

# "Museum piece" both interesting and not

by Ron Norman

Reading mostly from his recent works, interspersed with some singing and Tibetan Buddhist mantras, Allen Ginsberg was at times both interesting and boring last Thursday evening before an audience of about 300 people in the McInnis Room.

I went to find out exactly what Allen Ginsberg has been doing the past few years, as well as to grab the opportunity to see what a friend termed a "museum piece" (referring of course to Ginsberg's place in American literature as an original member of the group of writers in the mid-fifties who began a literary renaissance in San Francisco, and who were coined by the word genius of the group, Jack Kerouac, as the "Beat Generation").

The program itself was not nearly as interesting, nor as entertaining as the reception held afterwards, but there were a few nice spots. Sitting on some pillows crossed-legged, surrounded by what seemed to be mounds of paraphernalia, and playing his harmonium, Ginsberg began with a half hour of Buddhist mantras. The mantras were mantras for open-eyed reality, the reality of the ordinary mind and in that way reflected, in part, Ginsberg's present thinking (ie. the reality of now - "be here now").

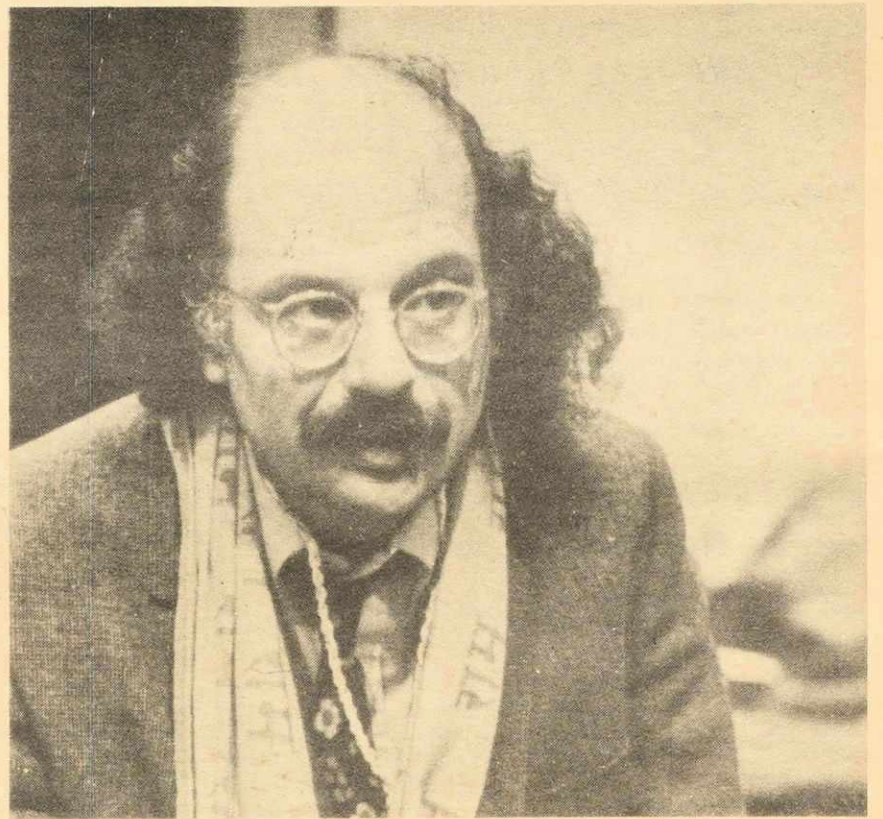
The mantras themselves were on such a minor level that they were somewhat analogous to a Mitch Millar sing-a-long, though as is typical here at Dalhousie, very few

people joined in. After trying to set a mood with the mantras, and finding the audience only mildly receptive, Ginsberg read from an early work - Kaddish (1960). This poem reflected his Whitmanesque influences - long catalogues, ordered mainly by their cadences. Though, at times verbose and rambling, the poem manifested Ginsberg's perceptive qualities as well as his modern tone: "O beautiful Garbo of my karma", and "with your chin of Trotsky and the Spanish civil war".

Ginsberg then read from his contemporary works, which on the whole proved to be a letdown. His earlier poetry, from 1953-62 is much stronger, both stylistically and thematically than his most recent work.

The second half of the program began very much the same as the first - with a couple of mantras. However, this time around the audience seemed more bored than anything else. Though the mantras were probably foreign to most of the crowd, the real problem concerned the individuality of the mantras; Ginsberg enjoyed them, but the audience yawned.

The finest part of the program came when Ginsberg sang a few Blake songs which he had put to music. With his voice, very much influenced by his present tour with Bob Dylan, and with the persistent beat of his harmonium, the songs were fun.



Ginsberg raps with CKDU. Tom Mooney / Dal Photo

The evening ended with his reading of Jesse Re Road, a poem which Ginsberg said is his best work in ten years (it was written in 1971). It was a lengthy poem with sparks of perception, but really cannot compare with anything he wrote before 1962.

At the finish of the concert, when asked why he made public appearances, Ginsberg said that one cannot be enlightened until

everyone is enlightened. He added that it was part of his role on earth to spread his passions and his thoughts.

Ginsberg also said afterwards that he has been heavily influenced by Dylan's style of singing, and said that Dylan is one of the best poets in America. He said that he thought Dylan was producing his finest material ever, and attributed it to Dylan getting over his ego.

## Donnellys were certainly not victims despite Reaney

by Wayne Ingarfield

It was called one of the "bloodiest massacres in Canadian history!" On the night of Feb. 4, 1880, five members of the Donnelly family were beaten and axed to death in their home by a drunken mob of 31 men belonging to the "Biddilph Vigilance Committee". The committee was organized by the area constable James Carroll, with the expressed purpose of exterminating the entire Donnelly family.

As in the other two parts of the "Donnelly Trilogy" prepared by James Reaney (Sticks and Stones, and The St. Nicholas Hotel) the acting in "Handcuffs" was superb. The story line was at first a little difficult to follow unless you had seen the other two parts of the trilogy, or had some previous knowledge of the Donnelly story. This is not the case through the

entire play though, as the plot becomes increasingly clear as the story unravels. The two and one half hours flew by and there was no point in the play where you found yourself asking when something exciting or interesting was going to happen. To single out any one actor or actress as being the sole reason for the play's success would be an unfair and unreasonable demand, as it was the over all quality of acting put forth by the entire company which made the play such an admirable piece of work.

The only complaint I could come up with, is that Reaney has made the Donnelly family out as completely honest and upright citizens, who never caused any trouble, and were victims of a mean

and prejudiced community. Anyone who has done any reading on the subject knows that such is not the case.

As was mentioned in previous articles, "Handcuffs" is a nominee for this year's Chalmers Award, and if it takes any less than top honours it is going to take an exceptional (extraordinary?) play to defeat it.

For those of you who missed seeing one of Reaney's productions this time, if you ever get the chance to see them again, and don't attend at least one of the "Donnelly Trilogy" you'll be doing yourself a great injustice.

Ed. note: "Handcuffs" was one of three plays about the Donnelly family of Ontario shown at Neptune Theatre last week.



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