

More music, less politics, please

by David Deaton

Bruce Cockburn — **Big Circumstance**

*I've got friends trying to
batter the system down,
Fighting the past till the
future comes round.
It'll never be a perfect world
'til God declares it that
way,
But that don't mean there's
nothing we can do or say...*

Bruce Cockburn keeps on fighting the good fight.

On *Big Circumstance*, his umpteenth LP, he lashes out against political oppression, deforestation, and all such tumours of glory.

Cockburn's outrage remains as loud as it's ever been. Who else in Canada or America has so determinedly raised their voice against "man's inhumanity to man"?

For the first time, though, Cockburn sounds weary, as if he's aware he's fighting a losing cause. The cover photograph of him does nothing to allay this impression. There he sits, a picture of dejection.

No doubt you've heard the album's single "If A Tree Falls (Does Anybody Hear)," his passionate protest against the destruction of the Amazon rain forest. Its irresistible rhythm and stream-of-consciousness recitation capture your attention from the start:

*rain forest
mist and mystery
teeming green
green brain facing
lobotomy
climate control centre for
the world
ancient cord of co-existence
hacked by parasitic green-
head scam*

Who would deny that this is poetry? But therein lies the weakness of *Big Circumstance*. So much of it sounds like words set to music — with music coming very much as an afterthought.

Several other songs on the album are spoken, not sung. The effect seems forced and feeble, after that first blistering cut.

As if to make up for the relative dearth of melody, every track here gets full studio treatment. The songs themselves drown in sound. It's enough to make you wish Cockburn would go back to being a folkie.

How much more affecting was his gentle ballad "Don't Feel Your Touch" when he played it at the Cohn last year on a lone electric guitar! This time we get AM mush.

BIG CIRCUMSTANCE BRUCE COCKBURN



Bruce Cockburn, however, can scarcely be accused of pandering to commercial tastes. From first to last, *Big Circumstance* is an avowedly political album.

You can guess his none-too-hidden agenda just from the song titles:

"Gospel of Bondage" — a dirge-like swipe at Swaggart and Co.

"Where The Death Squad Lives" — a seven-minute blues bomber, so hypnotically monotonous that the only way to stay awake is to make up new lyrics. (I ended up singing about my dog getting AIDS.)

The problem with all these well-meaning songs is their total inability to transcend their subject. They yield everything they have to yield after just a few listens.

And just a few listens is all you may want to give them. How many times does anyone want to hear about right-wing evangelists? And what, exactly, does Cockburn want us to *do* about them?

Not every song, it should be said, is vehemently political.

There's the rollicking Celtic-sounding "Shipwrecked at the Stable Door," which shows off Cockburn's particle of faith.

There's also the regrettably Yiddish-sounding "Anything Can Happen," which closes the album on a rancid note. It was an outtake back in 1981, and you wish it had stayed that way.

Big Circumstance does have moments of delight, indeed of beatitude:

*Blessed are the dead for love
And those who cry for
peace
And those who love the gift
of earth —
May their gene pool
increase.*

But for the most part, Cockburn's latest is as exhilarating as a newscast. His heart surely is in the right place, but to a point where his mind no longer seems to be on the music.

More's the pity, when you hark back to earlier albums and are reminded of Cockburn's dazzling artistry.

The uninitiated would do well to pass on *Big Circumstance* and try Cockburn's 1984 stunner, *World of Wonders*. Inexplicably, it can be found selling for \$1.99 in the discount cassette bins at Sam's. World of wonders, indeed!

Not only is *WOW* a heart-thumpingly good album, it has a close-up of ol' Bruce when he was still able to smile.

Pill box mania...

Kelly's Hats

by Joanie Veitch

I walked up the stairs of the Green Bean Coffeehouse to enjoy one of my first cups of coffee in Halifax. I had just moved to the city and was still doing lots of exploring. Great fun! A display of hats caught my attention: all neatly lined up, brightly coloured and definitely eye-catching. The person who served me explained enthusiastically that she had made them. Her name is Kelly Burgess, a native of Nova Scotia and a familiar face to many Haligonians.

Burgess, a former student of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, began sewing at a very early age. She makes many of her own clothes, often without a pattern, simply using her own ideas. She made a few hats for herself last year and was surprised by the results. She received many comments and offers to buy them. In February of this year she decided to sell them. Now she is virtually in business for herself!

Obviously the public was ready for more local art and innovative ideas. During the summer months Kelly set up her hat display outside the Public Gardens in Halifax. She was pleased to hear the encouraging and appreciative

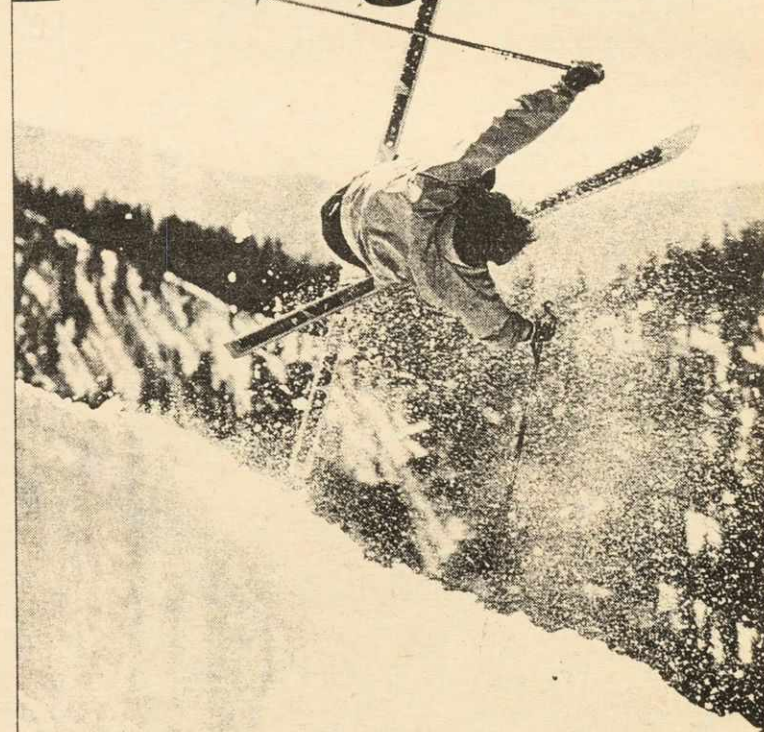
comments of tourists and passers-by. She did especially well during the Buskers Festival when the city overflowed with visitors and street performers from all around the world.

It is refreshing to find unique clothing which is fashionable, different and locally made.

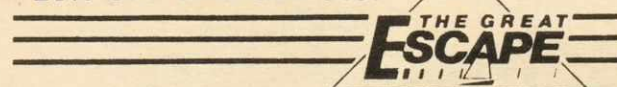
Burgess works at her kitchen table where she feels most comfortable and relaxed with her cup of tea and her cat Kugan curled around her legs. When she isn't sewing she enjoys camping and saw much of the province this summer on her weekend jaunts. She is also an avid flea market shopper; with her discriminating eye she finds some great bargains. Looking around her apartment one can see the creative flair which will always spawn new ideas to brighten up the dull and ordinary.

Kelly Burgess's hats are displayed at the Green Bean on Blowers Street. On Saturday mornings she bundles them up and sets up her stall in the Brewery Market on Hollis Street. She will also be selling them on campus in the Dalhousie Student Union Building on November 1, 3, 8, 9, 10.

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