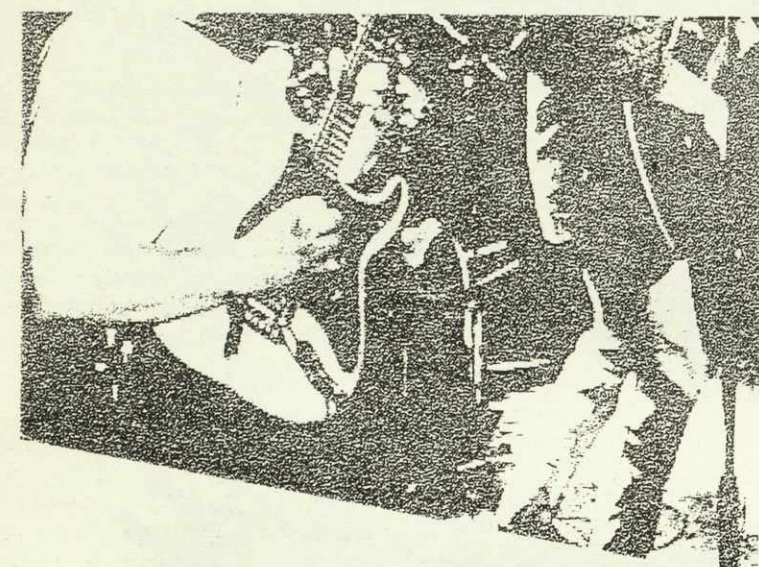


ARTS

If the answer's electric what's the question?



BY MIKE ZELLE

BRETT RYAN MADE history by becoming the first Maritime-based artist to get a distribution deal for the U.S. It's too bad that his debut album "The Answer's Electric" doesn't live up to the expectations created by such an honor, but seems to repeat history instead.

**MUSIC**  
Brett Ryan  
The Answer's Electric

Listening to the songs on this tape, one can only wonder why such a fuss has been made over Halifax-based

Ryan, it certainly has nothing to do with his originality. The title track as the first release has pale commercial appeal, being one of those over-produced glittery tunes that is reminiscent of Rational Youth's 1985 hit "In Your Eyes." Released nationally as the second single, "The Jester" embodies exactly the "Canadian Sound" that everyone seems to be searching for, at least if you believe that Glass Tiger is the epitome of talent in the Canadian music scene.

The latest track, Justice Denied (one of the politically bent songs) actually shows a glimmer of talent hidden deep inside, but its topic limits the song's North American appeal. Although not a deeply profound commentary on the Donald Marshall case, it is

more bearable than the trite and shallow Inside Workers Blues, Ryan's attempt to comment on the life of a night worker at the post office. Then there is The Condemned Man Escapes. Ryan whines away through this song so well that one can't help but pick up the liner notes and search for references to Bob Dylan.

This album in total is over-produced and off the mark. Ryan stumbles his way through ten songs, never once deciding for himself what he wants to do with his music. Each song seems to miss the proper energy level, the music seems contrived and doesn't mesh properly with the lyrics, leaving a sense of dischord. If Brett Ryan is going to be the vanguard of Maritimers receiving U.S. distribution, one can only hope that the American public will be satisfied with such an inferior product.

Articulation §

THERE IS A QUESTION that has been bothering me for many days. It is poor writing style to use too many question marks, but I fear that in order to do justice to the discussion I must involve you. My preambles tend to be rather lengthy so I must ask you to all stay together and hey, you kid, spit out that gum.

§ There are concepts with which one deals every day about which nothing is fully understood. And yet, for most intents and purposes, the little that is known is sufficient. Beauty, for instance. Perfection. These concepts flagrantly flout the precepts of logic by (paradoxically) demanding to be recognized at once as both relatives and absolutes. Everyone's concept of beauty is relative, but the over-all existence of the idea must suggest that it is inherent and inviolate.

§ We all have a working knowledge of beauty. Do our differing conceptions change the ideal? Does such an image exist? Or is beauty only as real as our ephemeral natures, and not innate at all?

