



# *Kim Hughes*

Journalist, editor, news and arts reporter and creative writer

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Motto: Use humour whenever possible; avoid clichés like the plague that they are; never use a three-dollar word when a twenty-five-cent word suffices; write for the reader, not for yourself

*Contact Information*

*khughes84@hotmail.com*

*416-465-9125*



# The Recession Mixtape

In calamitous financial times, the only sensible course of action is to down three fingers of hooch to the strains of a themed soundtrack cobbled together (presciently, it seems) from the best releases of this mercifully fading year.

– Kim Hughes

1. Hot N Cold  
by Katy Perry

"You're hot then you're cold/  
You're yes then you're no/  
You're in and you're out/  
You're up and you're down"  
*Dedicated to The TSX*

2. Lost!  
by Coldplay

"Just because I'm hurting/  
Doesn't mean I'm hurt/  
Doesn't mean I didn't get  
what I deserved/  
No better and no worse"  
*Dedicated to Your Broker*

3. You Cheated Me  
by Martha Wainwright

"I know you've got to go and I/  
Wanted to be afraid to say, but/  
I'm not/I'm scared to death  
of what you've become"  
*Dedicated to Your Fund Adviser*

4. In Love With Money  
by Plies

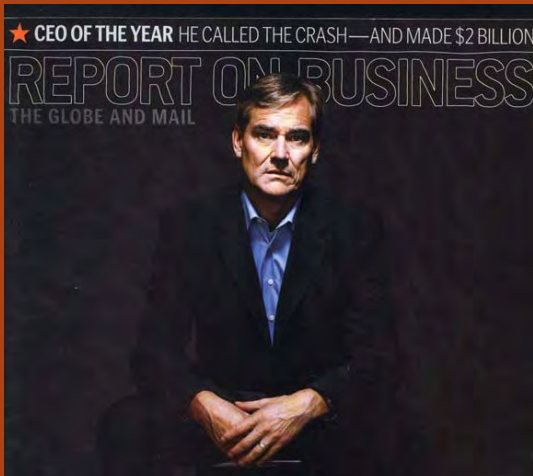
"I'm allergic to broke/  
I'm addicted to stuntin'/  
I'm infatuated wit hos/  
And I'm in love wit money/  
I'm in love wit money"  
*Dedicated to Your Golden-Parachuting CEO*

5. Many Shades of Black  
by The Raconteurs

"Go ahead, go ahead/  
And smash it on the floor/  
Take whatever's left/  
And take it with you out  
the door"  
*Dedicated to Your Mortgage Lender*

6. Broken, Beat & Scarred  
by Metallica

"You rise you fall/  
You're down and you rise again/  
What doesn't kill you makes  
you more strong"  
*Dedicated to You*



Report on Business Magazine

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*NOW Magazine*

*November 2 - 8, 2000*

# Philip Glass

## Songs in the key of death

**By Kim Hughes**

NEW YORK CITY – Philip Glass eases open the door of his unremarkable East Village brownstone with the cultivated calm you’d expect from a Buddhist vegetarian who summers not in the swish Hamptons but in sleepy Cape Breton.

With a dishevelled, mad-genius shock of hair and his heavily hooded eyes, he looks the part of a rumpled composer – in his case, one responsible for countless symphonies, film scores, operas and theatre pieces.

This makes him mildly intimidating despite the fact that he’s quite pleasant, and eventually even gets around to offering dainty chocolate truffles and fresh water.

Later, he’ll laugh – hard – when I confess to owning a bootleg of an as-yet-unrecorded opera. Then he asks me if the sound quality is any good, lest there not be a market for a proper studio recording.

As he leads the way downstairs to his genteel, subterranean kitchen – an oasis of calm amid the major reparations going on in his 160-year-old house, situated around the block from punk rock toilet CBGBs – I feel almost giddy.

So this quiet, gentle man is the infamous Philip Glass: father of minimalism and a man so wildly prolific that critics can reasonably hate him for churning out brilliant, ground-breaking pieces of music before lunchtime. And those are the nice critics.

Not that he gives a toss whether people think his repertoire is too expansive or his approach too clinical – he knows that his ensemble pieces like *Music In Twelve Parts* foretold the loops eventually employed by electronic combos and admitted fans, the Orb and Orbital.

Is there another similarly accomplished contemporary composer who would force opera-goers to wear cheesy cardboard 3D glasses in order to absorb the full effects of a multimedia work, as Glass did with soon-to-be-recorded *Monsters Of Grace*? 3D is KISS territory, for chrissakes.

Glass thrives on collaboration both within and outside of the classical realm. Witness his work with Ashley MacIsaac, Aphex Twin, Twyla Tharp, Alan Ginsberg, David Byrne and Robert Wilson, with whom he wrote the seminal four-hour opera *Einstein On The Beach* and the above-mentioned *Monsters Of Grace*.

“To be able to continually develop new ideas is very hard,” he explains. “Working with people you don’t know is one way of doing it. Collaborations force you to do something you hadn’t anticipated.”

Glass refuses to be caged by expectation or tradition. So when the folks at Universal decided they needed a chillingly dramatic new score to accompany the reissue of Tod Browning’s 1931 classic *Dracula* – starring Bela Lugosi in the role that would trail him to the grave – they didn’t call John Williams. They called Glass, who, as fans of his music will tell you, possesses that rarest of qualities: the ability to score raw human emotion. And to grab headlines.

Along with the equally groundbreaking chamber ensemble Kronos Quartet, Glass, who’s also created music for *Kundun*, *Koyaanisqatsi* and *The Truman Show* among other films, has written music for *Dracula* that seems to borrow its tempo from the vampire’s heartbeat.

Kronos’s violins create tension by slowly sawing back and forth in monotonous unity, then swiftly bunching together in a howl to create surprise while a cello screeches out a bruising moan. If ever music could be said to be haunting, this is it. It’s now impossible to imagine the film without it.

Typical of the workaholic Glass, though, the process didn’t

end with the recording. He’s taking Kronos, his score and the film on the road for live shows, including Roy Thomson Hall Tuesday. The players will perform live as the film screens, just like in the old days of silent movies.

And should proof be needed that the 63-year-old composer can cut to the heart of a contemporary audience, Glass confirms with a chuckle that presentations of *Dracula* have been pulling in goths.

“They do turn up,” he laughs softly. “We’ll be in concert and we can look out and see them. Not so much in Europe but in North America, for sure. I can only imagine what our Halloween show will be like.

“The thing about the original film is that it looked unfinished, like there were a lot of loose ends. It was very awkward and it ends so abruptly. When you look at the original, most people don’t seem to know when the film is over. So I knew I had some work to do. For instance, I added a piece of music at the end that gave it a feeling of completion.

“The Tchaikovsky and the Wagner in the original, I’m convinced, were completely random. It could have been anything. I mean, *Swan Lake* for the titles? The film’s music editor, if there was one, just added it. I doubt the director said, ‘I want this music here.’ So I didn’t use the original music as a point of reference at all.

“Having said that, I see myself as an amateur film composer because I’ve done so few. Fortunately, I’ve done some very good films with very good directors, which perhaps gives the impression I’ve done more than I actually have.”

Glass’s wilfully self-deprecating remark is not as dubious as it sounds. After all, he disowned his entire catalogue after he’d been hired to transcribe the music of Ravi Shankar in Paris in the 60s, thereafter unearthing the sinewy joys of Eastern rhythms.

Then again, he claims he never gets up in the middle of the night to scribble down a melody or a musical idea. “There will always be other ideas, other melodies,” he says, picking up and putting down his glasses for the 100th time during our 40-minute chat.

He acknowledges that the *Dracula* project was unique for several reasons, not the least of which is that his involvement did not begin at ground zero, as is the case with brand new films he’s crafted music for. Plus, *Dracula*’s a bit of a classic and people are fussy about who gets to mess around with established things in the pop culture canon.

Still, Glass argues the soundtrack will enjoy an independent life after the hoopla relating to the film’s re-release and current tour dies down.

“Definitely,” Glass says, “and in fact, I plan to add it to my repertoire that I play with my ensemble. This was kind of a risky film for me to do because it’s a film that’s already well known. What do you do with a classic? You have to make it more of a classic.” ♦

# The Munchies Bowl

By Kim Hughes

For sheer scope, hype and hyperbole, nothing touches the mighty Super Bowl. It doesn't matter who is playing or if one is a regular season football fan. The Super Bowl is an event unto itself, a daylong high point on the social calendar focused on cheeky, high-priced American advertising and garish halftime spectacles. Oh yes, and the game.

For Canadians, house parties are the preferred means of fraternizing with the pigskin faithful. But what makes the party special? Rituals. Chili and beer may be Super Bowl staples but there will be much more going on in the rec rooms of the nation tomorrow than just flagrant consumption.

