

VIRULENT OPINIONS ON POP-WORLD

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● and now comes

● *The Electric Kool-Aid Test*

● *The Pump House Gang*

by David McCaughna

The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test Tom Wolfe, \$7.25
Doubleday

The Pump House Gang Tom Wolfe, \$7.25 Doubleday

In 1965 a book called *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* was published; it had been written by an unknown called Tom Wolfe. It was a collection of essays done for New York magazines and it took the literary establishment by the neck. Tom Wolfe immediately became the *enfant terrible* of American literary-journalistic circles. For that is essentially what Mr. Wolfe is — a journalist. But a journalist with a unique distinction — his own completely individual and highly original style and approach. Critics and fellow-journalists argued heatedly about the first collection, some called Wolfe a colossal put-on with his zany, odd manner of wording, punctuation and grammar, and others called him the greatest thing to happen to American journalism since the death of Hearst.

For the past few years not much has been heard from Tom Wolfe and the verdict was passed up, a flash-in-the-pan. One hit and nothing else. But now Wolfe has come out with two books simultaneously that should firmly establish him as the supreme American journalist of the 1960's.

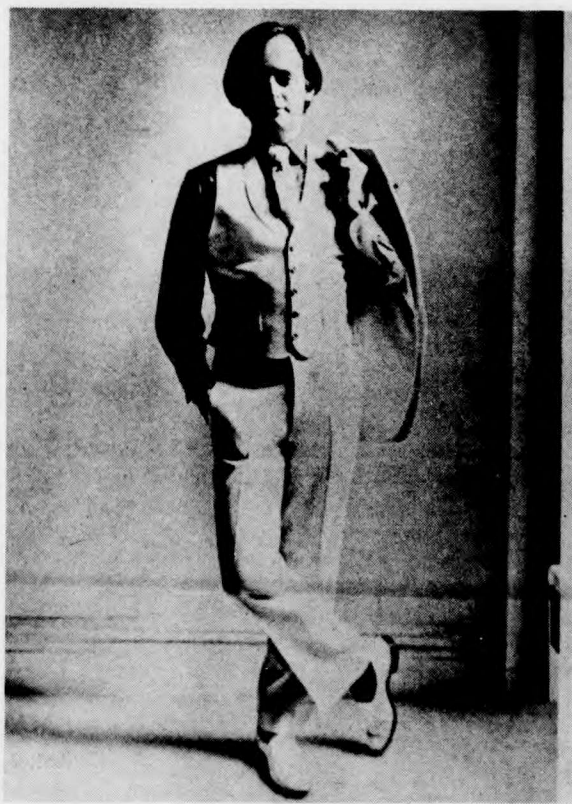
The best and most important of the new Wolfe books is *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. It is a marvelous piece of journalistic art-work that also happens to be a significant social history.

The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test follows the development, adventures and demise of Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters. Now Ken Kesey, to give some background to the book, was one of those successful and highly-praised young novelists of the early '60's whose works held hope for salvaging the state of American fiction. Kesey wrote two novels, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Sometimes A Great Notion*. He made a good bit of money but was dissatisfied with himself and was searching for some higher plane of fulfillment. He had a group of people around him, bizarre people, lost souls, ex-beatniks, etc. People with names like Stark Naked, Gretchen Fetchin the Slime Queen, Zonker, Doris Delay, Mountain Girl and Black Maria. They gave themselves the collective name of the Merry Pranksters. Kesey formed a company called Intrepid Trips, Inc., purchased an ancient bus and made plans for a cross country trip with the purpose of making a film (Kesey's idea was followed a few years later by the Beatles and their Magic Mystery Tour).

Wolfe's book follows Kesey and his Prankster's along the trip and stays with them until the group falls apart after nearly two years.

From his home near San Francisco Kesey and the Pranksters with their unconventional dress and gaudily decorated bus filled with film-making equipment head out to shock middle-class America.

"So the Hieronymus Bosch bus headed out of Kesey's place with the destination sign in front reading "Further" and a sign in the back saying "Caution: Weird Load." It was weird, all right, but it was euphoria on board, barreling through all that



Some people don't realize that young humour can be humorous. Tom Wolfe, above, did not say that.

warm California sun in July on the road, and everything they had been working on at Kesey's was on board and heading on Furthur. Besides, the joints were going around, and it was nice and high out here on the road in America."

Of course the bus was stocked with an ample supply of LSD, pot, and other drugs. The Pranksters are high practically all of the time, which explains why the film, nearly forty hours long, comes out a fuzzy mess.

