

# ARTS



## Crashing into an air bag

BY STEPHANIE NOLEN AND DON HARRISON

**T**HE FRONTMAN for a hot new Canadian band says Canadian content laws are an important "help" to new artists.

**MUSIC**  
Crash Test Dummies  
McInnes Room

Brad Roberts, of the Crash Test Dummies, defended the regulations recently slammed by other prominent Canadian artists. The Dummies were in town for a sold-out show at Dal last Wednesday.

"The common assumption on the part of people who don't like Canadian Content rulings is that you end up with a lot of mediocre Canadian music on the air that wouldn't otherwise get played and the only reason it gets played is because people are forced to play it," he says.

But Roberts calls this claim "bogus."

"Since when," he asks, "did aesthetics ever play a part in deciding what went on the radio to begin with? There's all kinds of crap on the radio now that's not there because of Canadian content and there always will be and if you get rid of Canadian content that's not going to change."

He adds that even if mediocre Canadian music gets air time, just because of rules at radio stations, people are not going to buy it and they're not going to request it. Bad Canadian music, he says, does no better than bad music from anywhere else.

"I think that what Canadian con-

tent laws do is give a fighting chance to some bands who otherwise wouldn't be played," says Roberts.

He says the main concern at many stations is to pull in advertising dollars, "and it's better to go with a well-tested and safe American hit" than to push a debut album from a Canadian band.

"That probably wouldn't happen unless they were forced to by law," he says. "It does give those kinds of people some hope that they'll get that initial exposure and maybe things will snowball if there's potential."

However: "I would also say that in the case of Canadian Content laws, Canadian content laws really didn't have a fuck of a lot to do with our success," Roberts says.

"I don't mean that in any way to suggest that they're not good laws," he says. "It's just that in our particular situation, Superman's Song was kind of an unusual phenomenon."

Roberts explains the song garnered its success from a totally unexpected response from listeners, and program directors accepted its viability only when faced with an ecstatic outpouring from fans.

Roberts calls that first hit single off the debut album *The Ghosts That Haunt Me*, "clearly political." "Superman as cast in Superman's Song is obviously a left-wing political figure," Roberts explains. "His activity in the community is intrinsic to his being. Superman is being juxtaposed against Tarzan, who is kind of a laissez-faire capitalist type who retreats to the forest, and rejects the idea of the community. He wants

to live in a so-called animal state, and he doesn't have to be bothered with any kind of political realities.

"I typed Superman and Tarzan in a gentle, mocking way, and this is my left wing tendency creeping up," he says. But, "people listen to that song and don't necessarily say to themselves 'well obviously Brad's a Commie,'" he says with a chuckle.

Roberts says he choose to write the song about comic book characters to avoid a problem he sees in a lot of politically oriented music.

"I wanted to talk about political subjects, but a great deal of politically motivated writing tends to be heavy handed, and preachy sounding," he says.

"The writer has a point he or she wants to make and it gets done in a way that is no less than pedantic and you feel in the end of it like you've just been told how to think," says Roberts.

Political or otherwise, *The Crash Test Dummies* draw their unique sounding music from a mixed bag of musical influences.

"The first record," Roberts says, "was no less than an attempt to try to fuse together a wide variety of different styles, and the whole premise was to combine disparate genres in novel ways, to hopefully create some kind of interesting music."

Roberts says he feels his music transcends the traditional.

"I didn't want to do some kind of straightforward, earnest, predictable, clichéd restatement of things that have already been done," he explains. "I hate to use this term cuz it sounds so fucking pretentious, but we approach

those traditions, whereas lots of other bands seem to just extend the tradition, with a certain amount of modernizing."

Roberts, as he will tell you at length, is the main force behind the band. About the other four members, who include his brother Dan, Roberts says "really their job is to come to rehearsal and learn the songs I give them... that's not to downplay what they do, because they make a significant contribution. But I'm the one who does the writing."

All is not rosy within the band: a former drummer is currently suing the Dummies because he was listed as a guest drummer on the album. About the incident, Roberts will say only that he was "not road material, he was not easy to work with and we thought it would be better to work with somebody else."

There are indeed 'skeletons in everybody's closets' and Roberts calls this incident "The ghost that haunts me now, as it were."

Band politics aside, the *Crash Test Dummies* are doing well. The album has sold 100 000 copies in the US and *Superman's Song* is doing well in both Australia and Europe. The Dummies include both those places on up and coming tour agendas.

