

You give me a flat tire
—The Government—

Hear the voices you left behind

Elliott Lefko

Long live the tradition! What was pioneered by Fats Waller and James P. Johnson, maintained by Thelonious Monk, Dollar Brand, Randy Weston and Cecil Taylor, continues in the form of musicians such as violinist Leroy Jenkins, pianist Anthony Davis, and drummer Andrew Cyrille.

Last Thursday evening, before a receptive Burton gathering, Jenkins' trio layed down some fine new jazz. Each member contributed dazzling solos, and precise accompaniment. To such a high degree was the interaction between the three that it seemed as if they were operating on another, higher level. After the show Jenkins summed up his interest in the art: "It's the improvisation. That to me is everything."

Jenkins' jazz career began in his native Chicago in the mid '60s when he linked up with the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians playing with such greats as Muhal Richard Abrams, Leo Smith, Anthony Braxton, Cecil Taylor, Alice Coltrane and Archie Shepp.

In 1969 he joined Braxton, Smith and drummer Steve McCall to form the Creative Construction Company which gave New York City its first taste of the new jazz that Chicago musicians were creating. His later work with the collective Revolutionary Ensemble gained Jenkins prominence as one of the most brilliant violinists and improvisational artists in jazz.

The concert was not without its problems. It started late and up until the morning of the show, concert organizer Paul Kennedy didn't even know Cyrille and Davis were coming. Says Kennedy: "We thought Jenkins was coming with a bassist. When Davis stepped off the place I thought 'hey, he's a pianist.' We had to scramble to find one. It was close."



The fine touch of the superb musicians reflected their ingrained virtuosity. Davis, for example, is only 28 yet he has already progressed to the top of his musical class. He has recorded on a number of albums, including some groundbreaking solo ones. Both his compositions and the execution of them belie a man of much older years. Davis credits the great Duke Ellington for his inspiration. He has written a tribute for him, *Man on a Turquoise Cloud*.

"Ellington's my model," admits Davis. "He was underrated as a pianist. He wrote those marvellous compositions but, to me, he was a great pianist. He helped foreground the piano from a background instrument to an important and vital voice."

The unexpected presence of Davis and Cyrille didn't escape the knowledgeable Burtonians. Twice, solos by Cyrille were met by booming applause. The second one had many on their feet.

Cyrille was last seen in Toronto raw-energizing with the Carla Bley Big Band. His work with Jenkins was mainly dark and subdued. During one song he stopped drumming with his hands, keeping the beat with his foot. It was not until late in the second half that Cyrille broke loose. The thunderous explosion shook the hall.

After the show a tired Jenkins explained how they have been on the road for a series of one night stands. "I have these black bags under my eyes. I just can't seem to relax with the travelling and hotel rooms. This is a good city though. I enjoy playing here."

Rat chat

An interview in a sparsely-furnished 5'X10' box called a dressing room, filled with Teenage Head. No, it's not a sexual fantasy, but Canada's top rock 'n' roll band. In these adverse conditions, it was revealed that Frankie Venom and the boys, in the international spirit of their music, will be playing a benefit concert for the Vanier College Refugee Fund, Feb. 12 here at York. Despite the unjustified bad press the band received last fall after the window-smashing of a few jocks, and being ripped off for money in their dressing room, the lads have consented to return, bringing along their sickness and a new sound system to make your ears bleed. Frankie assured this writer he's fully recovered from swallowing a Haynes stocking. Tickets at 3 bob (Vanier ID), 4 (York) are being sold this week in Central Square or 121 Vanier.

Doug Meneilly

Screen. It's a pop musical about Hollywood in the '30s. Stong "Cabaret" presents their next fantastic production on Feb. 14 and 15 at 9 and 10:30 pm in the Stong Common Room. Of course it's licensed. The lights are on.

Agony and ecstasy



Bryon Johnson

Leora Aisenberg

In another impressive entry onto a growing list of ambitious productions, York's Theatre Department is presenting George Ryga's powerful play, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*.

Originally produced in 1967, the play concerns the Canadian Indians' struggle to survive in both the alienating world of the city and the changing life on the reservation. *Rita Joe* is one of several works Ryga has written which he says, "pick up where life too often leaves off or becomes obscured by the protective shutters of civilisation."

According to director Jeff Henry, a drama focussing upon the plight of a minority group can pack a tremendous emotional impact. Consequently, he ensured that he and his cast researched and were exposed to the harsh realities of the native people's situation. The first week of rehearsals was spent in discussion, talking to Indians on a reservation and listening to a visiting anthropologist.

No stage newcomer, Henry, a York theatre professor has worked as a dancer, actor, choreographer and director all over the globe. He is also the founder and artistic director of Theatre Fountainhead, a company devoted to introducing African and Caribbean playwrights to Toronto. Henry is dedicated to his latest project, maintaining that "there is an absolute need to do this type of play."

Roles for *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* were chosen, rather than auditioned. Members of the cast, all York Theatre students, include Kelita Haverland (Rita Joe), Don Strand (Jaimie Paul), Phil Hogarth (Magistrate) and Neil Black (David Joe).

