

# Poet defies turkeys

The following article deals with an informal interview that Gateway had with Milton Acorn, the Canadian people's poet. Acorn, besides being just a poet, is a carpenter by trade as well as being a political activist, advocating socialism and Canadian independence.

by Beno John

Two Saturdays ago, RATT drinkers had an opportunity to listen to the poetry of Milton Acorn while undergoing the steady, usual process of inebriation. Milton Acorn, the "people's poet" could have been just the right kind of a show for RATT, had it not been for a minority of obnoxious turkeys who were determined to take the show away from him. Luckily enough Acorn, a self-styled champion of the socialist cause, was able to display in flesh a fiery assertiveness which has acquired him a notorious reputation in print.

Part of this reputation comes from Acorn's unique ability to combine his strong political beliefs with an art that has generally divorced itself from political realities. In this, he offers healthy contrast to the self-indulgence of poets like Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen. Acorn revives the poets' traditional roots, by basing his craft solidly on the social and political milieu of his society. Like a bard of old, he sings tribute to the common, decent values that persist, while lashing out at the impersonal forces which threaten those values. But what is most interesting about Acorn is his keen knowledge of history, which he uses to buttress his political and poetical sentiments.

Acorn fervently believes in socialism as the main alternative for Canada to follow. He justifies this by citing the fact that Canada still reflects a colonial mentality. It is only because of Canada's economic dependence, which dissolves and dilutes its distinctly unique cultural heritage. "The Canadian people built this country ..." even though "... the bourgeois ruling class have merged with its American counterpart. Because of this the people of Canada should collec-

tively oppose capitalism."

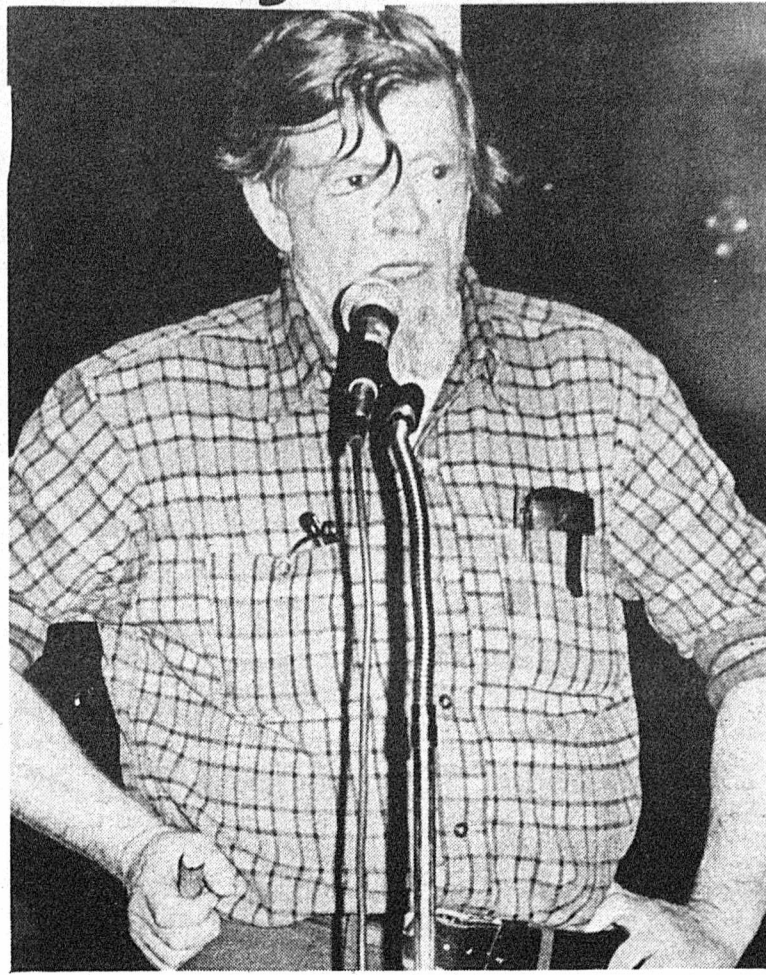
It was out of Acorn's search for various mediums to voice his political sentiments that he co-founded the Georgia Strait. "My object was to start a medium which could serve progressive thought." But the venture was short-lived, Acorn found his underground paper "being sabotaged by leftist elements in the wrong context." Acorn then became disenchanted with the splintering of leftist groups into "paranoid", "ineffectual fanatical groups who lost their sense of political reality." Acorn cited the mounting opposition to seal hunting in Newfoundland as an example of misguided sentiment. "There is an annual hymn of discrimination against Newfoundland about the harp seal hunts. The harp seal is not facing extinction. In actuality, the population of the harp seals have been rising because of the recent drop in fur prices."

