

ENTERTAINMENT

Wilcox and the politics of rock

David Wilcox
Highway Motor Inn
Saturday, Oct. 20

interview by Dave Burns

Saturday. I'm going crazy. This was going to be the day I caught up on some essays, but the blank paper in front of me dares me to write even a single word. I'm starting to break. The phone rings. It's the Gateway. Would I like to see David Wilcox and interview him after the show? I stare at my books. Where's he playing?

He has a new album out called "Bad Reputation." I listen to it for the first time and enjoy it thoroughly. It's the same hard-driving gritty style that's made his stage show so much fun. It is easily the best of his three records, and I'm now beginning to look forward to the evening.

11:00 pm. I arrive at the club where he's playing. It's packed, and they're starting to turn people away. Luckily, I'd talked to Wilcox's manager who promised to put me on the guest list. I tell this to the girl at the door. She asks me my name and I tell her. She says I'm not on the guest list so I can't come in. I bark a bit and she relents. As I walk in the club, Wilcox starts his show.

After the show, over a little bourbon, we talked about various things.

Q: Tell us about yourself.

Wilcox: Well, my name is David Wilcox. I'm from Montreal. I was born in Montreal in 1949. Grew up there and in Toronto. Um, I became a part-time musician at 12, started playing guitar when I was 7. Started playing for money in front of people when I was 12, became a full time musician when I was 20 or 21. I've been a band leader, as opposed to playing behind somebody, for nine years now. Before that, I played behind Maria Muldaur, Ian and Sylvia, Todd Rundgren, Paul Butterfield, John Paul Jones from Led Zepplin, just all kinds of people in the music business.

Q: Who were your major influences?

Wilcox: The main people who influenced me are Elvis and Robert Johnson, a great, great singer from the 1930's who invented a lot of modern rock and roll on acoustic guitar. Lotta Led Zepplin riffs, stuff like that.

Q: Who taught you to play slide guitar?

Wilcox: Well, basically, I taught myself. Well, I stole everything, but I mean I taught myself, you know? I'm not saying I invented it, but, no, I learned from records. Robert Johnson. It (slide guitar) goes up and down in



Photo Tim Kubash

David Wilcox will be at Dinwoodie this Saturday.

popularity. It's just a little sound I like. For any musicians who are listening, I like the micro-tonality of it. It enables you to get between the actual literal tones as opposed to a piano, for example.

Q: Do you use a special tuning?

Wilcox: I use a bunch of different tunings. I tune the G to G sharp, which gives you an E7 quadrant on the top four strings. I also, for some stuff, tune the low E down to D. For "Hypnotizing Boogie," I go into what's called an open G or sebastipol tuning, and I use an open C tuning on "Hot Papa".

Q: Tell me about your guitar. That old Stratocaster. Have you had it for a long time?

Wilcox: I've had it for fifteen years, on and off. I lost it for three (years) in a card game. Damn stupid thing to do. Last Christmas I bought it back for myself for six times what I originally paid for it. I won't tell you the money involved, but it was six times what I originally paid.

Q: Must have been one hell of a card game.

Wilcox: Well, it was. I was winning great until I bet the guitar, then "oh no!" Teaches you not to drink and play cards at the same time.

Q: Do you like playing Edmonton?

Wilcox: Oh, ya. We've been here a bunch of times now. We're actually in some ways in terms of record sales and things like that bigger in Alberta than Ontario. We're still building in Vancouver and Montreal, my

home town, but, no, we have a great west.

Q: Would you recommend this life to anyone?

Wilcox: I wouldn't recommend it to anyone ever, because it's the kind of thing you do when you absolutely have to do it. See, I have to play music. I don't have any other marketable skills as a human. I'm a high-school dropout, never been to college or university. I love to study, but as Winston Churchill said, "...lots of people like to learn, but very few like to be taught." So, I didn't

like to be taught. Especially the way they taught you in high school. They told you that ya stunk if you made a mistake, and other garbage. You know, I just went home, skipped school, and played guitar.

Q: Neil Young said at a concert here just recently that if he'd played rock any longer, it would have killed him. Does the lifestyle ever catch up to you?

