

# Downchild Blues Band: a year long party



Jane Vasey is fine back-up.



Don Walsh's blood runs hot.

**Liz Alt and Jim Agnelli**  
Downchild Blues Band settled into Founders College last Friday night, well-armed with familiar songs and styles, as well as its age-old crowd-drawing name. And there were no surprises. Downchild did just what was expected of them. The beer flowed, the feet began to tap, and eventually, as the combination of the two took hold, the habitually "closer-to-comatose" pub crowd even moved onto the dance floor from time to time.

How does Downchild manage to inspire activity when so many others have failed? Could it be the familiar raspy throat vocals and rough bar-room conviviality of singer Don Walsh? Perhaps it's their antithesis-of-slick-professionalism, that still oozes warmth and relaxation. Or maybe it's due to competent back-up musicians, including a horn section, which at times comandered the music with a dose of the big-band swing

sound in some of Downchild's less than bluesy numbers.

In all, blues was in the minority, Friday night, by about 5 to 1 in favour of more danceable jazz. (Who wants more blues at this time of year anyway? We already have mid-terms, finals and research papers). Or perhaps it's because the band knew enough to take us through a well-placed set of known stand-bys from the first album and newish highlights from their latest album, *Blood Run Hot*, interspersed with such blues classics and miscellaneous covers, as "Shotgun Blues" or "Flip, Flop and Fly."

Downchild are not fashion-plates; no electronic wizardry or rowdy excitement. So how do they do it? A bar-band simply knows how to re-create a bar-atmosphere, gets the beat going and the beer flowing, even in Founders Dining Hall.

*Don your group has just finished cutting a new album with Spencer Davis right?*

Right  
*Could you tell me if the group has decided to take a different direction on this new album, Blood Run Hot?*

What do you mean direction — that's a typical interview question — tell me something has your life changed direction? Well...

I'm doing what I was doing ten years ago, we are performers who work 50 weeks a year; we don't change direction we just do it.

*Fair enough. Your group seems to be getting a good reaction from the audience. Is this typical when you come to York?*

7 or 8 years ago we played at a place called the Green Bushdown, and the crowd was just crazy there, there were people drinking beer up in the rafters and dancing on the tables.

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## Chaim Potok

### Fighting inhumanity

**Elliott Lefko**

There's a little bit of humanity in man and Chaim Potok has chosen to scrape away and find it.

"I hope that my novels will forever change the eyes of the people reading them," said the brilliant American author who spoke in Toronto, Tuesday, as part of the Jewish book fair.

Potok has written five novels, the most popular being *The Chosen*, written in 1967, which is being released as a full-length film this Christmas. His latest work is entitled *The Book of Lights*. According to the author, all of his books have a consistent message running throughout: the conflict within the 20th Century North American Jew, who must choose between his European Jewish tradition and the tradition of his adopted North American homeland.

"I see the innocent 21-year-old as a battleground for this confrontation," said the bearded, balding, and bespectacled ordained Rabbi. "In particular I see universities as the citadels of society. They are forced to accept a model of society that is given as absolute. Yet no model is absolute. There must be provisions attached. The individual cannot therefore accept readily all that is given. Questions must be asked. Demands must be made to re-open the invisible model."

Potok has dedicated his life to "thinking things through his novels. They're not just stories," he says of his work. "When I was

growing up I found that I sometimes lost myself in novels and the world of fiction became more real than my real world."

"Everyone loves a story though," he continues. "It's universal and you can write on different levels. For example *Huckleberry Finn*; that's not a child's book. It is a perfect example of how society has broken down until the city, which was formed originally to bring people together to civilize them, has become the centre for violence, and hypocrisy.

"Only on the raft does Huck find freedom. It is that vulgar aspect of our Western Civilization which constantly tests our core and which we must continually try to deal with."

Potok believes the high points of our "rich geography of serious modern literature is the result of the many mini-subcultures rubbing against the umbrella civilization." He mentions authors such as Stephen Crane, Thomas Mann, and Sinclair Lewis, who wrote of the individual polarized against his Western culture. For Potok the moment of inspiration came one grey cloudy day in February 1957 when he stood in Hiroshima on the spot where the bomb had fallen. "I stood there and thought as an American, as a Man, and as a Jew, what did the moment mean to me? I decided then that I would try to deal with these questions through my writing. And the subject matter for all my work was born out of the encounter."

## No flowers bloom here

**Robyn Butt**

I wish there was something exciting to say about *Spring Awakening*. One keeps going to theatre department productions hoping to be stunned. *Spring Awakening* is a fine play (although Edward Bond's translation sounds a little archaic now). While this production was consistently nice to look at, the play requires from its leading characters a torment that just wasn't there opening night.