§ Perfection. Another absolute, obviously: no tribute could be higher. But perfection is completely relative to the form and/or function of the device attaining it: a shark is perfect in the sea, a well-oiled machine works perfectly in a factory. But if any one thing is less than perfect, does that subvert perfection? Can perfection honestly be achieved with a sum of imperfect parts? Say, one part of the machine is scratched. In what arena of perfection is it to be judged, and by whom?

§ Which brings us to the nadir of my question (surprise). There is a concept so all-encompassing and omnipresent it is vital in considerations from the facetious to the sublime: quality.

§ All things, actions, people and places contain a quantum of quality, which every person measures in a different way. How in the world can one measure quality? By its very nature it denies quantitiveness. It is an arbitrary, absolute scale of value and worth, solely determined by the weigher. Can there be quality inherent in an object, or do we call it into being? "These crummy shoes have worn out," implies that the shoes had quality that is all used up. How can that be? Quality runs out? Say, you've walked fast and far, been caught in the rain a few times, had the shoes for a year, and the soles fall off. Has your abuse perverted quality?

§ What about a record you loved when first bought. You played it to death and are now sick of it. Has your judgement of quality changed? How did you form your opinion in the first place?

§ Ramble, rant, rave. For those of you who haven't taken first year Poli Sci, you're holding it in your hands. Now that I've stacked the deck to my satisfaction I'll let you in on what I really want to ask you. Consider quality, value, worth. Absolute and relative things. Personal integrity of opinion. Now tell me: what is Art?

§ Art is quality - by whose judgement? Art is pure - on what scale? Suppose everyone who sees your work thinks it stinks. Are you any less an "artist?" On the other hand, suppose the world loves what you do. Does that validate your art? If your work has worth to no one but you, isn't that fine? I mean, who else's opinion should you follow?

§ Art, perhaps, has become anything created for the purpose of creation. From a fancy to a masterpiece, Art has value both inherent and malleable. Here comes what really scares me: Art (quality) is routinely assigned a monetary representation. Ye gods and little fishes, how? The best book you ever read, how much was it? A paperback, maybe, \$5.95? Someone decided that, as quality means business, a certain given number of people would have to agree on the quality of that book in order to make it available at that price. What business people don't know is, you would have been willing to spend twenty dollars on that book (If they ever figure out how to make us pay on a relative scale, their first move will be to close all libraries).

§ Now - compare your favorite book (a steal at \$5.95) with the most amazing live performance you ever attended. What was it, a local band with a ticket price of eleven dollars? A play viewed from sky-scraping seats for \$17.50? Or a symphony performance, three hours long, at thirty-three dollars a pop? You bought your way in to quality, expecting it to be worthwhile. Was it worth it? Maybe the event was so evocative and wonderful the evening so memory-laden, you would have paid double. But what if you were disappointed: say, you see a movie at regular price that's just mediocre enough to be worth attending on a cheap night. Don't you feel cheated? You have no recourse; you can only hope to make up for it in the future: maybe you adjust your expectations for quality downwards.

§ This is it, this is the end, I promise. Is it necessarily evil to create for monetary gain? Does business pervert art? Or is it ridiculous to attempt to "purify" art and artists? I mean, artists can't live on love, surely, and appreciation of art must take the form of some token gesture. Would we have artists if there was no money or fame involved? Is it wrong to stigmatize art as "commercial?" We often frown upon artists for "selling-out" (U2), but why does some are become less valid as its appeal widens, when a painting coveted by thousands suddenly has a value all out of proportion to its wood and canvas?

ARTS

By Grande Ballet Canadienne I sat down and wept

BY MIRIAM KORN

I ALWAYS WANTED to marry a ballet dancer. I figured if I was to have graceful children this would be the only way to get the required gene into the family, for my coordination leaves much to be desired, while my manner is a far cry from my romantic vision of grace.

Moreover, my age, though no longer considered to classify me as an old maid by modern, "liberated," Western standards, is undoubtedly over-the-hill in the ballet world.

