

arts



PHOTO: ANGELOS HARVENTIDIS

This member of the Parachute Club typifies the energy of the band's performance last night at Founders College. "We have a more activist approach," says co-founder Billy Bryans.

This Club has landed

By CAROLINE CHIA

The Parachute Club is a band on their way to the top. The seven member Toronto-based band is only a year old, but already they have both an album and a single sitting high on the charts. Last night, the band proved just why with their sold-out show in the Founders College Dining Hall.

But before the show got underway, I managed to speak to one of the band's co-founders, drummer Billy Bryans. He related how the group got started, and described their beginnings as being "very spontaneous." Bryans and lead singer Lorraine Segato had been working within a community of downtown Toronto musicians when they met—Bryans was doing the music for a film that Segato was editing.

It wasn't until they met again when Lorraine was the lead singer in a band called Mamaquilla II (at the time an all women's band) that things began to happen.

Mamaquilla II lost their drummer and Billy stepped in. The remaining Mamaquilla II members and Billy later became V. There were even more changes within V and from this group of musicians eventually

evolved the Parachute Club.

The band thought they would just play a few gigs here and there and then disband. But after the releases of their current single hit *Rise-Up* and their self-titled debut album (July 15) things began to go extremely well. The album has been selling well and on September 16 was released in the U.S. It is expected to be released in the U.K. sometime in November.

With this kind of success the band decided to try a new medium to get exposure: videos. The production of *Rise-Up* was just recently released and is being shown on MTV in the U.S., which has introduced the band and their songs to an entirely different group of listeners. Viewers, that is.

The group has a distinct Afro-Caribbean influence, borrowing heavily from Calypso music and Bryans explains the reason for taking this particular approach: "The band is fairly experienced and there tends to be a little of everything thrown into every song. For example, Laurie has a Gospel and Blues background whereas I have a lot more of the Afro-Caribbean influence."

I asked him specifically about

their current hit *Rise-Up* and how it was conceived. He said the songs evolve through the efforts of bandmembers and friends. In particular *Rise-Up* was written in collaboration with five people, including local poet Lynn Fernie, their ex-bass player and Billy. The rest of the songs on the first album were written primarily by pairs of writers.

Asked about the political undertones in the songs, Bryans said "Both Lorraine and I have always had a political or cultural way of looking at the world. We've always felt that we should choose our lyrics from the world rather than from personal experiences. We have a more activist approach than a passive approach."

Segato came out of the feminist circles of Toronto and Bryans has background in "new-left" bands of the early '70s. This was the intention in forming the Parachute Club: it was to have a political and cultural point of view. This is reflected in lyrics such as "Rise-up to your power/Freedom time has come/Want to be Free." At one concert earlier they dedicated their hit *Rise-Up* to the 269 passengers of the Korean Air Liner disaster.

Plath's letters read well

The dark life of one woman who wrote well, published little, and died by her own hand in 1963 is the subject of Rose Leiman Goldemberg's *Letters Home* at the Adelaide Court Theatre.

Whether or not this play—based on correspondence between the American poet Sylvia Plath and her mother—accurately represents the individual is a question for her family, and for those who practise the dubious habit of reconstructing the artist from her work.

Letters Home is a fascinating piece of theatre in its conception and in the vital portrayal of its two characters, Sylvia (Caitlin Hicks) and her mother Aurelia Plath (Patricia Brown, who also directs).

The combination of the verbatim Plath letter with Goldemberg's artistic use of it reminds us forcefully of the possibilities in theatre. The action is arranged chronologically, embracing the 15 years of correspondence to Plath's death.

But there are two planes of time before us. As the old mother reminisces for us from the present, the young poet, three steps away, quotes her letters from the period described. This is striking enough, but when the one supplies words for the other's recitation, or when the two, neither hearing the other, confront one another directly on-

stage, we are moved into a deeper understanding of the relationship than the letters alone could supply.

Aurelia Plath, narrating with her ribbon-bound packs of correspondence, and the young Plath, declaiming from somewhere beyond time, both seem irredeemably lonely and forsaken people, despite the history of letters.

The Plath letters depict a mother and daughter with a line of communication more intimate than usual. Yet Goldemberg's fast-moving drama suggests much more. Is "Sivvy" at Smith College as full of *joie de vivre* as the words in her letters? In this production, when young Plath's (Hick's) exuberant voice falls silent, her face falls also, into a gloomy, pensive, perplexed look of the deeply depressed woman who will beg her mother's help near the end of her short life.

They cannot communicate as well in person as they do in writing. During those scenes of the two speaking simultaneously to the audience, the mother usually gets the upper hand (though in the most benign, solicitous way imaginable), leaving her daughter silent, glaring resentfully from across the stage. There are hints of Plath's distaste with life throughout.