Peter MacKay, deputy leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, admits with a laugh that being a fan of the beleaguered Buffalo Bills and a fan of the Super Bowl might seem like a contradiction in terms.

Still, MacKay says he can set aside his disappointment over his team's perennial bridesmaid status long enough to gorge on a little Super Bowl revelry.

"I've been a huge Super Bowl fan going back to the 70s. When I was a kid, my younger brother Andrew and I always watched the Super Bowl and the Grey Cup games together and we would go on these absolute junk food binges," he says.

"Now I'm in a football pool with some friends from university and some people from work. We get together and watch the games and eat chili and tacos, pizza, wings, that sort of thing."

Ditto Ken Diamond, a 30-year-old portfolio administrator with Mackenzie Financial and a lifelong fan of the Washington Redskins. Diamond and a group of roughly "28 die-hard players," host "Stuperbowl," a Super Bowl-themed interactive event so big it has its own Web site ([www.stuperbowl.com](http://www.stuperbowl.com)).

"Almost as much fun as the games we play is the food we eat," Diamond explains. "This event is potluck, with one interesting twist: You have to bring food that represents your favorite team, so Buffalo fans would bring wings, Green Bay fans would bring cheese and so on. This makes for quite the array of food."

Toronto Argonauts defensive end Marvin Thomas played Super Bowl XXXIV with the Denver Broncos against the Atlanta Falcons. This year, he and other members of the Grey Cup-winning Argos will be at Wayne Gretzky's sports bar for a little carousing. Fans are welcome.

"I'd rather be playing than throwing a party," Thomas admits. "If I did go to a party, chicken tenders with honey mustard sauce and tortillas with mild jalapeno cheese are must-haves. I would drink Hawaiian Punch."

Argo defensive back Orlando Steinauer is a little more proactive. "I have hosted parties at my house and messed up other people's houses by going to theirs. I don't cook a lot. It is mainly chips, dips, sandwiches, pizza, and beer. We usually bring up extra TVs from the basement as well."

"If one of my buddies is on one of the opposing teams, I cheer them on loudly," Thomas adds. "Then I will call them after the game and ask specific questions about plays they made or didn't make. I like to get more in-depth about the actual game. I like to see a lot of hard, nasty hitting."

Should you find yourself in the living room of Steve Jordan, an executive with the True North record label and a fan of "the Killer B's: Bengals, Bills, Broncos," beware of projectiles. "I like to have a bucket of something on hand – rubber bands or tennis balls – to throw at the screen during the inexorable abomination that is guaranteed to be the halftime show," cracks Jordan, a fan of It beats banging a hole through the screen with a boot."

Super Bowl aficionados cite half-time as time best suited to washroom breaks, heated debates and the arrival of the steaming vat of chili. (Don't expect a repeat of last year's infamous Janet Jackson moment: Paul McCartney performs the half-time show this year).

"I have a DVD of NFL trivia and during halftime I'll put that in and the assembled will play the game," admits San Diego Chargers fan Tyler Wolosewich, co-ordinator of archival services at the Hockey Hall of Fame.

Typically though, he puts the emphasis on the food. "Guy food is key," he explains. "You are not going to go to a guy's house and be served quiche. I mean, if there isn't chili, nachos, beer and wings, there's going to be panic."

"You also have to go dressed up," Wolosewich adds, "preferably in a jersey but at a minimum, a hat or a T-shirt. And even if your team isn't playing you can still wear their gear. That way, people know where you stand. If the Broncos make the Super Bowl and I'm wearing my Chargers jersey, people know I'm not cheering for the Broncos."

Jon Box, a 31-year-old sales manager for Universal Music and an Oakland Raiders fan, sums up him Super Bowl ritual with four words: football, friends, food, and funds.

"No Super Bowl party is complete without a little friendly wagering," Box maintains. "With a group of people it's a good idea to set up some sort of a pool. Remember to keep it simple, since for some Super Bowl is the only football they'll watch all year."

Of course, there is a decided downside to the advent of the Super Bowl. "It means the end of football season," Wolosewich sighs. 🍷

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*TV Times Magazine*

*February 5, 2005*



# Cultural Exchange

By Kim Hughes



Elvira Kurt has presence. Even sitting in a deserted subterranean food court with more cleaning staff than customers milling about, the congenial comedian/writer and Second City alumna crackles like a bonfire: eyes blazing, arms waving, and thoughts shooting off in a million directions.

Regardless of the subject – her derisive Hungarian mother, the weather, the regimented language of Starbucks employees – Kurt never fails to find the funny in the everyday. “You go in and ask for a large coffee instead of a Grande,” she intones with a wink, “and they act like you’re speaking a foreign language.”

Kurt’s natural effusiveness and observational savvy are precisely what the brain trust at the Comedy Network hope will propel Popcultured with Elvira Kurt, a new half-hour show premiering April 5.

Slated to be filmed live-to-tape, Popcultured satirizes the day’s entertainment and pop culture detritus in a manner both provocative and pithy. Think Entertainment Tonight by way of the Daily Show but without the politics of the latter or the fawning obsequiousness of the former, and with a decidedly Canadian slant.

“The challenge of our show is to not make the obvious jokes, or to react sarcastically. It’s how do you make something funny without going for the jugular or seeming too negative and bitter? How do you make something both funny and good-natured?” Kurt says.

“I mean, we don’t mind sinking our teeth into a subject and drawing blood but we don’t have to suck anybody dry. Our philosophy is we judge because we love. And it’s OK to bite the hand that feeds. The important thing to remember is that I don’t wish this pop culture stuff would go away. I’m immersed in it.

“I may feel dirty watching The Simple Life, but for me it’s appointment television. Same with The Bachelorette. There is no one more vapid than Jen Schefft and yet I’m there every Monday. So I love it but I also feel free to say what I think about it. And there isn’t a lot of that on TV these days. I hate the slavish devotion of most entertainment shows. Our show will be more pointed.”

Regular viewers of CTV’s entertainment roundup show, eTalk Daily recently got a glimpse into Kurt’s approach during short, sharp segments (aired as a kind of Litmus test) where Kurt cheekily deconstructed the Hollywood events of the moment, standup style.

Of Brad and Jen’s split, for instance she cracked: “Angelina Jolie denies she’s a home-wrecker. She’s the hottest woman on the planet. I don’t even know her and she’s wrecking my home.”

In addition to an opening monologue, Popcultured will feature correspondent-type contributions from a rotating stable of Canadian comics plus a guest interview. There’s also talk of segments filmed outside the studio. But all that is sizzle: the steak, as Kurt describes it, will be the subjects of the day and Popcultured’s irreverent take on each.

“The show on April 5 will be about everything that’s been in the news April 4. It has that kind of shelf life. So we never break the news but we’re talking about stuff that’s come up on all our radar. It’s pulling back, looking underneath and saying what we really think of things.”

Admittedly, trolling the day’s headlines for suitable fodder, extracting and/or creating funny bits about it, then getting the material to sail four nights a week (Popcultured airs Mondays through Thursdays, 10 pm) is a tall order. Yet smart money says Kurt has a better-than-average chance of succeeding.

Consider her resume. Various TV specials have aired on both sides of the border, on Comedy Central (two specials) and the Comedy Network (Elvira Kurt’s Adventures in Comedy). Kurt has performed in marquee comedy clubs continentwide, and she has done the The Vagina Monologues on stage.

In addition, Kurt contributed to the CBS pilot and HBO special for Ellen DeGeneres, has written for This Hour Has 22 Minutes and several Canadian award shows. Playing to those strengths, Popcultured finds Kurt writing as well as hosting. As long as celebrity couples insist on doomed quickie marriages and British royals continue making dubious costume choices, Kurt should be in business.

“But we’re not just going to be satirizing American culture,” she adds. “We have our own shows and media and pop culture and entertainers in Canada and they’re also fair game. Politics is the exception.

“If Paul Martin slips on a banana peel, that would fall into our realm. If he made a policy we didn’t agree with, it probably wouldn’t. There are already enough shows covering that aspect.

“I have a good feeling about this show,” Kurt says. “I think John Stewart’s show (The Daily Show) has revealed that people are interested not just in taking on the news but in taking on the medium itself. I see that show as a kindred spirit. It’s like, ‘Stop the spin. We’re not buying it.’

“People are much more savvy because they’re more connected now. There is no curtain anymore; we know the man from Oz is standing there. So this is not just about the message but how the message is presented.” ♦

*National Post*

*TV Times Magazine*

*Saturday, March 26, 2005*





Toronto Star

Sunday, November 23, 2003

# Devil's snare

By Kim Hughes

Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda By Lt.-Gen. Romeo Dallaire Random House Canada, 562 pages, \$39.95

Somewhere in the middle of Canadian Lt.-Gen. Romeo Dallaire's Shake Hands with the Devil, which chronicles his tour as commander of the United Nations peacekeeping operation in Rwanda during that country's 1993-94 civil war and genocide, a thought hits, a board to the forehead.

