

ARTS

Painful twangs and standard whine

Country Chorale
Theatre Network
Until April 4

review by Allison Annesley

Theatre Network's down-home musical production, Country Chorale, offers some good singing talent and fine acting ability, but falls far short of its mark as an entertaining show of broad appeal. The story line itself is just not interesting enough to capture an audience's full attention for any length of time. And the country music prevalent throughout the entire show is for country lovers only. The rest of us must simply endure.

Writer Raymond Storey has dished out some rather moldy left-overs with yet another adaptation of the "small-town girl with talent and big singing star aspirations" theme.

The young talent in question is Ruby McKutcheon, played with unwavering intensity and near perfect timing by Nola Augustson. Of course, poor Ruby's dreams are emphatically halted when she becomes engaged to the town boy who got her pregnant, Del Warren, played by Murray McClune. Even before marriage, Del has made it very clear that his future wife's time will be divided between the kitchen and the bedroom.



Ruby McKutcheon (Nola Augustson) fells Del Warren (Murray McClune) with her charms.

McClune, gives a fine portrayal of the simple yet earnest Del whose largest dream is to own his own home and land. It simply does not occur to small-dream Del that the achievement of this goal alone, may not

give Ruby his sense of contentment. McClune has the character of Del perfected, down to the subtle hunch of posture, associated with hard physical labor. Joyce Seeley as both Ruby's

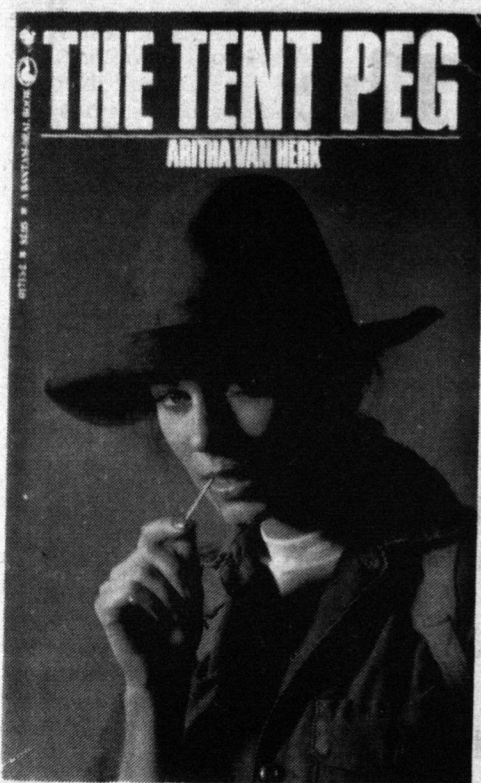
stereotypical farm momma and the Warren's alcoholic and stir-crazy neighbor, gives a fine comic performance — one of the few characters to provide this kind of relief. The ending is predictable, but then so is the whole plot.

The standard country music whine will be just as unappealing to country music haters as the sound of Tammy Whinette in full throttle. This is not cross-over music with the potential to start the audience tapping their toes. The most upbeat tune for us non-devotees to enjoy is "Thing From Space," while the regular fare includes such painful twangs as "Crying in the Chapel" and "Tears in my Eyes". The music is all written by John Roby.

Ruby's story is hardly unique, though Nola Augustson brings to the role all the zest it is capable of carrying. The other cast members all deliver adequate to very good performances, given the depth of material with which they were working.

Country Chorale has not been able to attract a large audience, partly due to its awkward location at 11845-77 St. For this reason, admission to the show will be free until it ends April 4 at Theatre Network. The show opens at Centre Stage, Red Deer College on April 7, and runs there until April 17.

A short short short book review with a long long long headline



The Tent Peg
Aritha van Herk
Bantam, 1982

review by Dave Caulks

The style and captivating plot line of Aritha van Herk's *The Tent Peg* whirl the reader away in the first pages like a Cessna not landing until the conclusion.

Her tale is of a young woman student who gets mightily fed up with the restricting expectations and banal relationships in her life. J.L., the protagonist, disguises herself as a man to get a job as a cook for a mining expedition.

