

**Elton John in high gear**

**Portrait of the superstar as an automobile**

By JEFFREY MORGAN

Elton John is a Volkswagen, standing alone in the middle of a rock hierarchy that consists mainly of sleek and smooth Jaguars, shiny Corvettes and phantom Silver Ghosts.

Visually, he is the most improbable and unlikely rock star ever given an opportunity to grace a stage. Strike One, he's fat. Strike Two, he's short. Strike Three, he wears glasses. Why then, in Crom's name, would any one person (let

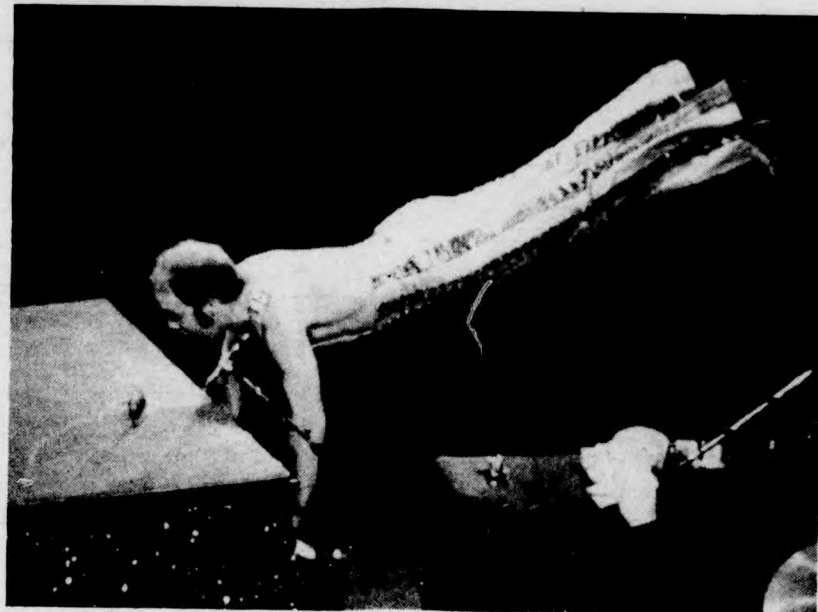
alone the 19,000 of them) pay good money to see him perform at Maple Leaf Gardens?

The answer is simple. Despite how awkward they may look, everybody knows that, above all else, Volkswagens perform well; and Elton John is no exception.

He's no fool either. By managing to turn those three major strikes of his into one of the most successful triple plays of all time, Elton has become not only a millionaire 10 times over, but a music phenomenon on a par with the Beatles. Like the Beatles before him, Elton is English, quite harmless, and lovable in a funny — dumb sort of way. He's a "Pop Star" (remember them?) of the sixties rather than a "Rock Superstar" of the 'eighties'.

As for the show itself, it hasn't been since The Beatles' September '64 concert at the Gardens that I've heard and seen such an onslaught of screams and flashbulbs while the Pintsized Pianist hammered his way through over two hours worth of hits, including such standards as Saturday Night's Alright For Fighting, The Bitch Is Back, Love Lies Bleeding, and Burn Down The Mission.

During the course of the concert, the Rocket Man took to jumping around on stage, posing on the red carpeted top of his piano, throwing away his gold covered piano bench,



The Rocket Man, Elton John in mid-flight.

and on one occasion even executing his famous flying leap into the air (proving once and for all that Pete Townshend isn't the only one who can play an instrument while in mid-flight).

Showman that he is though, most of the evening's gold stars must go to the Madman's warm up act, The Kiki Dee Band. Looking somewhat at times like a cross between Mick Jagger and Jane Fonda, Kiki Dee's stage presence owes much more to the electric sensual undercurrents of a Grace Slick than it does to the leather jacketed image-impositions of a Suzi Quatro.

She's alright, she's dynamite, and she's out of sight.

Indeed, Elton John may be a Volkswagen, but he's far from becoming an Edsel. Kiki Dee, on the other hand, can be likened to a Kawasaki 900.

And that my friend, as we all know, is no contest.

**Renoir film a gem, but oddly unexciting**

By WARREN CLEMENTS

Stumbling onto Le Petit Monde de Jean Renoir, opening tomorrow at Cinecity, is like happening upon a wistful man's daydreams.

Renoir, the 80-year old French film director whose many past glories include Les Regles du Jeu and La Grande Illusion, has written, directed and produced a trio of his quiet fantasies. And critics have praised the work as "delightful", a "masterwork" and a "film of rare beauty".

But sitting in the theatre, one feels pressured by the extravagances of such praise.

Certainly the first tale, of a shivering penniless couple in Paris who exist through their wits, charity and the power of love and imagination, has a certain misty charm. And the

mock-opera, complete with a chorus of secretaries and executives, about a Parisian wife whose husbands refuse to let her own an electric waxer, is an amusing exercise in bathos.

But it is not particularly exciting. The film is an eccentric jewel fashioned by a master film-maker with all the love and polish which won him his fame. But it is a very small jewel, and one tires of marvelling at its perfection long before the vignettes have run their course.

There is a nice moment at the end, when the cast of the final skit bow to the camera, and the curtain symbolically rings down. It was a nice artificial ending to a nicely artificial movie.

If only it had been more exciting, or striking, or involving, or demanding, or, ultimately, entertaining.

**Donnellys return in scattered play**

By MYRA FRIEDLANDER

Canada's newest national family of heroes have returned to Toronto. The Donnellys are back, this time at the Tarragon Theatre in James Reaney's newest play The St. Nicholas Hotel, and once again Keith Turnbull leads his huge cast through a complex and over-long production.

The story of the Donnellys is admittedly an interesting and exciting bit of Canadian history, but the impact of the story is considerably lessened by the drawn-out epics that Reaney seems to specialize in. What saves his work from unbearable boredom is his brilliant use of poetic rhythms and a child-like circus quality that provides the framework for each of his plays.

This technique has its drawbacks however as it tends to create a lack of focus for the central figures. Perhaps if Reaney's editing of the material were tighter this focus would come of itself, but as it stands,

the three-ringed scattered concentration serves to diffuse the story, rather than strengthen it.

Considering the odds that director Turnbull has had to struggle against the production, although uneven, works reasonably well. The ensemble, mostly the same group as for The Donnellys, Part 1, has about it a freshness and vigour that is exciting to watch. The fact that they manage

to maintain their energy level to the very end of the 2½ hour script is a feat worthy of praise.

Their use of the restrained and interesting set also helps to relieve the strain for the audience, and it is due to the imagination of cast and crew that it is possible to walk away from St. Nicholas Hotel feeling if not fulfilled, at least positive about the potential of the night's work.

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