Despite the endless news footage of combat with its up-close atrocities, you never cease to be amazed by the sheer barbarism of man operating under the aegis of war. It's a perversely comforting notion and it makes Dallaire's deeply disturbing book one that everyone, and no one, should have to read.

While the slaughter of 800,000 people is comparatively small in the nasty scheme of things – even when that number represents 10 per cent of a country's pre-war population – the sheer brutality of Rwanda is staggering. That it happened under the nose of a UN with Dallaire as its eyewitness at ground zero is downright petrifying.

Just when you think the systemic organizational bumbling Dallaire details in these 500-odd pages will surely spark worldwide outrage, along comes a wrenching missive from the trenches, and fury melts into revulsion and hopelessness.

"Just as I glimpsed the body of a child, it moved," Dallaire writes with heart-stopping frankness in one of many scenes detailing the carnage wrought by the warring Tutsi and Hutu sects vying for control of a landlocked, indigent nation of little consequence to the western world. "I wasn't sure if it was my imagination, but I saw the twitching of the child and wanted to help.

"I leaned down to pick the child up, and suddenly I was holding a little boy that was both tingling and mushy in my hands. In a second I realized that the movement was not the child but the action of maggots. I was frozen."

Dallaire wasn't frozen for long. His masters in New York were provided with an endless stream of reports from their chronically understaffed and overwhelmed peacekeepers in the region, each more urgent and ugly than the last. But as Dallaire maintains, bureaucracy trumped benevolence every time, and he was left holding the bag as thousands died needlessly.

"Member nations do no want a large, reputable, strong and independent United Nations, no matter their hypocritical pronouncements otherwise," he writes. "What they want is a weak, beholden, indebted scapegoat of an organization, which they can blame for their failures or steal victories from."

Dallaire's book, with its myriad examples of missed opportunities and wasted actions, makes it hard to disagree. In case you miss the point, however, the author bluntly asserts in his conclusion that he holds the Johnny-come-lately Americans and Hutu-friendly French in especially low regard.

Compared to them, he declares, "The failings of the UN and Belgium (which had colonial ties with Rwanda) were not in the same league." Furthermore, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan emerges as genuinely compassionate albeit bound by his host organization and its glacial reflexes.

By comparison, the family of Rwandan president/dictator Major General Juvenal Habyarimana – a Hutu who came to power in a coup d'etat in '73 and who died in a suspicious plane crash in '93, further destabilizing the nation, "had close ties to President Mitterand; one of [Mitterand's] sons had serious business interests inside Rwanda."

Laid out chronologically and with straightforward language, Shake Hands with the Devil is equal parts excruciatingly gruesome war story and sworn testimony of crimes against humanity complete with the names of the people who committed them.

When it comes to the international community's sluggish deportment toward Rwanda, Dallaire insists what was lacking most was simple will. With a concurrent and much higher-profile situation unfolding in Yugoslavia, the world was at once distracted and suffering from a kind of collective ennui. The warring Rwandans knew it, and they seized the opportunity to advance their own ethnically motivated agendas with negligible fear of retribution.

"I mark April 12 [93] as the day the world moved from disinterest in Rwanda to the abandonment of Rwandans to their fate," Dallaire writes. "The swift evacuation of foreign nationals [en masse from Rwanda in a sweeping military exercise] was the signal for the genocidaires to move toward the apocalypse. That night I didn't sleep at all for guilt."

Barring rivers of blood and unending grief, guilt is one of the few things in abundance in Rwanda during Dallaire's tenure. Everyone, it seems, was complicit in the genocide, including of course, the media.

"I couldn't help thinking, 'Too bad this slaughter was not in a market in Yugoslavia – maybe somebody outside Rwanda would have cared.' As it happened, the Rwandan genocide was having a hard time knocking the South African elections and American figure skater Tonya Harding's criminal troubles off the front pages."

Shameful, yes and doubtless doomed to be repeated. But that's only part of what makes Shake Hands with the Devil a frustrating and often challenging read.

Dallaire, military man that he is, converses in military terms, all of which boil down to acronyms. An attached glossary helps, and some terms inevitably stick, but many do not. Differentiating between the RPF and RGF and UNOMUR and UNAMIR is key to following the action; so many acronyms are a slog for the lay reader.

Moreover, Dallaire's story is densely populated and wildly international. Belgians, Canadians, and Bangladeshis work alongside Tunisians, Ghanaians, and Pakistanis. Staying abreast of who's who is tough, especially since these characters tend to be assigned ranks, not traits.

And then there are the descriptive passages of mass murder, rape and mutilation, and the scorched earth scenes greeting Dallaire, and us, in every corner of the country.

Dead children, also abundant in this story, are an unbearably difficult component and Dallaire must be commended for having the temerity to revisit such nightmares in order to adequately frame his rage and disgust.

Yet elsewhere, we are left wanting. Though Dallaire intimates his own mental breakdown, which ultimately saw him leaving Rwanda before completing the final stage of the mission, he offers no hindsight analysis of his condition. Nor does he touch on the "broken" and "suicidal" aspects of his post-war personality advertised on the book's dust jacket. How exactly did he manage to plow forward and eventually author this book?

In a rare moment of self-reflection, Dallaire offers simply: "My own mea culpa is this: as the person charged with the military leadership of UNAMIR, I was unable to persuade the international community that this tiny, poor, overpopulated country and its people were worth saving from the horror of genocide – even when the measures needed for success were relatively small."

That, sadly, is undeniably true. But with his book, Dallaire succeeds in other ways. He correctly shames an apathetic global community and a savage segment of the Rwandan elite. He canonizes those who worked tirelessly alongside him in the killing fields. He reminds us in the First World that most of our vexations are fluff compared to the dispossessed.

Most of all, Dallaire compellingly demonstrates that life, whether in the Balkans or Africa, is ultimately more precious than any natural resource or strategic military position. Whether the world's reigning powers will ever be persuaded to accept such a basic point is to risk another exercise in powerlessness. ♦

# The Playlist

Shaping up is a mission made easier (or at least slightly less loathsome) with a great set of tunes.

— Kim Hughes

## DAWN CHORUS

### Boards of Canada

Its twinkly, teetering lilt makes it a great warm-up track, while the ecstatic sexual moans serve as a reminder of why you're at the gym.

## A-PUNK

### Vampire Weekend

Punchy and ridiculously joyful, this strummy, ska-scented corker provides the perfect boost on the treadmill.

## TICK TICK BOOM

### The Hives

Guitar-shredding, spittle-soaked garage rock with buckets of oomph to keep you grunting through your cardio.

## CLOSER

### Nine Inch Nails

Tap into your inner misanthrope and propel through another grinding rep of squats.

## LUST FOR LIFE

### Iggy Pop

At 61, Iggy and his iron six-pack provide ample inspiration for more sit-ups.

## NINE IN THE AFTERNOON

### Panic at the Disco

Dizzy, breathless and all kinds of smug - just like you at the end of your workout.



**★ OEAR**

## Gym dandy

Now that the New Year's resolutions have given up and the gym has calmed down, you can concentrate on working out again. Get off on the right foot by taking time this month to simplify your locker-room regimen. Remember your own resolution: There's no need to dress down just because you're sweating. —Doug Wallace

**Knicker Sans Muscle Bulk, Cooling Blend**  
A certified organic muslin-cotton blend from an age-old herbal formula of camphor, rose and eucalyptus is infused with all of the muscle-free family's many fresh and fresh smells, after a nice hot shower. \$17 (U.S.) & budgobath.com

**Puma Progressive Motion tee and shorts**  
The "motion and motion" is in the fabric, breathable and stretchy. The line goes just below the waist. \$17 (U.S.) & puma.com

**Nike Free 5.0 V4**  
The waffle outside and cushioned sole make this flexible shoe was designed to make you feel like you're working out barefoot. Don't worry, it's not totally bare. \$120 (U.S.) & nike.com

**Komen Body Fitness Battiscare**  
detoxifying body and face cream. An all-over body cream that works on the skin, from the neck to the face. "Komen" is not just Battiscare's brand name, it's the embodiment of well-being. \$39 (U.S.) & komen.com

**MALE CARE**  
Gillette Clinical Strength Ultra Comfort anti-irritant. A sensitive skin protector for every man. Works even better if you put it on at night, when the body's sweat rate slows. Lasts all of the next day. \$9 (U.S.) & gillette.com

**Connuet & Co. Hair**  
Leave the oil of hair at home. Free drops of the Connuet hair oil will hydrate, condition and moisturize. \$4.99 (U.S.) & connuet.com

**Adidas After Sport Body Wash & Shampoo**  
This two-in-one won't dry you out like a Turkish apricot, so you can use it as often as you like. 16.9 ounces, main residence. \$12 (U.S.) & adidas.com

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- 4. NIKE COMPLETE**  
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An uncompromising, light shoe built to meet your needs. (That's right, Great for speed training and everything.) \$129 (U.S.) & nike.com
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Nike's most famous shoe is 25 years old, and it's still going strong. The Prestige 2 is the new, the answer to your Nike, and the shoe will look like a new, classic and colorful. \$129 (U.S.) & nike.com

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# A matter of fate

By Kim Hughes

**A Venetian Affair**  
by **Andrea di Robilant**  
Knopf, 291 pages, \$36

Despite the vivid real-life characters precisely drawn by first-time author Andrea di Robilant in his sumptuous book *A Venetian Affair* – from central players Andrea and Giustiniana to 18th century composers, authors, painters, and royalty – nothing looms larger or lingers more forcefully than the presence of fate.

