurels instead of progressing into new areas such as experimental theatre. His best point of the evening was that Canadian actors were better than the average American actors due to their independent training instead of the university courses offered in the U.S. Mr. Barnes suggested conservatory-type training instead of university courses which give too much extraneous material. But insights such as this could not keep me from feeling that Mr. Barnes' lecture was in itself an exploitation not only of the arts, but of his own name.

Malcolm Scully

What The Butler saw a farce

I went down to the St. Lawrence Centre of the Arts last Friday night where What The Butler Saw was playing. It was a farce in the finest sense of the word. You have to listen closely if you want to catch all of the dialogue.

Although somewhat garbled at times, it is terrifically witty.

Irony follows irony through mistaken identities, rude awakenings, and yes, even mistaken sex. Ah, the joy of incest in the insane asylum. After all where else could you have so much fun, for all you have to do is be declared insane, or was it sane? Well, it doesn't really matter because by the end of the play you might have reason to doubt your own sanity.

Everyone is indicted from Royalty, to certain parts (which shall remain nameless) of Sir Winston Churchill. After the Chief Inspector of Sanity shoots himself up, anything and everything can be expected.

Howard Kurlaski

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