Ric Sarabia as Moritz put in his usual intelligent performance; Sarabia is one of the few York actors who uses his voice well, phrasing and pacing lines that pull you along without letting you realise you're going. He has some subtle facial and body tricks that make a convincing youngster, and the absurd tone given Moritz never faltered, even when he had to shoot himself.

But Dan Chevrier as Melchior and Debbie Tompkins as Wendla, who had to carry the play's passion, never managed to cross the barrier into believability. Their problem might have been with sensitivity to the characters; people who are written tortured by their intelligence and their ignorance. They are also only 15 years old, an element left glossed-over here. Neither act showed much development, so that their unhappiness fell flatter than it should have. But they were still popular with the crowd from the local highschool. ("Nah, they're probably married. We don't have a chance...")

The play's high points included Stuart Hughes' monologue to Botticelli's *Venus*, current queen in his harem of erotic pictures. It's beautifully written, which helps, but Hughes was good. Another unintended high came when the same character kisses Steven Hill as Harry. The baby audience erupted in outraged squeals that earned them a

little tongue when the kiss was repeated. The third delight was Darlene Harrison, who believes everything she does and could have played Wendla.

The rest of the cast were competent, if predictable, pacing held well, and Alan Richardson's direction was solid and usually sensitive, if it had the odd blind spot (casting, for instance). The set was interesting — especially the white gauze blossom that hung down and defined space for the action, functioning both as various things

in the play and as a visual metaphor. Kathe Climie and Tanny Mendes on set and Sarah Knowling on lighting deserve credit there. Tistolov Songedal's costumes were also fine except for one oversight: it's hard to believe talk about sexual repression when everyone is wearing only tights below the waist.)

In the end this *Spring Awakening* is a worthy but safe piece of theatre. If only something would break and York drama would start taking risks more serious than boys necking or masturbation onstage.



## Blow grey November away with a visit to the IDA

**Al Locke**

If you can't use your medium to say what you want to say - don't be an artist. Sharing intimate, original expressions is the premise of art.

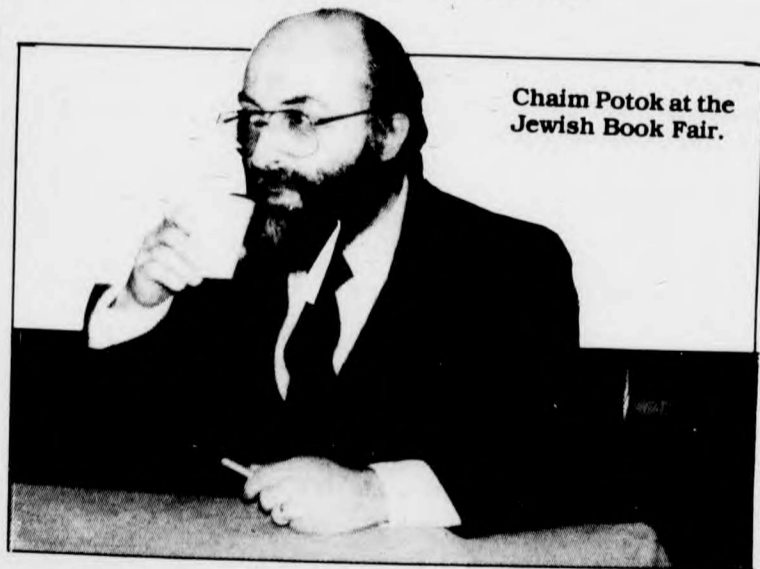
The IDA Gallery is currently presenting the Undergraduate Pure Arts Show, featuring Christine Budden, Tim des Clouds, Teresa Hanley, Anne McMillan, and Arif Shah. These artists and their innovative work offers an exciting escape from the grey November 'blahs'.

The artists' use of colour, materials, and technique were of high quality. Tim des Cloud's fascination with Egyptian Culture is realized through an explosive use of colour and form. Arif Shah's two energetic works seethe with profound eroticism. With these vivid colours the gallery lives, yet doesn't become abusive, as a fragile balance is kept between the powerful and the introspective, through the softer works offered by other artists.

Ann McMillan's brooding *One Hates to Live Alone* and her use of colour and form (reminiscent of American Indian Art) provide that balance. Teresa Hanley's pastels are soft and warm, and Christine Budden's works range from the bright and alive to the dark and foreboding.

The IDA is presenting a fine exhibit, well worth the time it takes to appreciate the art. It is a show that lacks pretentiousness. But there is no need for pretention, because there is talent.

**COMING SOON:  
Kiddie Book Art**



Chaim Potok at the Jewish Book Fair.

Sur Epstein

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