Di Robilant and his father may have been the ones poring over recovered love letters exchanged over the years by Andrea and Giustiniana, piecing together their story from slender, dog-eared fragments first discovered in Italy and later, improbably, in America. Di Robilant may have charted the chronology, painstakingly cracking the lovers’ secret code and typing the words onto the page. But fate was directing the action.

Indeed, the only thing more unlikely than the engrossing tale of Andrea Memmo and Giustiniana Wynne – he a noble politician-in-waiting from one of Venice’s foremost families, she an Italian-English mongrel of “murky heritage” – is how di Robilant came to tell this story.

As the author, a journalist by trade, tantalizingly offers at the book’s start, “Some years ago my father came home with a carton of old letters that time and humidity had compacted into wads of barely legible paper. He announced that he had found them in the attic of the old family palazzo on the Grand Canal, where he had lived as a boy in the twenties.”

If such a discovery seems just a little too convenient – uncommonly literate, furtively written love letters scripted by chums of Casanova, the real guy, and set against the Seven Years’ War? – what follows is positively surreal. And that’s before Andrea and Giustiniana’s wind swept story unfolds.

The trail of the letters leads di Robilant through Italy, a library’s worth of books and, eventually, to Washington, D.C. where the philanthropic American diplomat and Casanova scholar James Rives Childs bequeathed a cache of Giustiniana’s letters to his alma mater, Randolph Macon College. Never far from the action, fate ensured that the author’s mother had grown up in Lynchburg and attended Randolph Macon Women’s College.

“So for me,” di Robilant writes, “the quest that had begun several years earlier with the letters my father had found in the attic of his childhood home in Venice ended, rather eerily, a few miles up the road from my mother’s birthplace in America.”

Even more astounding is the true-life story Di Robilant is chasing: the engulfing, enduring affair of Andrea and Giustiniana, set amid the canals and casinos of Venice in the mid-1700s. Theirs was a romance so powerful that it literally shaped their lives to the end. Reading the sometimes tender, sometimes despondent correspondences between them – secretly spirited to and fro by a cabal of sympathetic aids – it’s possible to believe their love was carved out of something larger than mere lust. It was, in romance novel parlance, heaven-sent though often as painful as it was joyous.

“All this love I have for you, it startles me, it fills me completely,” Giustiniana writes to Andrea with typical flourish as she’s dragged off to Paris by her irascible mother. “I love you more and more, and more and more I see the miserable difficulties ahead... Oh God! Memmo, my Memmo, still forever mine, oh God, pity me. And you, my heart, how will you remember me... My dearest Memmo, you are such a rare being. Wait for me, wherever you want.”

That Andrea and Giustiniana’s love could never be fulfilled in the traditional sense was a given from the start. Both understood that a formal union, even if they could convince their local clergy and various reigning bureaucrats to allow it, would bring despair, shame and financial ruin, a point keenly underscored by their families.

But as the saying goes, there’s no harm in trying. And while other lives veered off course as a result of Andrea and Giustiniana’s frequent deceptions and unshakable devotion – notably prospective spouses from their respective classes – there is the sense that the pair’s dewy-eyed rapture would have dulled had they married, anyway. Surely, the force of their forbidden love would ebb away as the mundane reality of mounting laundry and Sunday dinners with the in-laws crept in.

Moreover, a storybook ending would have robbed the world of what may rank as one of the fondest loved-and-lost stories ever told though it’s one decidedly saucier than anything Harlequin might publish.

Andrea and Giustiniana weren’t the only ones carrying on in a racy manner, though. As di Robilant tells it, there was enough sex, intrigue, deceit, and general naughtiness to keep the courts of Venice and Paris twittering for years. Andrea and Giustiniana too, managed to compartmentalize their passion long enough to take other lovers, albeit with each other’s knowledge and consent.

One wonders what Andrea and Giustiniana would make of *A Venetian Affair*; whether they would feel flattered by di Robilant’s lively, thorough, and non-judgmental recreation of their lives, even though their privacy is necessarily compromised. Andrea, for instance, probably could rest easier without the world knowing he often included specimens of his semen in his letters to Giustiniana as a gesture of affection.

That aside, the reader is offered a treasure-trove: mad love, deeply considered insight into an era larded with Byzantine rules and mores, dazzling scenery, rich historical fact, and a resplendent society crazy about masks, gambling, fine art, and all-night balls.

What’s more, something ensured that Andrea and Giustiniana’s story was written by the unusually soulful and gifted di Robilant and not by Casanova, Ambassador Childs, or di Robilant’s father even though all three (and others besides) had access to it at different times prior to the author. None could have constructed a better tale with greater care. You might say it was meant to be. ♦

Toronto Star

Sunday, February 22, 2004

# Douglas Coupland

## Canlit culture vulture gorges on L.A. excess

By Kim Hughes



*NOW Magazine*

*January 13-19, 2000*

MONTREAL – He may be the architect of Generation X, patron saint of computer geeks and father to a host of oddly resonant societal dropouts. But right now, mega-cool Left Coast author Douglas Coupland is coming slightly unglued.

Picture this scene. A frigid (what else is new?) January Tuesday at a Montreal theatre. Coupland – tentative even in controlled situations – is stepping before a paying audience to read from his new work, *Miss Wyoming*.

Fans range from punks to sprout-eaters to the uptight chick in the full-length fur who, when informed of the club’s policy that all coats must be checked, shrieks, “Are you going to pay me \$10,000 if this coat is stolen?” Heads up, thieves and animal activists.

Though he presides over a flock that’s hip to the meaning of Bradyism and boomer envy, it’s lucky Coupland prints his photo on the dust jackets of his novels. Otherwise, the slouching, nondescript fidget up there onstage might be mistaken for some publishing-house dweeb and not one of Canada’s most widely read and quoted novelists.

OK, so Truman Capote and Dorothy Parker notwithstanding, authors are bookish by definition. And Coupland is funny as hell, not to mention polite in the Canadian way. But still.

How to reconcile this jittery dad-like dude with the iconoclastic former magazine journalist who pursued sculpture vocationally before deciding, in a teary, life-affirming moment on a Toronto street corner, to follow his heart and – yikes – wade into the murky waters of fiction. And not just stories, but vivid, non-linear, contemporary snapshots owing more to Pollack than Hemingway.

“I saw an interview with John Travolta once,” Coupland recalls earlier in the day, when it’s pointed out that he’s become the kind of brand name one of his wiseacre creations might passingly refer to over cheeseburgers and a mangy copy of *Wired*.

“The interviewer said, ‘Twenty years ago, you were a big hit in *Saturday Night Fever*, and 20 years later you’re a big hit in *Pulp Fiction*. How does it feel to be a pop icon again?’

“And Travolta said, ‘The big difference is, *Saturday Night Fever* was pop culture, and *Pulp Fiction* was about pop culture.’ The reverse thing happened with me. Somewhere along the line, I went to the other side of the mirror.”

### Basic instincts

Perhaps strangely, then, all his characters (save maybe the namesake of *Girlfriend In A Coma*) are unapologetically normal. They may be suffering from terminal ennui, but they’re average. They’re us. They lob non sequiturs at friends. They drive around, have so-so sex and strictly-for-the-money jobs. And like us, they’re consciously searching for the reason they’re alive, because something inside tells them they should.

That savagely human need for answers gave Coupland’s Generation X weight despite its precocious preoccupation with identifying a subgroup and giving it its own language. It redeemed the bipolar protagonist in the maligned but arresting *Life After God*. Today, it lends crucial believability to the otherwise fantastical *Miss Wyoming*.

All of this makes Coupland, ironically, something of an old-fashioned moral watchdog, an arbiter of 20th-century righteousness for misfits staring out past the invisible fencing of their McJobs. And we were expecting some flamboyant gadfly?

