

Shearer entertainment

This weekend the Hovel presents Jon Shearer, a versatile guitarist originally from Edmonton, now working out of Victoria.

Shearer is much acclaimed as a serious composer, arranger and producer, having had the chance to prove his talents by doing musical scores for plays and presenting his music in other inventive ways both here

and at the coast. His music ranges from classical to jazz. Accompanying him will be some of the city's finest session musicians. His musical expression is an experience one should not miss.

Admission for all shows is \$2 for members, \$3 for non-members, doors open at 8:30, shows at 9:30. Shearer will appear nightly from Mar. 26 to Mar. 28.

# The arts

## Myths about Metis remain unexplored

The novel Andre Tom Macgregor is the winner of the annual Search-for-a-New-Alberta-Novelist contest. Two other novels were named as runners-up in the competition, and will be reviewed in the next two issues of The Gateway. They are The Mind Gods by Marie Jakober and Adrift by Randal Harker.

Wilson, Betty, Andre Tom Macgregor, Macmillan of Canada 1976, \$7.95; 162 pp.

Andre Tom Macgregor is a novel about a bright young Metis boy who tries to make it in the 'white man's world.' Andre eventually makes in that world; he does the right thing, and gains acceptance.

But first, we follow him through a series of impossible situations: the husband of the woman he has been sleeping with comes home unexpectedly, forcing Andre to flee his home. Or: the boys at the school Andre finally attends fast-talk him into having a party at his boarding-place, while the owners are absent. Andre knows the party will likely result in damage to the house, which belongs to the kindly Bayrock family. It does, and he is thrown out.

But, just as often as Andre becomes entangled in problems, he is neatly extricated from them. It's rather like an obstacle course; as a result, the reader spends most of his time wondering how the author is going to get Andre through it, instead of becoming involved in the boy's problems. At the last moment, the author always plucks him out the the mess and sets him gently down on his feet.

Because of this kind of motherly intervention, Andre seems a bit of a softie - still tied to his author's apron strings. Mrs. Wilson doesn't seem to want to let him fend for himself.

The book is well-balanced, in the sense that there are no loose ends. In fact, it's too neat, too tidy; there are no surprises. Writing about a young Metis seeking his fortune in the city is a touchy subject, and a tough one, no doubt about it. And Mrs. Wilson has met that challenge by taking the easy way out.

In the interests of realism, Andre's background is rather

sordid. He lives with his family in a tarpaper shack in Northern Alberta. His parents and sister are 'bad' Metis; they drink, prostitute, pimp and never clean up their shack. Contrasted with these characters are the Bayrocks, the family with whom Andre boards in the city. Mrs. Nelle Bayrock is a 'good' Metis; who has risen above her origins to become a decent, god-fearing citizen in the city. Another 'bad' Metis is Gary One Blanket, who lives in squalorous city rooms and sells the bodies of young girls.

But you obviously can't have a bunch of 'bad' Metis, without balancing the picture with some 'bad' whites. So there is Dolores, the bad white girl that Andre falls in love with and marries. Dolores steals, sleeps around, has Andre's baby and runs off with her shop-lifting girlfriend, in the end.

This misguided girl is more interesting, in many ways, than the main character. Where Andre is nice, obliging and passive; Dolores is tough, stubborn and ambitious. At the end of the novel Wilson has Andre triumph by settling down in the Bayrocks home with his newborn son. Dolores 'loses' and leaves to pursue a life of crime, we presume. If one were able to follow the lives of the characters after a novel ends, it would be more interesting to follow



Citadel Too presents David Freeman's *You're Gonna Be Alright, Jamie Boy*, directed by Keith Digby. The play, a clever satire describing the zombie state of a television-addicted family, begins Mar. 29 and runs to Apr. 10. Tickets are available at the Citadel Box Office or at 424-2828. Photo by Keith Miller

Dolores than Andre. But we don't really get to know Andre; he is so busy running from someone or something, or fending off his myriad difficulties, or blundering into new ones, that we get only events stacked on top of one another, rather than a progressive development of character.

Andre is pretty much the same at the end of the book as he is at the beginning. He's a nice, passive, hard-working boy who has finally put all his troubles (including his past and his wife) behind him and is ready to begin anew; at the bottom of the ladder.

Other than the physical trappings of a Metis existence, Andre could be just any young, economically-deprived boy. The outer trappings of a Metis existence are among the best-written portions of the book; the portrayals of the tarpaper shacks and their inhabitants are, if superficial, interesting. But we never really get inside anyone's head, in the book, because the author does not do so. Andre's parents are portrayed as a pair of taciturn old people - but there are different ways of portraying this than having them say almost nothing throughout the entire novel. Even though the point of view is often Andre's or Dolores', they are shallow characters.

The prose in *Andre Tom Macgregor* is clean, uncluttered. It is not over-written; if anything, it's underwritten. This may be due to the author's perceptions of her characters, as much as her use of language. Apparently Wilson gathered her 'material' on Metis people by spending "long, tedious hours in numerous skid row bars observing the Metis and delving into their problems." As a result, the dialogue is excellent; it consistently rings true. But Wilson has not, it seems, "delved" far enough into the lives of Metis people. Or perhaps 'delving' is not the right approach. Whichever is true, the Metis characters are one-dimensional. Dolores, the small-town 'bad' girl from a strict family, is more fully-rounded, believable. Mrs. Wilson attended school in small towns; she is no doubt writing about something she knows about.

What is the purpose of the annual Search contest? If it is to encourage local writers by publishing their work: fine. If it is to publish writers that are unable to get published anywhere else, then maybe it's not so fine.

The fact that the average age of the Search judges is approximately 75 might have something to do with the results.

It is unlikely that if Leonard Cohen were to submit his *Beautiful Losers* to this competition, he would win.

But *Andre Tom Macgregor* would, and did. It is a comfortable book; the reader is not asked to involve himself, or to confront new ideas. No myths are exploded, no challenges issued. And it's a shame; people are hungry for information about these ignored people, but in *Andre Tom Macgregor*, are given none.

by Lindsay Brown



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