

## Books... A magic plunge

Stuart Ross

*The Red House*, by Gregory Orr. Harper & Row, 1980. 64 pp. \$6.50.

With *The Red House*, his third major collection of poems, Gregory Orr continues his exploration into the nature and drama of death. His persistent quest of the topic becomes neither morose nor repetitive, but more sensitive, demanding and intelligent.

The reference point for this work, the acceptance and subsequent plunge, can be found in the volume's second poem, "Song of the Invisible Corpse in the Field":

*And still I lie here,  
bruised by rain, gored  
by the tiny horns  
of sprouting grass.*

*I hum the song of spiders  
drawing, across the blankness  
of my eyes, accurate maps  
for the spirit's quest:  
always death at the center  
like Rome or some oasis  
toward which all paths tend.*

*I am the absence  
under your feet, the pit  
that opens, toothed with dew.*

Much of Orr's work appears to be highly autobiographical. Most of the poems in the book have rural settings, but into these creep a misty magic, a sense of earthly mythology. The imagery is often stark, raw, and at its most effective, it is surprising, sparkling. From "Walking Home After the First Encounter":

*And where the cow's tongue  
ticked the hours, we watched,  
from a black thicket, angels  
lug to field's edge rocks of flesh.*

There is pain in the poems, but it is the pain of birth. Orr reaches into the chasms of his mind, his experience, and the forces around him. He wrenches out that which is beautiful in its mystery, its freshness, but there is also a great gasp of fear and helplessness.

*...And in the hay,  
can't breathe; can't  
breathe in the hay. Hands  
on skin; how good it feels.  
(from "Adolescence")*

And as we journey through Orr's world, the home base, the shelter, *The Red House*, becomes more distant and foreboding. It throws us at the world.

## Easy on the Mayo

Mayonnaise Review  
Michael Monastyrskij

If you are looking for a 'pleasant way' to spend an evening and are not in the mood to ponder the Great Questions of life, then you may want to take a dip into *Mayonnaise*.

The comedy, written by John Ibbitson, is set in London, England, where two Canadian cartoonists, Hirsch and Alan, have settled. Alan (Jan Filips) is handsome, outgoing and rather successful with women. Hirsch (former York student Avery Saltzman) is round, introverted and frustrated.

The action takes place on Hirsch's birthday, an event which causes him to brood about his problems. The play's humour arises from his obsessive self-deprecation. Without Saltzman's ability to exploit his own appearance many of the jokes would fall flat.

Besides providing a foil for Hirsch, Filips' role is important because it allows us to see Hirsch's problems from a more objective perspective. While Hirsch considers himself a victim, Alan argues that Hirsch is to blame for his own dilemma.

A third character, Cynthia, portrayed by Nancy Polk, provides a catalyst for the play's action. When she ignores Hirsch and falls for Alan, Hirsch's dissatisfaction



"Look, Hirsch, I know it's lousy, but it's the best promo shot they had."

grows, causing him to angrily express what before were only vague allusions.

But the play never really explores Hirsch's problems. It treats them rather superficially and never becomes more than an excuse to make some jokes.

*Mayonnaise* is an entertaining play but not one that encourages thought.

*Mayonnaise* plays at the Phoenix Theatre (390 Dupont St.) until February 1. For more information call 922-7835.

## The Inmates: inside and behind bars



The Inmates conduct a sombre Sing Sing seance.

Elliott Lefko

I've just returned from my Excalibur-sponsored trip to England where I interviewed the notorious Inmates, Bill Hurley, Peter Gunn, Ben Donnelly, Tony Oliver and Jim Russell.

You seem to want to make it in America as opposed to England, why is that?

It seems to be better for us to tour in America. We've been offered work all over the place, two weeks in Poland, Italy, Spain. What you have to do is work out which are the best places to play, and North America seems to be the best place to tour.

Can you get more gigs in America?

Getting gigs is never any problem we get a lot of offers from France, Germany, Holland, Belgium and Scandinavia. So the numbers of gigs aren't as important as where we want to play. We try to achieve a balance.

Are your records available in all these places?

Well, everywhere except Poland, and they still want us to come and play there.

Do you have problems with the media in your home country?

Not really. Our problem is that R & B bands, soul bands, like ourselves, do very well in London,

but once you get outside of London, although the gigs still do okay, no one seems to buy the record. So we run up a lot of expenses.

If you were a tree, do you think your roots would be black?

Ha, ha. I like a lot of black artists, but that's just me. Peter, our guitar player, likes a lot of rockabilly stuff, our singer Bill's favourite singer is probably Elvis Presley, so there's certainly a black root in there, but I wouldn't say that's our roots. It's a mix of everything.

You played some gigs in prisons such as Sing Sing. Can you tell me what you gained from the experience?

The first one we did was in England at a woman's prison. And we didn't do that as anything like 'let's check-out the prison' or anything like that, it was a gig for a lot of women, and we really enjoyed doing it. And they enjoyed it. So consequently when we did Sing Sing, all it was was a show for some people. And because they're locked up all year, and don't get much entertainment they seemed to appreciate more. We do a lot of benefits too, we did one for gypsy children, and another for squatters.

There was a group in Toronto called The Battered Wives, who claimed they chose that name because they were the battered

wives of rock and roll. Are you the inmates of rock and roll?

I don't know about that. The name The Inmates came out of the Elvis Presley movie *Jail House Rock*. We picked the name because it was simple and straightforward. We just like the sound. We could have been the Santa Clauses.

Your band has achieved some success in that you are able to come to North America and play. How were you able to rise above all the other bands that were around when you began?

Well, really there was no specific game plan. We started the band to play the music that we liked. We started saying let's play one or two nights a week in a club, making some pin money and a few drinks, and enjoy ourselves. We found it hard to get the gigs because no one was doing our kind of music at the time in London. We broke new

ground. We started filling up the clubs, and released an album and it

started to snowball. And all we've done is carry on doing what we like, and the people have come out. We've got the offers first from Europe and then from North America.

When you began in England were there any places you wanted to play? Was coming to America a dream for you?

Well, everyone has their own dreams. All I wanted to do was play this pub in England called the Kensington, where I used to go in 1972 and watch bands like Brinsley Schwartz and Ducks Deluxe. I always wanted to play there and when I got the chance about six years ago I realized that there wasn't any other place I wanted to play. So now if it's a 5,000 seat club or a small club it really doesn't matter.



Randy Berkman

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