Wilcox: Well, I'm like anyone else, I guess, in **Interview plus more entertainment on p. 12**

Someone had to do it

1984
by George Orwell
adapted by Pavel Kohout
The Citadel: Rice Theatre

review by David Jordan

With speculation running rampant today as to the true message of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*, it is to the credit of Pavel Kohout that he did not try to interpret Orwell's work, but only to adapt it to the stage. It would be all too easy to "modernize" Orwell, to insert references to Afghanistan, Nicaragua, or Margaret Thatcher, or to perhaps push the date ahead a decade or two, changing the title to something like 2004. But in this adaptation (translated from the Czech by Geoffrey Skelton) Kohout simply transcribes Orwell's pages into dialogue and action.

Orwell certainly deserves such respect, but as drama, such a literal transcription has its weaknesses. George Orwell was a brilliant essayist, but he was no dramatist. *Nineteen Eighty-four* was the crowning achievement of a lifetime of writing, and is a fascinating document for the political insights and speculations it contains. As a literary work of art, though, it is merely competent, perhaps even mediocre.

Such themes as idealism, and love in the face of adversity are timeless; politics are not. The human element in Orwell's fiction reaches audiences today as forcefully as it did 35 years ago. The political message is still thought-provoking, but its effect on us today has only the remotest connection with Orwell's political vision in the mid-1940's.

Despite a very popular misconception, the political aspect of *Nineteen Eighty-four* is not relevant today. We in the Western world are not faced by the possibility of totalitarian domination; in the 40's, Orwell saw this as a real threat.

Yes, Russia has expanded its power base in Europe, but it is clear now that China will never overrun Japan, and that the U.S. is not about to conquer Britain.

Yes, video caught on, and we can even point to cameras in banks and 7-11's with a wry "he told us so." But only a truly paranoid schizo would believe in the possibility of government-controlled cameras monitoring every square inch of our country.

The Citadel's production of *1984* does have its appealing moments. The covert love affair between Winston and Julia is every bit as moving as tragedies of ill-fated lovers have been throughout the centuries. Linda MacKay portrays a beautifully alive and vibrant Julia, and Brian Gromoff is the perfect foil as a hesitant yet devoted Winston.

The love scenes, touching as they are, only serve to punctuate the much longer scenes of didactic speech making. Orwell's novel reads like a textbook, and unfortunately so does this script.

The sets and costumes, designed by Nadine Baylis, together with innovative lighting by Stencil Campbell, do wonders with the space limitations. With rapid set changes, the scenes shift from bedrooms to public rallies, and to half a dozen interior rooms, including a public washroom and a torture chamber. Campbell's lighting allows the focus to move from the exterior environment to the interior thoughts of the characters.

The sets are aesthetically appealing, and the acting is excellent in this production of *1984*. Unfortunately, the speech-making gets a little monotonous. Somebody had to produce this play this year though, and I could imagine a lot of worse ways it could have been done.

1984 plays at the Rice Theatre through Nov. 18. For information and reservations call the Citadel Theatre at 426-4811.

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ALBUM PLAYLIST

1. Various Artists — Something to Believe In (Better Youth Organization)
2. Tom Verlaine — Cover (Warner Brothers/WEA)
3. Robyn Hitchcock — I Often Dream of Trains (Midnight Music)
4. Rickie Lee Jones — The Magazine (Warner Brothers/WEA)
5. Amadeus — Soundtrack (A&M)
6. U2 — The Unforgettable Fire (Island/MCA)
7. Kid Bastien's Happy Pals — Kid Bastien's Happy Pals (Sunny South)
8. Stockholm Monsters — Alma Mater (Factory Communications)
9. Leo Smith — Rastafari (Sackville)
10. Sprangeen — Sprangeen (Springthyme)
11. Various — Everyman Has a Woman (Polydor/Polygram)
12. Bangles — All Over the Place (Columbia/CBS)

13. John Hicks — John Hicks (Theresa)
14. The Gryphon Quintet — They all Laughed (Mayfield)
15. General Public — All the Rage (IES/A&M)

EP'S, SINGLES & TAPES

1. James Brown & Afrika Bambaataa — Unity (Tommy Boy)
2. Omni Garage — The Fighter (Tape)
3. Gil-Scott Heron — Re-ron (Arista/Polygram)
4. Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band — Legendary A & M Sessions (A&M)
5. Jelly Bean — Wotupski!?! (EMI/Capitol)
6. Choir Invisible — Sea to Shining Sea (Passport/A&M)
7. Frank Zappa — Music From the Perfect Stranger (Angel/Capitol)
8. Emily — Nothing Near (Tape)
9. Dead Can Dance — Garden of Arcane Delights (4AD)
10. The Work Party — The Work Song (Mo-Da-Mu)