To initiate others into the glories of LSD, Kesey and his Pranksters held 'acid tests.' They spiked Kool-Aid with acid and their unsuspecting guests were turned on. Kesey and the Pranksters wanted to turn on the world, but didn't quite succeed. After three arrests for possession, Kesey flees to Mexico, followed by the Pranksters, but finding Mexico too far away from things, and with the arm of the law reaching out for him, he sneaks back to San Francisco and is eventually captured.

To avoid imprisonment Kesey promises to renounce drugs and lead his followers, and a great many he has, away from acid to a higher form of nirvana.

"... Mr. Kesey has had, of 'beyond acid,' an inspiration, a miracle, a light he has seen, although never mind the details of the beach in Manzanillo,

not... those lights... In any case... Mr. Kesey has a very public spirited-plan... He has returned voluntarily from exile in his safe harbour, to risk certain arrest and imprisonment in order to call a mass meeting of all LSD takers, past, present, and potential, for the purpose of telling them to move beyond this pestilent habit of taking LSD."

Great joke. But it gets Kesey off. He gives his message without much success, gives up the psychedelic world, and retires with his wife and kids to the woods of Oregon where, we can presume, he is working on his third novel.

The brilliance of Tom Wolfe's style is totally welded to his subject. His prose flows with the movement and feeling of Kesey and the Pranksters. He has the keen eye to capture detail and nuance sharply. Wolfe makes the non-fiction narrative into all that it can and should be.

The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test is a fascinating piece of history. Kesey and his followers were the forerunners, if not, the fathers, of the hippie scene. When the hippie world has finally vanished *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* will remain as its monument for future generations just as Kerouac's *On The Road* and *Dharma Bums* now stands for the beatnik era.

The other book Tom Wolfe has out this season is *The Pump House Gang*. It is similar to *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* as it is also a collection of Wolfe's essays. Wolfe is a specialist in dealing with the outsiders of society. He is at his best when writing about those at the bottom or of those at the top, when he is concerned with the middle-brackets of society his essays are not half as interesting or biting. Especially good in this collection are the essays about *The Pump House Gang*, a group of teen-age California surfers living a life in limbo on a San Diego beach; the chapter on Hugh Hefner, recluse and publisher of *Playboy*; and an essay about a girl called Carol Doda who dances topless in a San Francisco bar with huge breasts created by painful and perhaps cancer-causing silicone injections.

Mr. Wolfe seems both fascinated and repelled at once by the lives of the people at the height of society. In *The Pump House Gang* there are a number of chapters about the beautiful people in London and New York. Wolfe is penetrating and caustic as in "The Life and Hard Times of a Teenage London Society Girl:"

"Any moment now, little Sue, Chinless Wonder at the wheel here will pull to a stop and say one of two things to you. He will either say he has a terrible headache, or he will say - let's go to my flat. **With this supercool tomato-aspic look on his face;** let's go to my flat. Sue feels very **right** in the sense of **right people**. She is starved to near perfection. Her London fashionable chrome yellow straight hair hangs down to her shoulder blades and it looks... **right**. Which it should, since it is freshly ironed. She ironed it herself on an ironing board. But exactly!"

And for those of us who want to become 'beautiful people' Wolfe includes his own hilarious "Book of Etiquette."

York choir fills Burton bill with Lois M.

by Don McKay

The welcome presence of Miss Lois Marshall made the opening evening of the Burton Theatre's performing arts series a truly gala occasion. Unfortunately the other parts of the concert were not up to the standard of the soloist.

The York University Choir

sang amazingly well when you consider that Dr. W. McCauly has had only a few weeks to rehearse with them. They are vocally powerful and have a pleasantly melodic tone. Unfortunately they have a great deal of work to do on enunciation and on expression. If the choir can do as well as they did Sunday with so little rehearsal, it will be another

successful year for them.

Featured on the bill was the O'Keefe Centre orchestra, also under the direction of Dr. McCauly. There is no excuse for the quality of their performance since they are all professional musicians. At the O'Keefe most of the music they would play would be Broadway drivel, but that is no reason for playing

music by Vaughn Williams, Puccini, Bernstein, and Verdi in the same disinterested style. When the orchestra was accompanying both the choir and Miss Marshall it was much too loud. Miss Marshall was never overpowered, but only because of her talent, not because of their consideration.

Lois Marshall's voice compensated for any other flaws in the

program. Her selection of material was varied and suited to her style. Without the usual gymnastics of the concert soloist she communicated the emotion in the various operatic selections she performed.

The performing arts series has started well with the appearance of one of Canada's best concert performers.