Well, actually, yes. Yet the contrast is why Coupland – 38, rich and translated into 22 languages – continues to captivate us seven books on despite being critically dissected and assigned as much mainstream ink as grunge, a phenomenon that shadowed his ascendancy. It’s the one catchphrase the king of contemporary catchphrases regrets he didn’t coin.

“After years of hearing, ‘Gee, Doug, there’s so much pop culture in your work – aren’t you afraid it’s going to prevent the books from enduring?’ I’ve finally realized that I’m coming from the academic culture of the visual world.

“Since World War II, high and low culture have been melted together,” he continues over coffee and fruit salad. “People think pop culture and literature are separate spheres that should never join together. Well, why?”

“The authors I like – Evelyn Waugh, John O’Hara, Noel Coward – all write about specific eras. Sometimes I don’t get the reference, but the spirit is there. And you feel like you’re getting the scoop on how things were at that time.”

Judging by the Montreal reading and other public exchanges with Coupland, his fan base remains youth-driven even though Gen X-ers are now driving Saabs.

Since Coupland writes from the precise point he’s at, his characters are naturally aging along with him, as is the case in *Miss Wyoming*. This may prove a bigger long-term problem than hopelessly of-the-moment language. On the upside, CanLit courses look brighter already.

“I don’t think you can plan to do a certain kind of book,” Coupland argues. “Books just happen. One of the weird misconceptions about me and other writers is that a high concept descends and that’s the book and you go out and write it. If that were the case, everybody would be writing best-sellers.

“The truth of the matter is, you live your life and these books just emerge, and the more that happens in your life, the more desperately the books want to be written.

“*Miss Wyoming* and the one I’m working on now didn’t so much emerge from me as explode, like the alien from the thorax.”

Since Coupland is widely regarded as a keen observer, let’s turn the tables and observe the observer.

He is very humble. He curates art shows. He genuinely likes his fans. And his fans, evidently, like each other. “One guy met his future wife at one of my readings. Another guy carved out a hole in a copy of *Microserfs* and put his engagement ring in it.”

He spends loads of time in Los Angeles. Video/film auteur Spike Jonze (Being John Malkovich) is a close personal friend. None of his books feels unfinished to him. He used to record fiction-bound thoughts in hundreds of spiral notebooks, but he doesn’t any more.

He proudly, consistently salts his work with Canadian references. Of all his books, *Life After God*, “a book I got so much shit for,” is his most real. He’d put that one in a time capsule.

And, yes, he admits the repetition of the same word over successive pages in *Microserfs* was indeed “a shameless homage to Warhol.”

So why hasn’t Coupland’s catalogue been seized by Hollywood? Maybe it’s because when Hollywood comes calling, Coupland doesn’t call back.

### Spike’s gag

“Spike Jonze, who’s a real prankster, was getting married last summer, so I was in Napa Valley. At one point I picked up my messages and had one from a guy claiming to be from John Malkovich’s office inquiring about buying the rights to *Shampoo Planet*. I’m, like, ‘That Spike, getting married in an hour and still pulling hijinks – ha ha.’ So I completely ignored it.

“I got another message, again allegedly from John Malkovich’s office, and I thought, ‘Spike, continuing the joke from his honeymoon in Tahiti.’ Finally, my agent says to me, ‘What the fuck are you doing? Call the guy back!’

“Turns out the calls were real. Malkovich came across the book completely independently of his relationship with Spike. It was one of those weird moments when reality and artifice collapse.

“But I try never to get my hopes up or turn into Ed Grimley. ‘Ooh, geez, they’re going to make my book into a movieee!’ Best to keep a level head.” ♦



# Cheat Sheet - CD

Muswell Hillbillies - The Kinks (Koch 2008)

Swaggering, sly and near-genius, 1971's Muswell Hillbillies (helpfully reissued on vinyl this month) might finally get its due - or at least enjoy a boost from analog-friendly new fans, Kinks completists and kids looking to connect the dots between 20th Century Man and Radiohead's Paranoid Android. Band baron Ray Davies - pint in hand and wearing a smirk you can practically hear - sharply surveys his North London 'hood, upending a cache of jangly pop, squawking blues, teary laments and juke-joint Americana. If pubs could talk, these are the stories they'd tell.

– Kim Hughes



Report on Business Magazine

October, 2008



Salon Magazine

April 2005

# Fulfilling Dreams

By Kim Hughes

It's tempting to call Miguel McCristall's mid-career transformation from unhappy but successful registered nurse to thriving owner/operator of Oshawa's opulent Salon Miguel a Cinderella story. Except in McCristall's case, the magic didn't come from a fairy godmother. It came from the 34-year-old's unshakeable faith in himself.

"I'd wanted to be a hairdresser since I was 17," McCristall offers over coffee while his omnipresent toy American Eskimo dog, Sasha, looks on. "But my family didn't want me to do that. So I became a nurse. And then one day in 1997, after I'd been practicing for about five years, I went to work and said, 'That's it,' and I quit.

"People thought I was nuts. The nursing supervisor at work asked me if I wanted some time to think it over but I'd made up my mind. I was going into hairdressing."

Unable to collect pogeys because he had quit, the quietly determined McCristall sold his car to finance hairdressing school. By April 1999, he'd finished his apprenticeship. A mere month later, having borrowed \$10,000 to launch his own operation, the first Salon Miguel was born.

"I had 1,700 square feet with one sink and one chair," he laughs, adding that he also had a vision of bigger things. By the time he was ready to take the next step, Salon Miguel had 13 chairs and a mantel full of awards for business excellence. Multiple TV appearances and competitive training with O'Hair Salon's Sabino Ditacchio followed in short order.

McCristall's professional revolution wasn't without its heartaches, though. "My dad stopped talking to me for six months because he was so embarrassed that I was a hairdresser. I worked so hard to prove that I could be a success and eventually my family came around. Now, my dad says, 'Do you know who my son is?'"

Today, Miguel McCristall is Durham Region's destination stylist. His salon's destination is pretty impressive, too. In August 2004, McCristall purchased a 4,000-square-foot century home in Oshawa, decorating its upper floors in period fashion for himself and his family, and reconfiguring the downstairs sitting room into the latest and current incarnation of Salon Miguel.

Built in 1916, the sprawling Victorian-style home was once owed by area businessman Sam McLaughlin of the McLaughlin family, founders of the McLaughlin Carriage Company and McLaughlin Motor Car Company, forerunner of General Motors of Canada. It features Persian carpets, Schonbek chandeliers (an ode to McCristall's idol Liberace; Elvis is another), overstuffed sofas, mammoth faux-flower arrangements, and various other unique pieces acquired at auction.

Family photos, fine art knockoffs, and vintage newspaper articles cover the walls, three cats prowl the lower level near a wine cellar, and clients seated beneath towering gilt rose topiaries are treated to an experience halfway between Upstairs Downstairs (yes, there's a real servants' quarters) and Shampoo.

Indeed, the formality of the house reflects McCristall's client philosophy that hair appointments should carry a sense of occasion. Ergo, no same-day bookings and no walk-ins without a referral.

But McCristall's appointments are worth waiting for, and come complete with offerings of food, fine coffees, wine, "neutral music," and the spry antics of Sasha. Plans are afoot to add a third floor to the existing structure (for the ballroom, natch) and a circular driveway out front.

Despite the house's sumptuousness, though, it's still located in suburban Oshawa, population 150,000, an hour east of Toronto by train and hardly an haute hotbed.

"There isn't a lot out here," McCristall admits. "But there is money and there are people who were going to nice salons in Toronto. I see myself as the sort of catch-basin between here and Toronto. I catch anyone who lives here but likes Toronto-style salons.

"And let's face it: my clients paid for this house and that's why I've made it so open to them and why I buy them the best," McCristall says, adding that he doesn't so much take work home with him as live with it 24/7. "This is my way of saying thanks to them. And they appreciate it." ♦





Chill Magazine

March/April 2005

# Keeper of the Cup

By Kim Hughes

His business card reads Vice-President, Hockey Operations and Curator, Hockey Hall of Fame. Simply put, Phil Pritchard is the keeper of the Stanley Cup. When the most recognizable trophy in professional sports hits the road, Pritchard is at its side, safeguarding against harm, patiently reciting lore and statistics, and thrilling kids from Finland to Flin Flon who dream of one day playing for the NHL and waltzing the thing down Main Street after the big win. We wondered what the heck the keeper of the Cup is doing now that the hockey season is officially over. Maybe the job has never been more important.

**You have a day job at the Hockey Hall of Fame and you teach at Seneca College. But what does the keeper of the Stanley Cup doing during a lockout?**

There is more to hockey than just the NHL and the Stanley Cup is an icon of hockey. In a year such as this, we get the opportunity to travel to other leagues, other associations, tournaments and the like all across North America. We're still traveling a lot.