Acorn's sympathies for the seal hunters comes largely out of the fact that seal hunting is about the only source of income for the hunters. "There is the allegation that seal hunting is not a very manly trade, but that's not true. Over a thousand Newfoundlanders have died in the seal hunts (this is a conservative estimate). It's a dangerous business - the ice and freezing salt water are treacherous."

After Acorn's attempts with the Georgia Strait, he helped found Perth County Conspiracy, an activist folk-music group from central Ontario.

The group has recorded many of Acorn's poems to music, proving once again Acorn's ability to use different mediums to voice his distinct message.

It was during his involvement with Perth County Conspiracy that Acorn recognized the oral traditions of poetry and began to incorporate chanting into his



Milton Acorn blasting away in RATT

photo Beno John

readings. At his reading in RATT, Acorn gave a witty example of this by chanting a satiric poem to the tune of the American national anthem.

All in all, Acorn's dynamic and vigorous personality is what comes through - this man is a product of this country. He is attuned to his roots and is comfortable with them. As a carpenter-turned-poet, he treats his work with words in a simple,

earthy fashion. His simple celebration of what he is, is perhaps one of the great influences transforming the self-conscious attitude so prevalent in Canadian literature.

Milton Acorn's books include *In Love and Anger*, *Against a League of Liars*, *More Poems for People* and *The Island Means Minago* (winner of the Governor General's Award for Poetry, 1976).

## Alberta culture crafts offers

Intensive immersion courses in a variety of craft disciplines will be offered to students of the Arts as part of Alberta Culture's program this fall.

The five-day workshops are designed to provide professional technical guidance to craftsmen and to develop the leadership techniques that will allow artists to pass on their knowledge to others in their communities.

All courses are being held during November at the Forest Technology School, Hinton, Alberta. As residency programs they will involve extensive studio work, lectures, films and seminars. The schedule of courses is as follows:

Ceramics: wheelthrowing - November 1-5; Ceramic Development - November 8-12 and November 15-19.

Weaving: Mixed Techniques - November 1-5; Introduction to Floor Looms - November 8-12. Drawing and Painting - November 15-19.