The story unfolds around her complex interactions with the men of the camp, each of whom reacts in his unique way to her presence. By one she is loved, by another lusted after, a third wants to attack her, others want to confess to her.

Her name, it is explained, derives from the biblical Ja-el in the book of Deborah. The prototype is a woman who lulls her enemy with food and drink, then crushes his temple with a tent peg.

Ms. van Herk's character does nothing quite so violent; nonetheless, she does metaphorically "crush the temple" at which the complacent men worship themselves.

I expected to be able to pour vitriolic criticism on the book when I first picked it up. It seemed to hold out promise of being another "Ladies' Home Journal" sort of fictional effort.

But dammit, the book is good. Its style is highly appealing, and just goes off like a firecracker at points. Aside from one or two points where the author is too visibly "literary", the book works smoothly as a whole.

All in all, this one is well worth reading, as soon as those exams and essays are finished.

DIRECT DRIVE

by James L. Stevens

I Love Rock-N-Roll
JOAN JETT AND THE
BLACKHEARTS
Boardwalk Records/C.B.S. (NB1-33243)

Joan Jett did not have much talent to work with as a member of The Runaways, and it seems as if she has even less now. If you listen to rock-oriented radio stations much, you have likely heard the strongest cut from this album; the title cut "I Love Rock-N-Roll." If this song leaves you cold, the rest of the album will freeze you solid. It is merely second-rate rock being sung by what looks like Carole Pope's sister.

The cover version of "Crimson and Clover" is a disgrace and an insult to Tommy James, who made the tune something of a rock classic. Ms. Jett's vocal treatment (and the fact that the words were not changed at all) give the song a lesbian lover flavor. And The Blackhearts' do not even come close to doing the song justice in the music department. As well, the album contains a harsh cover of the traditional tune "Little Drummer Boy." Mom will not want to hear this version.

The "Pile of Bile" award for this album goes to the tune "Nag." A real zero of a cut that is worse than lousy. It is pure cow-cookies! Excuse me, but it's given me a very nauseous feeling ...

Swords of a Thousand Men
TENPOLE TUDOR
Stiff Canada/Attic Records (RIP-2010)

This English bunch, while still very obscure in Canada, are all the rage in England. And once you have listened to their music, you will know why. The band, led by Eddie Tudorpole, plays extremely upbeat dance-oriented rock. It has very catchy rhythms. The music is completely infectious. It prompts one to get up and dance. The music is nothing like the typical, hard-to-dance-to rock we usually get here, but it is far from being juvenile (witness Adam & The Ants).

The group is competent, musically and vocally. The music is laden with guitar hooks and solid, well-timed percussion.

The songs lyrics and choruses are singable, enjoyable, and lighthearted. And most importantly, the album exudes an unending energy. The music seems to be waiting to be played. Once it is played, it stays with you and gets you humming and singing to yourself. Definitely an album to add to your collection.

My favorite track is the title track "Sword of a Thousand Men," with the rest of the album running a close second. The only major detraction from the album is a cut called "Wunderbar." But it's badness is miniscule compared to some of the other stuff I have to listen to. This cut only seems bad when compared to what the rest of the album offers, but on another album it would likely be one of the better cuts.

This album is one of the best albums I have heard this year. Look for it.

The Best
NILS LOFGREN
A & M Records (SP-69876)

The Best is simply a collection of Nils Lofgren's best releases — all in their original form from his five albums. There are no special remix versions, no extended play versions, and no "previously unreleased" live versions of any of his material.

Nils plays a fairly basic laid-back kind of rock music. I find it too slow for my liking, but that doesn't make it bad. The songwriting is solid on all the cuts and the music is played capably. My favorite is a biting tune titled "Keith Don't Go (Ode To A Glimmer Twin)." I thought it was particularly well written with a very pointed message for The Rolling Stones perennial junkie extremo, Keith Richards. *The Best* is not an outstanding album, but it certainly is much stronger than a lot of the junk on the store shelves these days.

If you like your rock a little slower and a little quieter than the typical "rocker," then this album would be a good purchase.

