

A soldier's view of war

Book Review: And No Birds Sang
by Alan Christensen

In 1939 when war broke out, Farley Mowat was an eighteen-year old youth with starry-eyed visions of "thrashing the Hun" just as his father had in World War One. Being rejected by the Air Force he was persuaded to join his father's old regiment in the army. As a lieutenant he took part in the Sicilian and Italian campaigns before being transferred to the rear where he spent the remainder of the war.

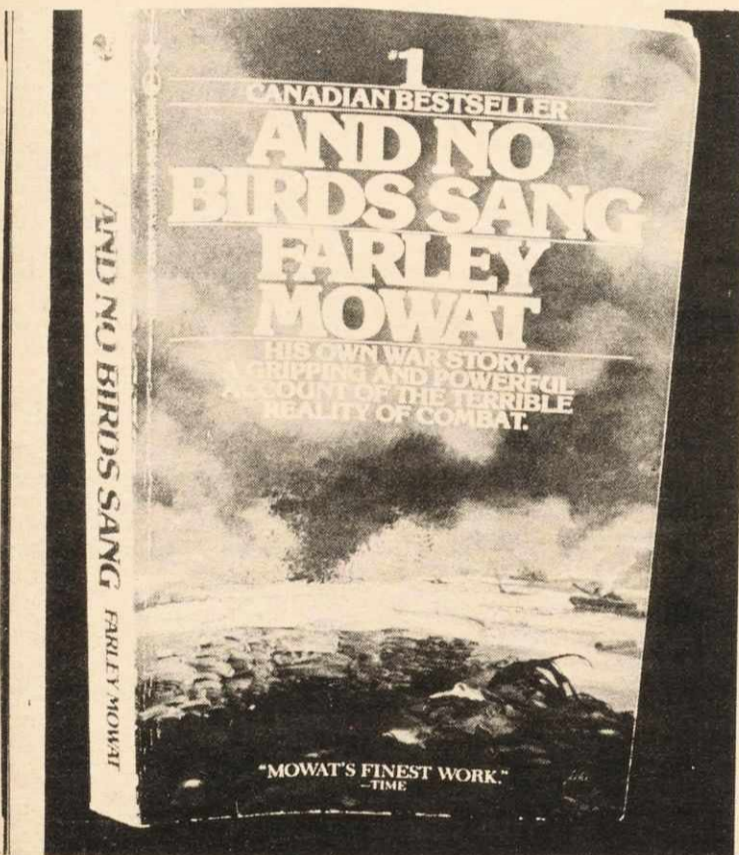
Mowat, after many years of

silence on the subject, has finally decided to tell his own war story. In his newest and finest work he describes World War Two from a perspective that has been too rarely seen in accounts. The war is seen from the viewpoint of an ordinary soldier who fought on the front-line and witnessed all of the horror and stupidity of war. The author attempts to portray his own emotional development while bringing in some of the more universal themes and experiences of front-line battle. He succeeds quite well in both aspects of his account.

Mowat shows his own personal development by using the simple little device of quoting from his diary and his letters to home. It works well because these first hand sources lend the account the authenticity that one gets from front-hand information. In the early letters one can really see his frustration over having to stay in England and one can feel his desire to see action before the war passes him by. Once he finally does get into battle in Sicily his attitude quickly changes and the letters express his frustration over the inhospitable climate, his anger over poor conditions of ordinary soldiers and the luxury of the high-ranking officers and sadness over the loss of friends and comrades.

The book also deals with more general aspects of the battle. Throughout the book Mowat is critical of the conduct of the "brass" as he outlines case after case of the "brass" disregarding the lives and welfare of the front-line soldiers. By the time one finishes reading the book one comes to believe that "fragging", the killing of officers by their own men, should be institutionalized in the case of high command.

In general the book is a very accurate and very moving portrayal of what it is like to be a soldier on the front-lines. It also does a very good job of dispelling the myth that war is glorious or good. Mowat himself says at the end of the book "there never has been, nor ever can be a 'good' or worthwhile war. Mine was one of the better ones (as such calamities are measured)".



