

Arts & Entertainment

Death of a poet: A eulogy for bp Nichol

by Linda Zelda Schulz

bp Nichol said it best when he said, "We are words and our meanings change." If you weren't told by one of your writer friends, you probably missed the tiny death notice in *The Globe and Mail* which read:

NICHOL, Barrie (bp) - Suddenly at Toronto General Hospital on Sunday, September 25, 1988... In lieu of flowers, donations to the Writers Fund For/Words Foundation, 35 Marchmount Road, Toronto M6G 2A9.

There are so many people on campus who knew bp Nichol or who knew of him and so maybe you've heard by word of mouth that one of Canada's best poets/writers, and the best creative writing teacher ever, is gone.

There isn't much fanfare for a writer who dies, especially a Canadian writer. After a memorial service held earlier this year for poet Gwendolyn MacEwen, the Festival of Authors at Harbourfront, Toronto (Oct. 14-22) announced a tribute



bp Nichol: Canadian poet dead at 44.

to living Canadian writers.

"It seemed," said festival artistic director Greg Gatenby at a press conference in Toronto, "that we only celebrated Canadian writers after they had died

If at the library you have a spare moment, and you're probably like the rest of us and don't have many spare moments, punch in NICHOL, bp, in the authors category of the On-Line Catalogue. There are 51 items and this is by no means a comprehensive list. Still, this doesn't begin to tell you why the small Canadian community of writers, and friends of writers, is grieving.

bp touched people through his writing. He placed himself in his own writing; he brought out the human side.

To younger writers and to his peers, he was a teacher, and a great one. He knew exactly how to encourage; he knew how much courage it takes to continue writing. He was funny and compassionate and I agree with Fred Wah, writer-in-residence and close friend of bp, that the man was "one of the most generous people I've ever met."

When Daphne Marlatt was writer-in-residence, three years ago, she suggested that I read Nichol's book, *Journal*. I was at a low point as a writer and she said that book would teach me a way to talk to myself as a writer so that I could push on, dream on, and make the words come out. After reading *Journal* I realized that writing was more of a discovery of what's already written in your head than a measuring up to some formula.

It was around that time that I had the chance to first meet bp in person. I showed him a piece that I'd written for one of my creative writing courses. He told me that it had a nascent quality. I had to look up the word nascent; I had no idea what it meant. I grabbed the *Oxford English Dictionary* and looked it up: In the act of being born. This gave me more hope and joy in the act of writing than I can put into words.

This past summer I jumped at the chance to work with bp and others at the Literary Workshop held at Red Deer

College. It was obvious bp wasn't feeling very well but he taught every day of that workshop and he consulted with every student who asked for his time.

He spoke about the 3-Day Novel writing contest, sponsored by Vancouver's Pulp Press, and he urged us on to compete in what we had previously imagined to be the impossible dream. bp simply said that spending three days writing during the Labor Day weekend would give a writer a good 50 pages or more of creative writing with which to play.

bp gave away the secret of writing which is in the re-writing or the re-vision. That's when you take another look at what you first put down. That's when you become the sculptor; you have to chisel away everything that doesn't work or that obscures the view. That's when you get to play with your own words.

bp could inspire a room full of people to start writing, I swear, and writing is not something that comes easy to many people.

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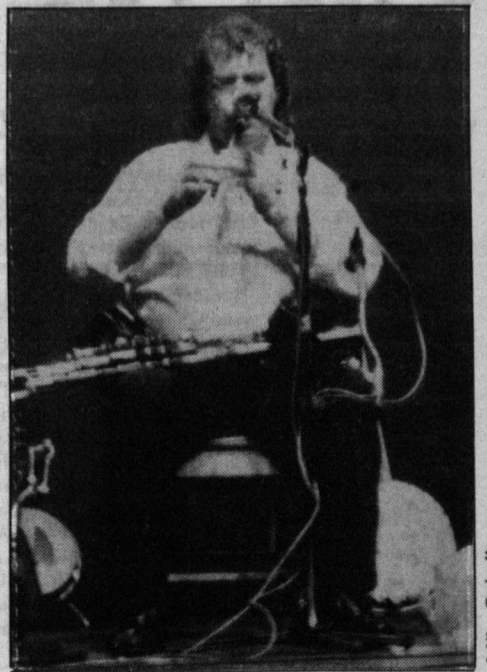
bp played with words for so many years. He inspired others to try and do the same. To have to say goodbye to him when he was only 44 is asking too much.

He told us what the word "grief" really means in his poem "6:35 a.m. to 7:35 a.m." In the second line he tells us that "the heart does break". This made me go back to the *Oxford English Dictionary* and look up the meaning of such a simple word I thought I knew — *break* — which means to do violence to; to crush in spirit or temper; to crush the strength of; to bruise, wound; to damage; to make or become unuseable; to kill, crush or overwhelm with sorrow; to part by violence; to take away a part from; to cut short, stop, bring to a sudden end; to interrupt the continuance of, to stop for a time, suspend; to make a way through, to penetrate, to open up; and, to deliver or reveal what is in one's heart.

For those of us who loved bp, he said it best:

the aching muscle in the chest
carries more than the weight hangs
from the body
from the barely perceiving brain
buried under the weight of loss

of grief



Finbar Furey with Uilleann pipes and pan flute.

was one that exuded the warmth and friendliness of the Irish nature. The band members certainly enjoyed themselves immensely and their vitality seemed to be catching. In little time, the audience had warmed to the band and had begun clapping in time and singing along as the 90 minute performance progressed.