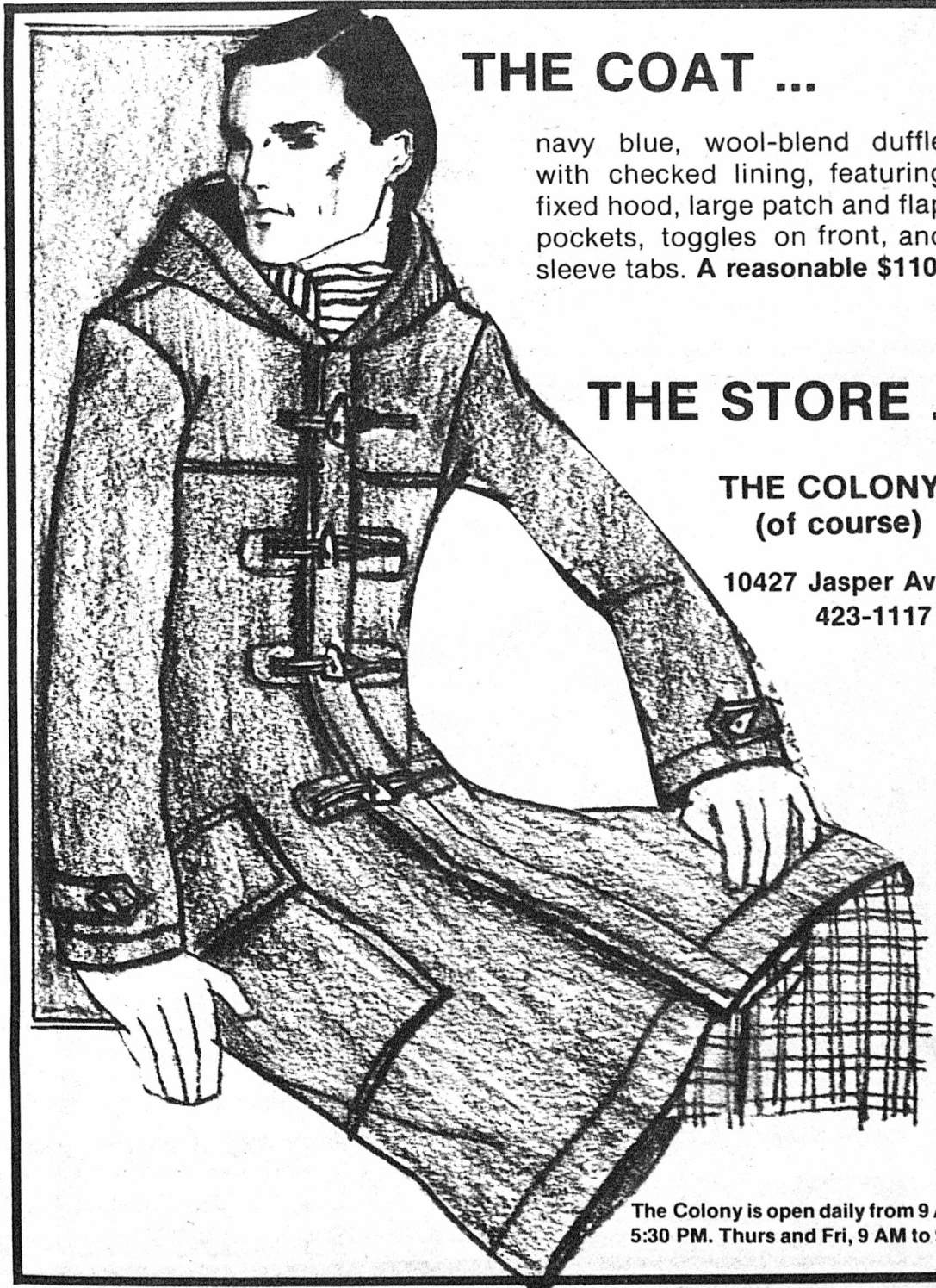
Copper Enameling - November 22-26.

Creative Stitchery and Fabric Arts - November 22-26.

Single course registration fee is \$17.50; accommodation and meals for 5 days and 5 nights is \$50.00. Applications are now being accepted on a first come, first served basis.

## THE COAT ...

navy blue, wool-blend duffel with checked lining, featuring fixed hood, large patch and flap pockets, toggles on front, and sleeve tabs. A reasonable \$110.



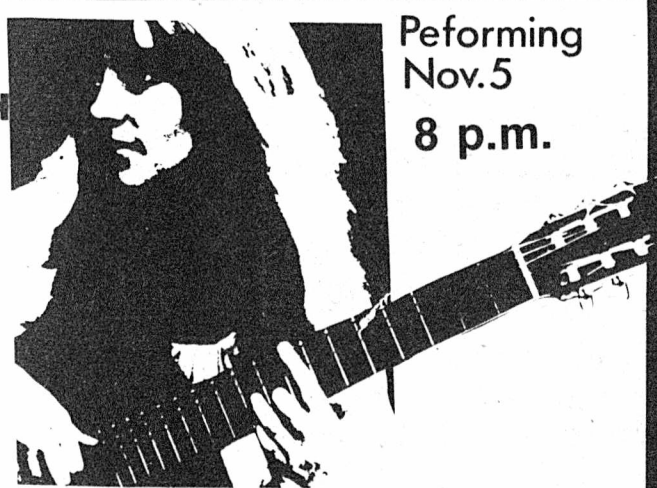
## THE STORE ...

THE COLONY  
(of course)

10427 Jasper Ave.  
423-1117

The Colony is open daily from 9 AM to 5:30 PM. Thurs and Fri, 9 AM to 9 PM.

Liona Boyd



Performing  
Nov. 5  
8 p.m.

Acclaimed classical guitarist Liona Boyd is a masterful and sensitive artist who evokes an intensely personal rapport between her audience and her music..... Liona Boyd is a rising star in the ranks of internationally prominent musicians.

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