



Political "Bitch Goddess" carries big schtick

By ALEX PATTERSON

"Have you noticed as you're studying how revolution flowers, Other people's masses look much better than ours?"

Could those words be anyone's other than Nancy White's? Our self-proclaimed "national voice of liberal guilt," veteran of countless benefit concerts for countless causes, is about to take a step in a different direction: a cabaret-style evening of songs and patter at the Toronto Free Theatre on Berkeley Street.

Every night from October 8-13, the bitch goddess of the North—who has been compared to everyone from Jane Siberry and Joni Mitchell to Tom Lehrer and even Woody Guthrie—will walk softly but carrying a big schtick. "This time it won't be quite so serious... more of a yuk-fest," says White, before hinting that her repertoire now contains a song about Ronald Reagan's polyp. The Ghost of Lady Eaton is also expected to put in an appearance, only "to be seen." Can we

anticipate some of those witty ditties which made her a rumor in her own time on CBC's Sunday Morning radio show? "Yes, but most of them are so topical that they date quickly, so I'm always having to write new ones." Today's read-all-about-it being tomorrow's fishwrapping presents an occupational hazard for a writer of songs political and/or satirical, and like the social worker in her 1982 "Mrs. Linda," Nancy White has suffered from burn-out before.

The album on which "Mrs. Linda" appeared, *Nancy White Unexpected* was intended to be made of more timeless stuff: the same biting doggerel set to the same kind of campfire choruses, only with subject matter more universal. For the most part this album succeeds at this, except for "Nous Sommes Des Enfants," which sticks pins into Ontario's "premier-for-life," Bill Davis. One can't blame her for thinking in 1982 that a provincial Tory government was a fact of life. "I thought that was one topical song

that would last forever. But..." If some of the album's melodies are too Easy Listening to be truly easy to listen to, it is only to cast her ascerbic observations in starker relief. The sweetness of the tunes can be deceptive.

The October shows will likely draw on material from her recent cassette release, available only through her own label (Mouton Records, 14 Ellsworth Ave., Toronto M6G 2K3, 656-5278), *The Sunday Morning Tapes and What Should I Wear To The Revolution?* When asked this musical question herself, White replied, "Oh, anything I happen to see in my closet, so long as it doesn't need ironing." The material she plans on doing at the TFT, accompanied by guitarist Rick Whitelaw and keyboardist Doug Wilde, will have as one of its theme's Canada's continuing search for its lost ID card. "Notre crise d'identité," she translates with extravagant Frenchified gesticulations. "Simultaneous translation is the sound of

Canada. That's why we don't get much done; we're too busy saying everything twice deux fois."

The concerts will also probably display at least a little of Nancy White's more serious side: her concern for the victims of brutal regimes in South and Central America. She can sign her composition "Desaparecidos" (about thousands of "disappeared ones" in General Pinochet's Chile) in either English or

Spanish. Last year she performed in a pop festival in Nicaragua—something which the mighty Clash have never done, despite their leftist posturings and the *Sandinista!* LP.

Does Nancy White have a Message for the students of York University and the youth of the nation? "Yes, come and see my show. You can fall about laughing and still go home with something to think about."

Mediocre show features balls but lacks ballast

By HUMBERTO DA SILVA

Balls and Chains, now playing at Theatre Passe Muraille, is what might be called "Theatre of the Box." It is theatre that owes a great debt to the imagistic shorthand that is the legacy of television, acknowledging this debt in its form and scope. It is not bad theatre, and would make good television.

Balls and Chains is supposed to be a perspective piece about the conflicting feelings and viewpoints that men hold on the *subject* of women. No really new material is dealt with because of the living room dimensions of the drama, but one is left with the overwhelming impression that men are hopelessly subjective.

Howard Lester and Andrew Alty, the writers and performers, are themselves the subjective men they portray. In real life as in the play one of them is gay and one of them is straight and they are best friends. They seem to enjoy being together onstage and expanding their identities into theatre, but this has led to their becoming a closed system. They are funny and bounce off of each other like fine ivory billiard ball but only deal with subjects inasmuch as they affect their friendship.

When a set of characters is used as

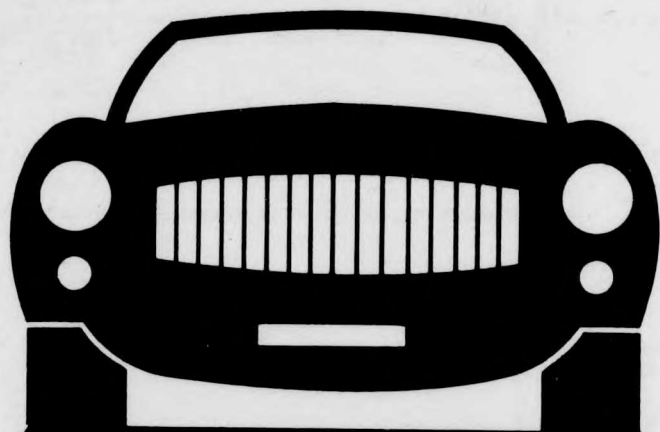
the measure of all things, then this set of characters becomes a situation comedy. *Balls and Chains*, like *Go Go Boys* which preceded it, is destined to make good television. One can only hope that the medium of television does not homogenize these characters into an updated Odd Couple because as it stands now *Ball and Chains* would have a positive impact on your average TV consumer.

Look at the concept: two men in a room with a chair and a television set that doubles as a toilet (the actual stage set), they are alone with their memories, conceptions and misconceptions about the women in their lives, one is straight and one is gay but their relationship is platonic; see them laugh, see them cry, see them come to hilarious grips with a world they never made. It's boob tube dynamite. And the themes: humanity versus role playing, fraternita vincit omnia, male bonding against misogyny.

The question of form aside, though *Ball and Chains* is a very funny bit of satire that does manage to boil down a certain amount of thought on the subject of male attitudes into accessible comedy; no mean feat. Their performance is substantial even when the material is not.



GROOVY GLASSES: Singer/songwriter Nancy White



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