

## From Thailand to Spain to ... Fredericton?

Meet our new Writer-in-Residence



Karen Connelly: She possesses a rare presence. Kevin G. Porter photo

by Carla Lam

Vivacious, colorful, fresh, uninhibited are just a few of the adjectives that come to mind when describing Karen Connelly, UNB's current writer in residence.

The 24 year old accomplished author is a native of Calgary, Alberta, but a gypsy at heart.

Of journal writing she humourously confesses, "... When I'm away it tends to be really vibrant, and interesting, and fascinating, and full of incredible details, but when I'm in Canada it tends to be rather boring, and personal ...and...neurotic." So great an influence her journeys have had on shaping her art and her life that she can be considered more European than Canadian, as she explains, "...every place...every time gets in you." Connelly, who has lived

abroad since the age of 17, strongly believes that the cultural awakening one gains from visiting foreign countries to be a valuable education in

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and of itself. She compares the experience to being born over again claiming, "We're best at being born again when we're young." She has the experience to back her words. After writing her first book of poetry, the award winning "The Small Words in my Body," she left home to live in Thailand as an exchange student for a year. She was the only Caucasian in the small

northern community of Denchai and she defines submersion in a foreign culture as "Relinquishing some of yourself in order to understand something which is much greater than yourself." Her life in Thailand inspired her journal writing and thus her second book, "Touch The Dragon - A Thai Journal," which has recently been accepted for English publication in Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia. Her most recent work is her second book of poetry, "This Brighter Prison." At present Connelly is working on her first novel, which is set in Spain, as well as an assortment of shore stories.

Despite the fact that she is culturally astute, having lived in Thailand, Spain, France and Greece and is an award-winning writer, she has acquired no arrogance or pretentiousness. Her successes appear to have colored her personality rather than detracting from it. In interview, and in larger gathering she possesses a rare presence ... not only to hold the floor—which she does very well, but to make one feel as if they are in the company of an old friend. Connelly seems unaware of this talent and the wisdom that surpasses her years. She half-jokingly describes herself as "... cheerfully, and poetically confused about life..." On her unconventional lifestyle she comments, "...maybe all lives are kind of unconventional in their own way," and emphasizes, "that there's no precise or correct way to live..." She urges people searching for their particular forté "not to be held back by the," usual things, "which is just fear in one form or another," she believes that one of universi-

ty's purposes is to help people figure out "where they belong in a bigger context." For any creative writer seeking a mentor you need not look further than UNB's own English department to Karen Connelly. The impression she left on this aspiring writer can be summed up in one word ... incredible.

Michael Edwards

## GENREKIDE

I have always had a problem with the way that people inevitably try to classify music into a particular type to help them decide whether they will like it or not. All this actually seems to do is to make the music less accessible to others. I mean, try to convince a country fan to listen to some 'grunge'. Or should that be 'new' country music. And just how loud do the guitars have to be to make it grunge? Sigh. It all gets far too complicated very quickly; even one of the more obvious genres -classical - has had its boundaries distorted lately by the efforts of Elvis Costello & The Brodsky String Quartet not to mention the Balanescu Quartet who do a rather tasteful Kraftwerk cover version. The answer? Genrecide - stop trying to put music into specific genres and simply accept it for the aural delights it offers. Music for music's sake. This may seem rather extreme but it appears to be the only way for people to discover many of the bands and singers just crying out to be listened to. And this is what I hope to do by means of this column - introduce you to some of the music which may have otherwise have passed you by. Every week I will feature a specific independent record label and review some of their more interesting releases and on the other weeks I will let you know about anything else I can get my hands on, and also do a bit of ranting on my soapbox about music in general.

But back to genrecide. The one genre that has always bothered me is 'alternative' for it fails to define itself - alternative to what? One person's alternative is another's norm. The thing that really brought it home to me was listening to a conversation between two people from CHSR about what should and should not be on their playlist. It would seem that the main criterion is that it isn't played on mainstream radio, or in other words, doesn't get into the charts. This leaves a huge grey area because most of the music that is released today fails to have any real commercial success - was the last Ringo Starr album which bombed more 'alternative' than Nirvana's last album which enjoyed lots of airplay on most radio stations and also huge sales? And, for that matter, were Nirvana 'alternative' be-

fore they had any commercial success with 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' and then ceased to be after they hit the Top 40? So this means that CHSR could play just about anything that they want including classical, blues and many others, which they do. A quick look at their schedule will let you see that 'alternative' encompasses just about every other genre so is more worthless than ever. It just doesn't seem to make much sense. The situation is worse in Britain where the media sub-divide music further into all manner of tiny categories which last for a few months and then disappear off the face of the earth, something which is happening to a lot of the very fashionable 'alternative' bands - I wonder if anyone will remember Porno For Pyros five years down the line. I hope not. So I do not like the term 'alternative' and will not use the term 'alternative'. I sometimes wonder if it was created by the media to make music less acceptable for older generations - parents have always been upset by what children listen to it locking up daughters when The Rolling Stones come to town or putting advisory labels on albums with questionable lyrics.

The biggest problem is that by calling something alternative then you scare off about 50% of the potential listeners because they think that their ears will start to bleed when they listen to it. In this column I will concentrate mainly upon independent music - companies that don't have the backing of the major labels for promotion and so tend to get ignored by most people even although most people start off on such a label and in many cases they have to start their own label in order to get any sort of release out. On these independent labels you find every type of music imaginable and I will try cater for all tastes as well as trying to cover labels from other countries. The whole world of music just waiting to be discovered and all that. And I shall end on that melodramatic point - one final thing though: if any one out there has any demos to be listened to or any concerts to be plugged then send details to me up here at the Brunswick office. Tune in next week for the first Label Of The Month - Bar/None Records.