And about that name. Does Roberts agree with those who claim it is the most original name for a Canadian band in 50 years?

"I couldn't get away with agreeing and not looking like a pretentious asshole so I'll just shut my mouth."

# GWEN NOAH

## STRUCTURED IMPROVISATION

BY MIRIAM KORN

**G**WEN NOAH has come a long way. This was evident when her most recent work, *Dances with Winds*, unfolded in January as part of Eye Level Gallery's New Dance Series.

**DANCE**  
Gwen Noah  
*Dances With Winds*

Since beginning her solo career in 1986 with *Gorgeous Dresses*, *Gorgeous Girls*, she has been creating work that has been seen from St. John's to Toronto. Her November 1991 program *Passion Undercover* filled The Church in Halifax.

Noah is fully aware of the difficulty many people have with more abstract works. She explains how in one of her works, *G-d is in Dartmouth*, she "tricked the audience". The show began with a monologue. "This settles everyone, gives them something to hang their hat on. In this piece [*Dances with Winds*], dance and music is all that there is to hang your hat on."

*Dances with Winds* is made up of six parts "The concept was simple and formal, exploring the body, sound and space."

Canadian Composer saxophonist Paul Cram accompanied her with a melody of dissonant notes.

It was felt by some that the dissonant music was too distracting, and the message too obtuse. One pondered, however, that it might be like the Emperor's Clothes.

... the artist fooling

the audience into thinking there was a deeper meaning.

Indeed, anyone musing about the significance of the pair of eyes adorning her flowing pants would have fallen into the Emperor's trap. They were merely patches acting as an impromptu repair. "If your costume melts five minutes before the show, you have to deal with it."

The dancer and the musician began working together in July. "It was like a jam session... now that was fun," said Noah. "Our improvisational world's connect, because we have the same philosophy towards improvisation."

Noah and Cram work with "structured improvisation". A certain amount of structure is laid for the music, but open spaces are left for improvisation. "It wasn't my decision what it would sound like, although I could give feedback [on the] structure for the music."

Two of the parts, *Long Distance* and *Mountains of Madness* had set

scores, the other s had very loose or non-existent structures

Many agreed that, of the six parts, the untitled silent solo was the most enjoyable. This allowed one to concentrate on watching Noah's moves which never cease to amaze. Here, the most powerful instrument was her body alone.

This performance's simplicity contrasted with her recent solo show, *Passion Undercover*, as well as the piece by Susan Miller which followed hers. "You didn't go in to see and feel an experience with obvious resolve... this was more subtle. It was pushed into the realm of abstraction more than my other pieces."

"You would have enjoyed it the most if you had come without expectations," said Noah. "Just dropped out of your head."

She felt that it would be easier for people to relate to *Passion Undercover*. "It had costume changes, different aspects of being a woman and a change of music. In *Dances with Winds*, the elements are there but there is a greater concentration on the body's movements, although my costume covered more of my body than in *Passion Undercover*."

Thus, the evolution of Noah's career continues.

"I'm trying to change and develop myself and my dance and I'm making progress," she says, but it seems that "just when you're getting somewhere, people want to change your style. I'm not interested in doing something different just for the sake of doing something different."

simple and formal, exploring the body, sound and space

PHOTO: MARK SIMKINS

### ARTS PICK OF THE WEEK:

**WOMEN'S FILM FESTIVAL WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 1992**  
ROOM 307, S.U.B.

• 7:00 PM : *Mother Earth*, directed by Terre Nash.

A poetic non-verbal film composed of shots selected from over fifty years of National Film Board productions. The story begins with an expression of the harmony between nature and its inhabitants. As 'man' begins to exploit 'his' surroundings, we descend into discord, death, and destruction of Mother Earth and her creatures. Fi-

nally, positive energy expresses itself in rebirth, nurturing, hope and harmony. And the film ends where it began.

*Adam's World*, directed by Donna Read.

Elizabeth Dodson Gray speaks passionately and humorously about global environmental crisis.

• 8:00 PM : *Goddess Remembered*, directed by Donna Read.

"The kind of connectedness women's spirituality... teaches about the earth is missing from politics today. And the people who are guiding our countries see the nature only as a resource for indus-

trial growth." -C. Spretnak

• 9:00 PM : *Burning Times*, directed by Donna Read.