The character of Rita Joe is very complex; a wide array of emotions are portrayed, ranging from tough and determined to vulnerable and loving. She is also subjected to sexual brutality. As Rita Joe, Kelita Haverland has acquired valuable insight into the life of Canadian Indians. "I was born and raised in Alberta,"

says Kelita, "and I was around Indians quite a bit. I saw the drunken ones, the prostitution, the cheap hotels." But, she adds, she also knew many Indians who did not match the "lazy Indian" stereotype. In any case, Kelita was determined to discard any preconceived notions so that she could concentrate completely on Ryga's characterization.

To realize the character of Jaimie Paul, Don Strand, who had no previous contact with native people, read books such as *Half Breed* and *Prison of Grass*. Both strand and Haverland are fascinated by the characters' complexities.

There have been some criticisms of Ryga's work, claiming that all the whites in the play are stereotypes of superficial, patronizing characters. Dramaturge Linda Stevens explained that when the play was written, it had to have a lot of impact, because the subject had rarely been dealt with. Adds director Henry, "The white characters can be played, not as one-dimensional stereotypes, but as broadly as possible."

Music, dance and a sophisticated lighting program all play major parts in the production. *Rita Joe* will be presented in Mac Hall, Feb. 7, 11, 12, and 13 at 8 pm, Feb. 9 and 14 at 4 pm, and Feb. 8 at 2 pm. Tickets for the first three days are sold out. They are free, and may be obtained at Burton Auditorium between 11 am and 2 pm.

As Chief Dan George, a member of the original cast, writes, "The play—*The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*—carries a message all Canada should hear."

The chameleon strikes

Elliott Lefko

If David Amram was an animal, he would be a chameleon. A bubbling store of music, stories, and special memories, Amram meets a new challenge head-on with the gusto of a comic book hero.

Forty-nine years young, Amram passed through T.O. recently to publicize the special 20th anniversary Mariposa concert of which he will be a big part. Amram has played the Mariposa summer festival three times and considers them to be three of the happiest times of his life. This year Mariposa has forgone the summer festival. Instead, they have organized a number of smaller concerts throughout Toronto all year. This Sunday's Massey Hall concert (tickets at Bass) will be the jewel around which the festivities will run. Amram considers the concert a lifelong dream come true.

"I've played Toronto 100 times in the past ten years. Let me say that every musician who has ever been here loves to play here and would like to live here if he could. The multi-race culture is respected and Canadians take pride in it. Most musicians who are in it for keeps find that there isn't just one music. This programme will illuminate the many musics available."

Amram's career reads like a good adventure novel. (He's actually written an exciting autobiography.) A tremendously diverse musician, able to play 30 flutes, guitars, numerous horns and percussions, Amram constantly writes songs and symphonies. In fact, he is best known as a conductor. He has led many of the world's symphonies, and conducts his own young people's symphony concerts in N.Y. However Amram isn't all white tails. The man may write a concerto by day, conduct it at night, then run to an after hours folk or jazz club to blow off steam.

Besides the jazz and classical background Amram is also a dues-paying member of the Pete Seeger sit-around-the-campfire type folk music. He began when living close to Bob Dylan. Picking up the guitar, he plucked out a song and didn't look back. Amram still enjoys Dylan's music, especially the confidence expressed. "Dylan has latched on to something. He hashed a lot of personal problems, but he keeps writing those good songs."

About ten years ago, Amram's passport looked like last year's tennis shoes. His constant globe-trotting added miles to his reservoir of experience but he really missed having a home base to come home to. Things have change since. He's married, and has a home and a little girl, Alana. Amram smiles and speaks: "My house is full of cribs, and rattles and carriages. I love playing for my girl, she has an



Lawrence Lee

attention span of one and a half minutes. After that she falls asleep. It's fun."

Although his pace has somewhat slowed down, Amram still finds time for a broad range of activities. He recently was commissioned to write all the music for a new stage version of *Harold and Maude*. The play was written by Colin Higgins, who wrote the original screenplay. "I add music, sound effects, and write new songs. It's a great play."

Amram enjoys working with actors. He's done fifteen plays and numerous films including, *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Splendour in the Grass*, and *The Arrangement*. But his favourite was a 20 minute film by Robert Frank, entitled *Pull My Daisy*. Says Amram: "It was a documentary on Jack Kerouac and his friends. He sang some poems and I added music."

Kerouac was close to Amram, and he sees no irony that the 'beat' author may once again become popular. *Heartbeat*, based on the life of Kerouac, has been released, and Francis Coppola is planning a cinematic *On The Road*. "Kerouac loved writing those books. They have not lost their flavour. He had trouble relating to intellectuals, but the books will hold up."

Along with Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Amram recalls having played York a number of seasons ago. He would love to come back next year with his jazz quintet. "Right now, with symphonies, plays, films, jazz and folk festivals, I'm booked up right past the summer months. But that's good because I can remember years when there would be 365 blank days on my calendar."

The interview ends as Amram switches on the 6 pm news. Afghanistan is being taken over, the hostages are still being held. The world looks smaller, the gates are closing. Pretty soon even David Amram with his musical pass-key will be forced to stay at home.