**Of all the Stanley Cup wins in history, which do you think was the most deserved?**

Whoa... there's 111 years of Stanley Cups to consider there. I guess a great one was when the Leafs won the Cup in 1967. It was Canada's Centennial Year and it was Toronto against Montreal. In 1993, which was the Centennial of the Cup itself, the Montreal Canadiens won and that was fitting because they had won the first Cup. Tradition has a funny way of working itself out in hockey.

**If push comes to shove, who is your favourite NHL team?**

Growing up it was the Canadiens. I remember the first game I heard on the radio: Montreal versus Boston in the 1968/69 season and Montreal won. I was about seven years old and I was listening to the game with my dad. I became a Montreal fan because of that... and I'm from Burlington.

**The Cup has traveled literally around the world. Is there a stamp in your passport you're most proud of?**

Probably Russia. We took it there for the first time in 97 when the Detroit Red Wings won it. There were five Russians on that team and they had the chance to take it to their homeland. They had come over to play our so-called game, mastered it, and then they got to share the Cup with their family and friends just like Canadians and Americans have. And the people we met were so knowledgeable about the NHL. It really gave a sense of just how popular this Canadian game is around the world. It was an amazing moment.

**Is the Cup a good traveling companion?**

It's a great traveling companion. It gets you on a flight if you're late. But things have changed since 9/11. We used to be able to bring it on board which was really fun for the passengers and crew. Now with the added security, it has to go underneath in a special compartment.

**For people seeing the Cup for the first time, what is the most frequently asked question?**

Is it real? People just can't believe the Stanley Cup has shown up in their small town. It just blows people away.

**When guys run into you at the airport bar and realize what you do, are they ecstatic?**

There was a commercial for MasterCard a few years ago about a day in the life of the Stanley Cup that I was featured in. It was one of those 'Priceless' ones. And I'll tell you the power of the media is amazing. I still get recognized from that whether I'm dressed normally or in my Hall of Fame jacket. So to answer your question, it's a bit weird.

**Your thoughts on the lockout?**

I'm a fan just like everyone else. And I think everyone out there would just love to see the game played, whenever that may be. Let's just get it sorted out and get everyone on the ice. When the NHL is playing, hockey at every level is better. 🏒



# Back in Session

By Kim Hughes

Michael Riley is positively vibrating. Tucked inside his trailer outside Old City Hall in downtown Toronto – the setting and, on this day, the real-life set of the CBC courtroom drama, This Is Wonderland – Riley is a gentler, more ebullient reflection of his character Elliot Sacks.

It makes sense. Riley insists an actor is never more engaged than when he's waist-deep in a role. And the role of the slightly feckless, motor-mouth lawyer suffering from attention deficit disorder is encompassing alright, even for an actor with a dossier of film, TV and theatre parts ranging from hostage in 100 Days in the Jungle to drug-addled dad in Homeless to Harvard.

Like castmates Cara Pifko, Michael Healey and Siu Ta, whose lawyer characters on the show guide an endless cabal of disenfranchised souls through Canada's lower criminal court system, Riley is equal parts actor and interpreter.

The plots in Wonderland shadow real-life events in the courts, so Riley and crew must capture the motivations and frustrations of the lawyers working the front lines, defending society's most marginalized people.

Clearly, research time logged by the actors in Old City Hall paid off. If you can't exactly see the sweat on Sacks' brow as he vigorously defends an unhinged man who snatches purses as a way to meet women – as Sacks does in the debut episode of This Is Wonderland's second season, this week – you can absolutely sense it in his reflexive tics and twitches.

"This is an anomalous show and unlike anything else I've seen on television," Riley offers over coffee just before Christmas. The series shoots from September to mid-February, which explains the abundance of snowy exterior scenes.

"The show exists on this knife-edge between comedy and poignant human drama. Watching an episode reminds me exactly of walking through Old City Hall. Before the show, it was just a building I passed on the way to the Eaton Centre. Now I say to people, 'If you're coming to Toronto to visit and you've seen all the other tourist landmarks, go to the courthouse.' It's the best human theatre you will ever see, and it's open to the public."

The voyeuristic appeal of the cases processed at Old City Hall was an obvious (and accessible) dramatic resource to executive producer Bernard Zukerman, who correctly describes This Is Wonderland as "the anti-murder show."

"People who know the court system and watch our show always marvel at how close we get to reality. It's the general audience, people who don't know the system, that say, 'They must be exaggerating,'" Zukerman says over lunch with writers and co-creators George F. Walker and Dani Romain.

The trio is gathered in Toronto's west end where the interior of Old City Hall has been precisely recreated on a sound stage since shooting on-site at a functioning courthouse is a rare proposition.

Part of what make Wonderland unique – and the thing that captured the imaginations of its writers, who themselves spent untold hours observing real court sessions – is that the villains are so difficult to spot.

Although drug users, prostitutes and thieves find themselves facing judges (played sardonically by Michael Murphy and compassionately by Eric Peterson), so, too do everyday next-door neighbours who are engaged in battle.

Add to the mix characters whose criminal impulses are caused by something less transparent – those who invariably land in Mental Health Court – and it's hard to know whether the lawyers defending them are psychological daredevils or the most altruistic bunch on the planet. Either way, the pathos quotient is high.

While Walker admits an abiding fascination with Mental Health Court in general and its constituents in particular, he concedes crafting those characters requires enormous care and sensitivity.

So it was a thrill for Walker and Romain when This Is Wonderland received the 2004 Media Award from the Schizophrenia Society of Canada for providing "a realistic view of mental illness."

"That for me was huge," Walker confirms. "It validated everything."

While Season 2 again finds the main characters ricocheting between moments of realism, absurdity, comedy and drama, writers Romain and Walker have pitched some neat curveballs.

Notable defendants from season one return to face the courts again. Lawyers Alice de Raye (Pifko), Sacks, James Ryder (Healey) and new-to-the-bar Nancy Dao (Ta) launch their own firm. Character actor Jayne Eastwood debuts as Elliot's sassy mom Ronnie, the office's new, multi-lingual receptionist.

Crucially, the new cases coming before the judges at Old City Hall are ripe with the palpable emotion (and/or weirdness) that earned season one 15 Gemini nominations and a tenacious following.

"The thing that really seemed to come through this season is that the characters are all much more put-upon," Walker says. "Their clients are coming at them in all sorts of new ways with new problems. So there's this growing intensity."

"This show is like lightning in a bottle. I've never worked on anything so collaborative," Riley says. "Usually you're feeling, 'Oh God the writer is on set today. He's going to be so precious.' With this show, it's like opening presents every day."





Salon Magazine

March, 2005

# Nail Blazer

By Kim Hughes

Describing Christine Turner as a nail technician is a little like calling Donald Trump a businessman; it's accurate but only just. And the term simply doesn't capture the jaw-dropping range of accomplishments and undertakings Turner has managed in only six-odd years in the industry.

A list might be helpful at this juncture. Until January of this year, when she decided to focus on family (she's expecting her first child in April), Turner simultaneously managed three businesses in the unlikely hotbed of New Westminster, B.C. She was owner/operator of Body & Sol Tanning, Nails and Day Spa; founder/operator of the Polished Nail Academy tech college; and founder/operator of Diva Nail & Beauty Supply, a wholesale shop.

She brought innovation (and truckloads of word-of-mouth among bridesmaids and birthday girls) to her business by taking something as simple as a pedicure and re-imagining it as the Margarita Pedicure, where clients received services while reclining on the salon's outdoor patio, frosty beverage in hand.

What's more, Body & Sol's annual breast cancer benefit drive has racked up, by Turner's estimation, more than \$5,000 over five years for the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation.

When not training with her mentor, U.S. author, educator, and master nail technician Vicki Peters, Turner pens pieces for trade publications like Scratch in the UK and NAILS in the U.S. She has been named "B.C. Ambassador" for the quarterly Canadian nail trade publication Exceptionail, "which allows me to report on the industry in B.C."

Then there are the teaching and consulting gigs, and the educational speeches. Oh yes, and the myriad international competitions and ensuing accolades, most recently and notably, a grad slam last May where Turner (pardon the pun) nailed NAILS Magazine International Artists & Visionaries Awards for Nail Tech of the Year and Salon of the Year for 2004/05 at the Las Vegas Hair & Nail Convention, the first-ever Canadian to score either let alone both.

Turner's Web site – just about the only space vast enough to catalog all her awards and achievements – cites the Vegas win as "her best accomplishment and most memorable career moment to date." Turner adds that congratulatory calls came from Japan, Bermuda and throughout the United States. But it could be that her legacy is yet to be written.