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"I Just Can't Stop It" has to be about the best proof that you can be serious and still have fun. Sly, witty, and eminently danceable, this debut offering from six lively and talented Englishmen is a celebration of ska, soul and rock'n'roll. It celebrates the spirit of Motown's best days in a wonderful cover of "Tears of a Clown", yet it is also acutely aware of current social problems. This album draws on dance music which was probably dismissed as mere pop fluff in the 1960s and makes it fully appropriate to the 1980s, with some top-notch saxophone work.

HONORABLE MENTIONS:
BEST REGGAE/R&B ARTIST/GROUP—The Specials, Stevie Wonder, The Police, George Thorogood and the Destroyers

BEST PRODUCER: Gary Numan, for "The Pleasure Principle"

BEST INSTRUMENTALIST: Gary Numan (keyboards)

Here is where you disagree most strongly with me, right? Gary Numan is a misunderstood artist in many ways, chiefly because most critics find it difficult to reconcile musical integrity to such a deliberate attempt to achieve

popularity. Forget all that. Numan's music is stark, but often incredibly beautiful and powerful, and his productions are exquisitely atmospheric. "The Pleasure Principle" is a fascinating record, full of subtle ironies and consistently well-orchestrated. Using a basic keyboards-bass-percussion structure, with viola and violin and not one electric six-string in sight, Numan and his band can rock impressively but can also convey a deeply poignant sadness. This music does not so much celebrate technology as contemplate its dangers from several points of view. Ray Coleman, writing in *Melody Maker* last autumn, claimed that Numan, perhaps more than anybody, could reflect the technological entrapments of our automated lifestyle and the bleakness of what many call the New Depression. This seems a valid appraisal, though open to debate. As a keyboardist, Gary Numan admits he is not technically very proficient. Be that as it may, he has a fine **essential** musical talent; his playing and his arrangements are evocative, even visual in effect, and can support his concise lyrical images and unique vocal style very well. "The Pleasure

Principle" contains nothing quite like Numan's 1979 classic from "Replicas", "Down in the Park", but it is a coherent, strong album, chilling in its vision yet at times so incredibly lovely.

HONORABLE MENTIONS:
BEST PRODUCER — Chris Thomas, Guy Stevens, Nick Lowe, Jimmy Tovine, Rovert Palmer.

BEST INSTRUMENTALIST—Roy Bittan (keyboards), The Police (all three members), Joe Jackson (keyboards), Cedric Sharpley (percussion), Paul Simonon (bass), Mark Knopfler (guitar), Keith Levine (PiL; various instruments), Pete Townshend (various instruments), Pick Withers (percussion), Saxa (The English Beat; saxophone)

You will notice that most of the choices and honorable mentions come from music released before last fall. Actually, the music of last fall provided some extremely notable releases, but I have not heard enough of them to adequately and fairly judge them. So, maybe in April I'll do a version of this article and call it "The Best of the Season—September 1980 to March 1981." After all, you have to give credit where credit is due.

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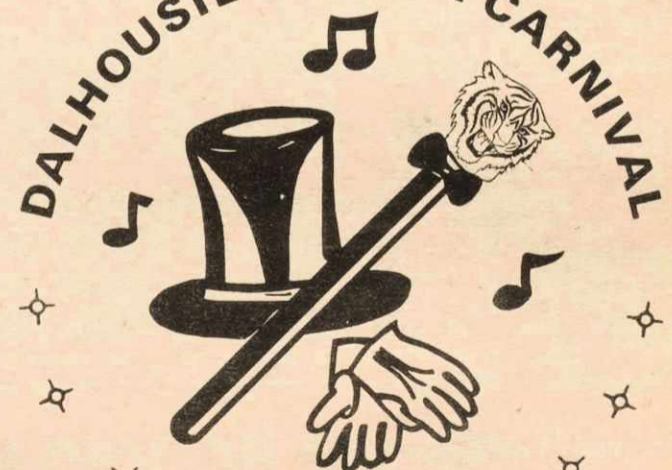
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