Lighter Classics' successful start

Edmonton Symphony Orchestra
Jubilee Auditorium
Thursday, October 13

review by Pat Hughes

Wow. On the way to see Thursday's performance of the ESO's Lighter Classics Series, I was expecting to be pacified with the nice, but all too familiar and overlaid sounds of Pachelbel's Canon and Mozart's Eine Kleine Nachtmusik. Works like these have been used for so many commercial purposes that one almost cringes in fear of hearing what will be done to them next; they are also often the substance of many such "lighter" attempts to entice the public into the world of classical music. The effect is disappointing at best. Not so, however, with Thursday's concert. Even those who look upon such endeavours with a jaundiced eye could not have found fault in the ESO's inaugural concert of the Lighter Classics Series. The performance was astounding, and not a hint of those tired, overdone anthems was to be found.

Not to imply that the selections were

unfamiliar; satisfied nods and smiles of recognition could be seen throughout the auditorium, as the patrons thought to themselves, "I've heard this before." Von Suppe's "Light Cavalry Overture" in particular drew a smile from everyone as the familiar, yet not overused, theme came about. The music on the program was not the typical, commercially adapted sort; it was good music of a lighter nature, and it was extremely successful.

The definite star of the evening was Arthur Ozolins. The West German-born pianist swept through Edvard Grieg's Piano Concerto in A minor, a colorful, furiously fast-paced work. Ozolins looked and sounded as though he belonged more in the Magnificent Masters series than the Lighter Classics, so forcefully and skilfully did he perform. In the opening Allegro, Ozolins simply stunned the crowd with an amazing display of control and power, bringing out all of the force in Grieg's composition. This was followed by a beautifully liquid Adagio, Ozolins proving that he plays with finesse as well as power. The closing Allegro was dazzling, and the greatness of this performer did not go unappreciated, the audience rewarding

Ozolins with a standing ovation. Truly he is an amazing pianist.

Also of interest on the program was contemporary composer Michael Horwood's "Amusement Part Suite," a series of five three-minute movements, each one representing a different ride at the park. The corresponding emotion and excitement was well conveyed in each, especially in the final movement, "The Roller Coaster."

This concert was a great success, as well as a big step for the ESO. The popularity of the Symphony is growing, and will continue to do so, especially when aided by concerts like this. Even though the ESO exists to serve the Arts, it too must sell itself a little to survive, and this is certainly the least painful way to do so. And even if the future sees a work as mistreated as Beethoven's Fifth on the program, at least the audience will get past the first eight notes, and get a chance to hear the intricate splendour and beauty of such a great piece of music. "The Lighter Classics" is a step in the right direction not only for the ESO, but for the public as well, providing a chance for the uninitiated to get past the stuffy image of classical music, and hear what they have been missing.

Furey Brothers: Irish spirit in SUB

Furey Brothers and Davey Arthur
SUB Theatre
Saturday October 15

review by Rachel Sanders

"God Bless Ireland!" the exuberant Irish gentleman at the back kept shouting. This exclamation reflected the general mood in SUB Theatre when The Furey Brothers and Davey Arthur, arguably Ireland's finest folk group, played there on Saturday night. The sold out show was attended by an audience that was, not surprisingly, almost completely Irish. No other nationality can get quite as sentimental and nostalgic about the old country as the Irish, and this reminiscing contributed greatly to the atmosphere of the concert. The four Furey brothers, Finbar, Eddy, George, and Paul, along with Davey Arthur, delighted the audience with their mixture of jigs, airs, ballads, and of course humorous tales about life back home in Ireland. While it seemed that this is just what the partisan crowd came for,

one didn't have to be Irish to enjoy the sparkling performance put on by the band.

After starting the show with a fast reel to warm up their fingers, the band launched into "Gallipoli - A Father's Lament", the story of a man whose only son was "blown to kingdom come on the shores of Gallipoli". The loss of young Irish lives in wars that were not their own was a recurrent theme throughout the concert, present also in "I Was Born in Portland Town", a poignant song about the Vietnam war. Since any song about exiled Irishmen is bound to bring a tear to any Irish eye, the lament for Irish soldiers dying in exile had most of the audience singing along with great emotion during "The Green Fields of France."

However, the band did more than just play upon the emotions of the reminiscing Irish emigrants, they also displayed their abilities as fine musicians. Finbar Furey has been a three time all-Ireland champion on his Uilleann pipes, and one could certainly understand why on Saturday night. He kept a lively pace during jigs and reels

while he just as easily wove an intricate, soaring melody around the soft guitar chords in "Under the Hill". The four part harmonies accompanying the guitar and accordion parts in many of the songs also made it apparent that the band's musical abilities had much to do with the heartfelt welcome given to them by the zealous Irish audience.

During the final song, Finbar, playing on the tenor banjo, asked the audience to sing along. It took little encouragement on his part to get most of the audience singing with the Fureys on the obviously well-known song "When You Were Sweet Sixteen". Everyone was further delighted with the Fureys' encore number "The Old Man", a touching song about their father, Ted Furey.

The show was opened by dancers from the Slaney Valley School of Irish Dancing whose costumes were decorated with elaborate Celtic embroidery. The young dancers seemed to have boundless energy and they did much to prepare the audience for the energetic performance put on by the Fureys.

The atmosphere in the SUB Theatre