The theatre is small, the stage tiny,

split into a simply suggested parlor for Aurelia Plath, and a bed, table, and cupboard that represent the poet's stark abode. In this intimate setting, expressions of Plath's anguish, which grow more frequent in the second act, could be embarrassing if poorly played. Caitlin Hicks manages, fortunately, to display the real anguish that burns through Plath's letters, despite the at once aggravating and heroic expressions in those letters of fortitude with a sour lot: a run-away husband, poverty, and two very young children.

Patricia Brown's direction is almost flawless, though she herself stumbles over some of her lines, a problem also experienced by Ms. Hicks.

There's something embarrassing about reading another's letters, even if the other is a public figure, a writer, and you feel some right to commit the postman's worst sin.

How much can we know about a specific person, even with the help of her letters? The mystifying complexities of Sylvia Plath, who died before finding her clearest voice are evoked but not answered in *Letters Home*. The play can stand as good theatre on its own legs. But Plath's quiet death and deeply sad and split life beg questions still.

CHRIS WARREN

Guns and guitars

By PAULETTE PEIROL

In 1979, Margaret Randall embarked on a three-month trip to Nicaragua to do fieldwork for a book on Nicaraguan women. The book, *Sandino's Daughters*, was published soon after. But that three-month trip stretched out to four years, and only now, after a second book (*From Witness to Struggle*) has Randall returned to North America.

As part of her month-long North American tour, Randall stopped at York Monday to give an informative talk and slide presentation, and offered an exhibit of her photographs in the Purple Lounge, in the Fine Arts building. Randall is a well-known poet, writer, and photographer, yet she has also been called "an international committed activist" since her stint in Nicaragua.

Experiencing Nicaragua firsthand left Randall with a myriad of images, both mental and visual. Of special interest to her are women's issues, religious activity, and the cultural situation in Nicaragua. She addressed specifically these three topics in her audio-visual slide presentation, using quotations from many Nicaraguans. The slides showed scenes of poverty, estranged mothers, street graffiti, social protest, worship, and war.

Led by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), the Nicaraguan Revolution protested against the dictatorship of tyrant Anastasio Somoza. By July 1979, the FSLN succeeded in overthrowing Somoza's regime.

"Yet," said Randall, "according to North Americans, it's an unstated war that doesn't exist." The struggle for autonomy and the development of a new socialist government is still being fought passionately.

It is not only an internal war. "Nicaragua poses a threat to the United States by influencing other Latin American countries," said Randall. She called it a "disinformation war," referring to an intentional distortion of Nicaraguan facts by the North American press.

The role of women in Nicaragua is also a pertinent topic—the beginning of the Women's Movement coincided with the growth of the Nicaraguan Revolution. Women have always played an important economic role in Latin America, where there is a high rate of "paternal irresponsibility." Often, women earn up to 60 percent of the family income.

Nicaraguan women became involved in all areas of the revolution: politically, in combat, and in leadership. One of Randall's fears is that as the struggle subsides, women will be squeezed back into their stereotype maternal roles. However, steps have been taken to prevent this from

happening. One such measure is the Law of Nurture which was passed last year. The law states that fathers are legally responsible for the care of children and half of the domestic work. "Women have gained a space which is irreversible," said Randall.

After the slide presentation, Randall discussed the growth of Nicaraguan culture. She explained that Nicaraguan culture "goes back to pre-Columbian days and is part of a continuum." Prior to the revolution, the Somoza government promoted little culture. There was much censorship of "any kind of profound contemporary thought," although over half the population was illiterate anyway. (The illiteracy rate has since been reduced from 59 percent to 12 percent.) Since then, cultural magazines have appeared, such as the *Ventana*, published by the of Liom. These magazines have promoted public discussion of such topics as "What is art in a revolutionary society?"

Only one week after the victory of the FSLN, poet Ernesto Cardinal established a Ministry of Culture, of which he is presently director. He set up a network of poetry workshops and began to form co-operatives of artists.

Since then, there has been a revival in theatre, music, and especially folk dancing.

Randall described the Cultural Brigades composed of eight to 12 performers (everything from artists, to musicians, to clowns) who venture out to the war fronts to emotionally revitalize the fighters. "It's not Bob Hope out to entertain," said Randall. "Sometimes they have a gun in one hand and a guitar in the other."

"Defense and production are priorities, but culture remains very important," said Randall. She explained that Nicaragua has always had "a strong indigenous cultural undercurrent." This can be seen in the street theatre and religious festivals so prevalent in the country.

"Very few artists are not behind the revolution," said Randall, "and the revolution is solidly behind art." An "enormous amount" of the leaders of the revolution were artists, writers, and musicians, she said.

Randall explained that Nicaragua receives many financial donations and art supplies from other countries. "People make things out of nothing," she added.

According to Randall, a poet is equivalent to a doctor. "It's a title as well as a noun," she said. "A doctor and poet are sort of on the same level."

Randall herself has earned the titles poet, writer, and photographer. She is currently touring North America until November primarily "to break down political preconceptions."



One of Margaret Randall's picture postcards from her four-year stint in Nicaragua. Randall was at York Monday to deliver a lecture and slide presentation.