She insists better education for nail techs, both beginners and pros seeking to update their skills, is essential to the well-being of the industry and she's determined to make it happen. Turner says her now-defunct Polished Nail Academy, launched to counter the educational void Turner perceived, ran aground because schools with lower standards undercut her on costs. Yet she remains committed to raising the bar for the nail industry in Canada.

"In Canada, we just don't have as many resources," she says, adding that she hopes to re-open her school "on a smaller scale in the future." Her shop, Body & Sol, meanwhile, has been sold though Turner remains a consultant.

"Canada doesn't offer a lot of trade shows, education classes, competitions or industry publications in comparison to the U.S. But nothing is stopping Canadian techs from taking advantage of all these opportunities from our neighbours.

"My philosophy is I can stand back and whine about the state of our industry or I can offer what I have to improve it. I choose the latter. I hope to inspire techs to take initiative and make the effort to improve their skills and increase their knowledge."

While Turner could fill a book with advice on how to excel as a nail tech, salon owner or both, she boils success in the business down to three key elements: skill, knowledge, and professionalism.

"Techs need to learn the most in-demand salon services and understand the need to continually upgrade their skill level through education and practice," Turner says. "They also need to be knowledgeable about all avenues associated with their profession.

"Finally, techs need to be professional in their salon conduct, have good salon ethics, and a professional personal appearance. This also includes being responsible for their own success by learning retailing, marketing, client retention skills, etc. The key is being well rounded in all three areas," Turner says.

"Great practical skill will come with knowledge, the desire to improve and practice." ♦

# Island Soujourn

By Kim Hughes

**The Greek for Love: A Memoir of Corfu**  
By James Chatto  
Random House Canada, 320 pages, \$34.95

James Chatto may be best known as the country’s leading food writer but with the publication of his memoir, *The Greek for Love*, he adds another accomplishment to his CV: master storyteller.

Maybe that’s not exactly breaking news to foodies who for years have been drooling over his dispatches in *Toronto Life* and *Food & Drink* Magazines. But greatness describing four-star boites and their mathematically complex dishes is no guarantee of sure footing on completely other terrain, especially terrain as fraught with potential potholes as a memoir.

Yet Chatto navigates the subject of his own life--a specific portion of it, anyway--with wit, grace, and enough frankness to soften the heart of any skeptic who might suggest there are tougher assignments than recalling days spent lazing amid the olive trees in dazzling, sun-drenched Corfu. The proof is in the prose.

“The desire to understand what was happening became obsessive,” Chatto writes during one of the book’s most affecting chapters. “I was filled with an unexpressed but roiling, unquenchable anger. One night I awoke and lay in the darkness clenched with fury at every novelist who ever manipulated the emotions of the reader, every peddler of fiction who ever invented scenes of sorrow and conjured up artificial misery, as if there weren’t enough real despair in the world without generating more. I vowed that I would never write fiction again.”

Chatto’s story, despite its many asides, is about life and truth is always more absorbing the fiction. So what begins as a simple narrative develops into a full-blown production with all the drama, comedy, pathos, bathos, heartache, and laughter one expects from a life lived with gusto.

*The Greek for Love* tells the story of Chatto and wife Wendy’s loving (and sometimes not-so-loving) restoration of a house in the tiny village or Loutses, Corfu. Though initially unimpressed with the locale – which they first visit as girlfriend-boyfriend on summer holiday – the pair are soon seduced and they decide, with some abandon and a ton of hope, to acquire a property, take leave of their lives in England and Canada, and make Loutses their home.

Easier said than done, of course. The house is a mess, the Chattos are living hand-to-mouth, the locals work according to their own incomprehensible schedule, water is scarce, it’s hot as hell and, oh yes, Wendy is about to give birth to the couple’s first child. At least the indigenous food is good.

“The pleasures of mixing cement are not always apparent to the uninitiated, but pleasures they are,” Chatto muses at one point. “Beyond the obvious satisfaction of physical exercise lies the childish delight in playing with mud and water, bucket and spade, and in stirring things together. Mixing a good batch of mortar is part building a sandcastle and part making a cake, the whole activity dignified by manly practicality.”

If the beginning of the book is a lightly comedic, straight forward chronicle of the perils of restoring a derelict villa in a town without a Home Depot, the balance details what happens when Fate cruelly stomps in with ideas of its own.

To give away that aspect of the plot would be a spoiler but suffice to say that the Chattos come to realize just how important community is. Fixing up a house and bending an elbow at the neighbourhood taverna is one thing. Traversing a cultural gulf and extracting strength from new relationships is quite another. Chatto eloquently leads us through his passage.

“At six o’clock that evening, the first visitors came to the door. They bore gifts of oil or wine or fruit or eggs wrapped in paper napkins. They hugged and patted us and made much of Joe. They sat for a moment but would take no refreshment, not wanting to put us to the trouble. When the subject inevitably turned to Nibby, they lifted their hands. ‘Ti na kame. What can one do.’

“It wasn’t a question; it was a philosophical statement. Life brought such things. There was no question of justice or injustice. It seemed the only possible response to what had happened. We were as grateful for such stoic practicality as we were for the shining kindness in their eyes.”

Part memoir, part love story, part wildly scenic travel piece, and how-to guide, *The Greek for Love* is every bit as sumptuous as its setting. And in Chatto we have a tour guide of inimitable perception and style. Like the food he so warmly describes throughout the book, we cannot help but devour his carefully constructed offering. ♦

*The Toronto Star*

*Sunday, March 20, 2005*





# Ice Cold Chillin'

By Kim Hughes



*Chill Magazine*

*December 2004 to*

*January, 2005*

The summer season might get better press but there's no denying that winter, despite its cold and snow, carries its own distinctive charm, and not just because it presents a handy excuse for lazing by the fireplace racking up guilt-free hours with the Xbox.

As any skier or snowboarder will attest, though, wrangling winter's harshness is the best way to combat cold fatigue, especially at the February mark when it feels as though the inhospitable tundra outside your living room window is going to be there forever.

With full props to said skiers and snowboarders – not to mention tobogganers, skaters, and snowman makers – Chill explored other snowbound activities with a mind to keeping costs in check and assuming not everyone boasts rugged athleticism. Three kept calling to us: dog sledding, ice fishing, and snowmobiling.

Really, that recreational triumvirate is quintessentially Canadian, dead fun, and offbeat enough to draw an audience to your tales at a cocktail party. We asked the experts to provide trusty, basic info that should give novices a clear picture of what's involved to get going. Who knows: it could be the start of a whole new hobby that will have you hungering for winter next year.

**SNOWMOBILING:** The most mainstream of the three sports featured and potentially the priciest, especially if you want to own your own machine (new sleds range from \$6,000 to \$14,000 and that's before buying gear and trail permits). Still, for those with a need for speed, nothing beats it.

**Raves:** Toronto's Craig Nicholson, who handles communications for the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs and rides between 12,000 and 15,000 kilometers of trails each winter, cites solitude, being with friends and family, scenery, even releasing tensions. "It's also discovering and exploring new places that can't be reached in other seasons. And in Ontario especially, it's having 43,000 km of maintained trails to ride."

**Popular Misconception:** "That all snowmobilers are drunken yahoos. It's just like with automobiles: a few give the many a bad name."

**Getting Started:** Nicholson recommends investigating [ontariotravel.net/snowmobile](http://ontariotravel.net/snowmobile) for tours and packages, including guided tours. He pegs rentals at about \$100 to \$200 per day.

**Costs and Considerations:** According to Nicholson, to snowmobile legally in Ontario, you must have a valid driver's license or Motorized Snow Vehicle Permit (ages 12 and over); proof of snowmobile ownership; registration; insurance;

helmet; and a snowmobile trail permit. Full season, good anywhere, any time: \$180 before Dec.1 and \$230 after; seven-day: \$100; one-day: \$35.

**Bet You Didn't Know:** Ontario has more kilometres of snowmobile trails than it does kilometres of highways.

**More Info:**  
[www.ofsc.on.ca](http://www.ofsc.on.ca); [www.ontariotravel.net/snowmobile](http://www.ontariotravel.net/snowmobile)

**ICE FISHING:** Forget images of lone men, teeth chattering, huddled over a hole in the frozen water. Ontario ice fishing allows anglers to bond with each other and get back to nature while anticipating a delicious perch in the pan at day's end.

**Raves:** "Ice fishing allows you to fish all the spots you would in a boat, without a boat. It's a great equalizer that way," says Gord Ellis, Thunder Bay-based fishing editor with Ontario Out of Doors magazine and an avowed angler. Plus, "Ice is stable: there are no waves to deal with and no spray."

**Popular Misconception:** That you'll freeze solid. "Yes, ice fishing can be cold but the winter clothing these days makes it very comfortable," Ellis insists. "There are also more shacks, tents and heaters for ice fishing than there used to be. Still, it is a winter sport!"