This conclusion was driven home as I sat in a cafe after missing my beginner's ballet class.

The first day was great. We pointed our feet outwards (in a "plié"), executed those lovely stretches by a bar in front of a mirror and drooped our heads in dramatic swoops all to the beat of a tribal drum. So this is how those beautiful creatures feel as they prance for us on stage, thought I.

Maybe I could be a ballerina after all. My teacher was an ex-Dalhousie student, who liked to babble. She had been dancing for 23 years (since she was five) . . . my lifetime.

I did surprisingly well, in my eyes, in the class and was thus bold audacious enough to ask: "At the end of this course, will we be able to dance?"

The ballerina looked at me, sympathetically, "Well, you'll be doing combinations."

Today, in my fruitless search for my

class, I stumbled upon an intermediate class of girls . . . all clad in black body suits, white tights and, you guessed it, pink slippers. They were floating across the floor in response to a plump lady's directions and some sickeningly sweet, almost saccharine-like, classical music. Perhaps this is why I was not destined to have devoted my life to the art. This really never was, and I doubt ever could be, my scene.

So for now, I will resign myself to simply being an awestruck admirer, and allow the grace department to rest entirely on Dad's shoulders.

The problem is that male ballet dancers are rather scarce. Pierre Lapointe, a ballet master of the Grande Ballet Canadienne said it was always difficult to find male dancers. This is despite their freedom to start later and still be quite accomplished.

LaPointe took up dancing when he was 21. "I went to see a show in my hometown, and that was it, I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

Since then, LaPointe danced in Vancouver for four years and then with the Grande Ballet for four years and has been with the latter ever since.

"Gee," said my fellow ballet-enthusiast friend, "I'd be a ballet dancer if I had known that you could start when you're 21." Being a ripe old 27, he has resigned himself to his flute lessons for fulfillment, much like I have with yoga.

The stigma associated with ballet as being a purely feminine pursuit is what, of course, keeps most men away. "Many people still think all male ballet dancers are gay," comments LaPointe. It is a true test of a heterosexual man's confidence with his sexuality. "I had a hard time breaking

it to my father," laughed

LaPointe.

Another friend of mine decided to take up ballet when he was 18. He was remarkably good at it, but his dad was not overly impressed with his talent, especially after coming home to sight of him sprawled out on the couch, clad in his new pink tights.

As we walked out of the theater, after the Grande Ballet's performance, my "date" reiterated his awe of the dancers. "I remember when I worked at a gym and the dance company would come in to work out," he recounted. "I thought, 'What right have you to look like that and hang around with women that look like that?'"

I considered this for a moment. My other friend, of pink tights fame, joined the lessons partly because he was rather infatuated with a certain ballerina.

Sure enough, this strategy blossomed into great possibilities. He was offered a spot in the National School of Ballet.

He turned down the offer but not the ballerina.

So, to all you guys working out in the weight room: if you are trying to impress other men, perhaps this is the right place for you, but if it is the attention of the opposite sex you are seeking, a better bet is to try a few dance lessons.

You could have joined my class, to help balance out the ratio of two men to four women. Your style does not matter. One man was ostentatiously dramatic in his moves, for he was obviously experienced in other forms of dance, while the other was hopelessly uncoordinated. However, both were quite charming in their delving into this alternative form of expression.

Because, you see, it is simply a matter of the unmistakable truth behind the title of my first article which originally hooked me on this wonderful art form, a couple of years ago: "ballet is not macho . . . it's sexy."

§ If you would like to do your bit to assert your own artistic vision, if you would try to answer these (intermittent) questions of mine, or if you just care to commiserate with the student body about life, the universe, and everything, I implore you: submit any form of quality you can yield to the Gazette Arts Supplement. Creative writing, reviews, sketches, photographs, all are welcome. Remember! Only you can validate Art! (brought to you by the longest in-house ad disguise company of 4:16 am/empty Arts page/over deadline Arts editor)

DEADLINE — THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 22