"The superior learning of witches was recognized in the widely extended belief of their ability to work miracles. The witch was in reality the most profound thinker, the most advanced scientist of those ages. As knowledge has ever been power, the church feared its use in women's hands and leveled its deadliest blows at her." -M.J. Gage, 1893

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## DIRECTING the Future

BY KATE RUTHERFORD

**H**IS NAME MAY NOT ring bells, but Neil Dainard's commitment to the theatre is making an impression on the students at Dalhousie's theatre department. He is one of the many professionals who travel to Dalhousie to direct acting students in the four major shows each year. His current assignment is Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, which he describes as, "a cry for us today."

**THEATRE**  
*The Trojan Women*  
Dal Theatre Productions

"Nurturing" and "stimulating" are among his favourite words. An education at the National Theatre School provided the nurturing he needed to direct imaginations and to express his creativity. A traditional education in history, classics and literature gave him a springboard to stimulate his talent. Spirit is what keeps

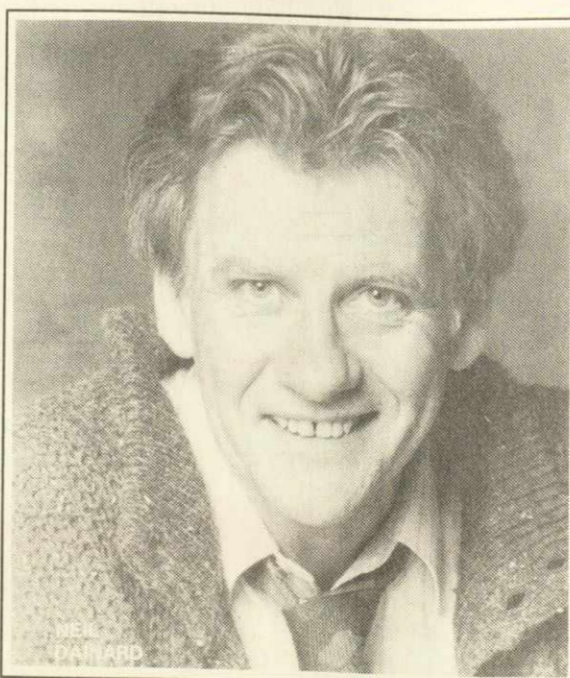
him looking forward after a career spanning nearly thirty years in theatre, film and television.

Dainard is himself a teacher. He taught at York University from 1974 to 1979 and at Ryerson from 1981 to 1990. His excitement is evident as he taps his pencil and describes his idea of a good education: two years at least of general post-secondary study, followed by two more years of guidance in a specific discipline.

"If you've chosen something like theatre, you'd better make sure it's not narrow," he says. Education outside the arena of theatre is vital.

"You may get out there and not have people waiting for you with open arms," says Dainard, "so you'd better find second and third things to do. If you want to stay close to theatre, make sure those things are [related to theatre] such as visual art and music."

Dainard's energy shifts to a deeper level as he speaks of Canadian culture.



Director Neil Dainard

"It comes down to one thing. The arts are thought of as a frill."

He believes the arts should be a stimulation of the community, a "social intercourse: you are engaged with people then and there." It is human spirit and energy that provoke change.

He continues to insist, however, that culture is the glue that binds communities. It starts with a small investment, but the rewards are greater than the value of that initial investment.

"Theatre, film and television are multipliers," he says. "If you give us one hundred dollars, we multiply that money. We spread it out in the community and that community spreads it out further... our hundred dollars stimulates about a thousand dollars worth of work. So [when] you give to the arts you may get every cent of your money back, every cent."

He sets his jaw and leans back as he thinks about Canada's cultural future.

slowly dwindle until there is nothing left but an ember by the turn of the century." His grim outlook is not without possibilities though. "Of course there's hope, but it's going to take a lot of energy, drive and focus to turn it around."

Dainard sees a lot of promise in the students he is involved with at present.

"They're the next generation, and there is far more out there than when I began. So it's up to them to come out and turn it around."

He shrugs a trifle self-consciously as he asks himself "why do I perpetuate it? I continue to hope to do my share, in that I want to direct more and more. There has to be a voice in there."

DTP's production of *The Trojan Women* runs February 12 to 15 in the David Murray Mack Studio Theatre. Performances are at 8 p.m. with a 2 p.m. matinee on Feb. 15. Tickets are \$10, \$9 for students and seniors. For more information call 494-2233.