**Getting Started:** "Start somewhere close to home. That way, if you don't like it you can bail fast," Ellis says, adding that stocked trout ponds, canals and reservoirs usually have a few fish that are biting.

**Costs and Considerations:** "Ice fishing can be as cheap or as expensive as you want to make it," Ellis says. "A spool of line, a few hooks, a can of worms and a hand auger will get you started and that might cost you all of \$50." For serious anglers, gas power augers, pop-up shacks, and underwater cameras can run into the thousands.

**Bet You Didn't Know:** "Women who try ice fishing tend to like it," Ellis says. "And in Finland, ice fishing tournaments attract thousands of people."

**More Info:**  
[www.fishontario.com/icefishing](http://www.fishontario.com/icefishing); [www.onicetour.com](http://www.onicetour.com)

**DOG SLEDDING:** Author Pierre Berton has conjured more than a few scenes of the valiant soul mushing across the white-capped terrain at the helm of a team of Huskies. In fact the sport is entirely international with clubs and organizations in Europe, the Americas and even Australia and Japan, according to the Sleddog Central Website.

**Raves:** "The best thing is the incredible athleticism of these dogs. There's no better way to spend a Sunday afternoon in the winter than to be out on the trail with your team," testifies Havelock, Ontario's Abby Brunton, website designer /author with the Ontario Federation of Sleddog Sports and the director of its Kennel Inspection program. Brunton currently has a small team of Siberian Huskies and has participated in races ranging from four to 70 miles in length.

**Popular Misconception:** "People think the dogs are forced to run. They're not," Brunton says. "My dogs live to run in a team together with their kennel mates and me. As soon as my guys hear the ATV starting up, they are screaming to go!"

**Getting Started:** Brunton says there's "many" tour operators offering trips that range from half-an-hour to several days. "Prices differ throughout Canada but you would be looking at roughly \$150 for a daytrip." Brunton suggests [sleddogcentral.com](http://sleddogcentral.com) as a good place to investigate tour operators.

**Costs and Cosiderations:** As with any sport, cost depends on level of commitment and desire for bells and whistles. When it comes to gear, Brunton's advice is to buy used. "That way you won't be spending a fortune before you know if you want to continue."

**Bet You Didn't Know:** "If you decide to keep a team you really have to enjoy scooping poop." Nuff said.

**More Info:** [www3.sympatico.ca/dogpower](http://www3.sympatico.ca/dogpower); [www.mushing-canada.com](http://www.mushing-canada.com); [www.sleddogsport.com](http://www.sleddogsport.com) 🐾







A close, comfortable shave. B3 / Lost in a crash, Ellie, B5

# Metropolis

Dollar stores:  
Not just for  
Scrooges. B4

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# Metropolis

# Cheaper by the dollar

You don't have to break the bank — or more than a \$20 bill — this Christmas. A trip to the discount store will solve your gift dilemmas, writes Kim Hughes

Free shopping opportunities are as readily found as a trip to the dollar store. It's not just the one-stop convenience of a place that sells extension cords, incense, blank VHS tapes, Scotch mints, panty hose, Tupperware, aluminum foil, party hats, greeting cards, key chains, smiley-face mugs, and spatulas, though that's part of it.

There's also the kick you get out of of the auxiliary stuff, those items you don't so much buy as ponder: The food products by manufacturers you've absolutely never heard of; the candles adorned by religious icons; the ceramic statutes of timber wolves and sleeping infants; those ubiquitous displays of garlic and onion salt.

Dollar stores occupy that rarified place between serviceable and stupid, functional and fun. When patience and scheduling rule out a trip to the big box retailers, dollar stores fill the gap. When budget is at issue, and even when it's not, it's nice to know there's a place where decorative snow globes are always in season, and real wooden matches are in endless supply. Dollar stores are also great places to kill an hour.

Just about everyone has a favourite dollar store, usually a local, and most would agree some are superior to others, though the definitions of why are as unique as the individual shopper's needs. Assigning rank in a city the size and scope of the GTA is tricky business, and hugely arbitrary, but a worthwhile exercise nonetheless. After all, for every dollar store deemed great, there are probably 10 more just as good waiting to be anointed.

We randomly salute five from Scarborough and Riverdale to Parkdale, Chinatown and Little India, awarding thumbs up both for what they have and what they don't. And, in the spirit of the holiday season, we devised a dollar store litmus test: with \$20 (tax included) to spend and five specific gift-giving dilemmas to solve, how do we fare? The results are as unexpected as those dusty cans of mystery meat.

**Dollar Depot Plus** (108 Danforth, at Broadview) bills itself as the "King of the Bargains on Danforth," which isn't apparent until you negotiate past the hulking display racks in the tiny doorway and head inside. Like any good dollar store, every inch of space is in use, from floor to ceiling, though no amount of discount detritus can obscure the yellow overhead signs warning against shoplifting and promising that you can be caught even after the fact when the merchants hand their video surveillance tapes over to police (really).

Warnings aside, Dollar Depot Plus has a solid selection of general merchandise. Candles, outerwear, underwear, kitchen supplies, party favours, children's toys, electronic gear, incense and the like are all represented and, as with all the stores in our survey, it's an excellent place to load up on inexpensive Christmas wrapping, gift bags, bows, ribbon etc. The obligatory cheese factor comes via Dollar Depot Plus' sizeable collection of plastic animal carvings and shelves of "Royal Selections" fragrances for men and women.

**Gift Dilemma:** Office Secret Santa

You draw the IT support guy. You know he's smart, and he's helped you out of countless computer crises, but what does he like? Think on-the-job practicality.

**Solution:** A plastic organizer for miscellaneous screws and connectors (\$1.49); precision screw set (\$1.49); 3-in-1, battery-operated power light (\$1.49); CD wallet (\$3.99); 3-prong extension cord (\$4.99); roller ball pen set (\$1); set of playing cards (\$1); and gift bag (\$1).

**Total with tax:** \$18.92. IT guy will appreciate the 3-prong extension cord (crucial for use with power bars), the CD wallet for his download collection, and the playing cards. Hey, geeks party, too.

**Dollar Saver** (682 Kennedy, north of St. Clair) is notable for having a good assortment of greeting cards of every stripe for \$1 each, and a vast display of glue. Why glue is anyone's guess though it dovetails nicely with Dollar Saver's general utility items such as locks and screws. Pet and sewing supplies, hair accessories, stationary, aluminum and plastic cooking/storage containers, household cleaning products, child's party stuff and lingerie are also on hand. Dollar Saver has a relatively small cheese factor and is very tidy. It also seems to attract colourful neighbourhood characters who hang near the cash and gab.

**Gift Dilemma:** The Emergency Package

It never fails: someone broadsides you with an unexpected present and you have nothing in return. Not this year.

**Solution:** Seasonal coffee mug filled with hard candy (\$1.99); decorative pillar candle (\$1); 4 boxes of wooden matches (\$0.25 each); 2 bags microwave popcorn (\$0.50 each); set of magnetic clips (\$1.29); soccer ball-themed traveling CD case (\$1.99); post-it notes (\$1); clip-on mini-light with flexible head (\$1.99) with AA batteries (\$1); greeting card (\$1); and gift bag (\$1).

**Total with tax:** \$16.40. The trick is to be general and not gender-specific. It's also a trick reaching \$20.

**Dollar Joint** (1499 Gerrard E, at Coxwell) is a revelation and a suitable template for all aspiring dollar stores. The clerks will tell you this, robot-like, but take our word for it: if a price tag on a box of candy canes says \$2.49, it's a dollar. If an item has no price, it's a dollar. Exception: items that are 2 for \$1 or 3 for \$1. Upstairs offers a mind-boggling collection of Christmas stuff — cards, gift wrap, candy, bows, tree ornaments, plastic holly, and stuffed toys. The joy continues downstairs where a similarly mind-boggling array of general merchandise waits. Shower curtains, dishes, building supplies (hacksaws, files), Tupperware, padlocks, hair accessories, linens, soaps, shampoos... you get the picture. And yes, odd food items (Success-brand mushrooms anyone?) and spice shakers come here to die. But bring cash, because Dollar Joint doesn't take credit and will only permit debit on purchases of five or more items, which won't present a problem.

**Gift Dilemma:** The Sleepyhead's Stocking Stuffers

Of course the kids will be up at the crack of dawn Christmas morning. What's needed is a stocking stuffed with things to occupy them while you snooze for another hour.

**Solution:** Jumbo colouring book (all items \$1 unless otherwise noted); Fun Pad games and puzzles book; non-toxic magic markers; assorted stickers; Ritz Snack Mixers (2 for \$1); pop-up storybook; candy canes; Santa hand puppet; reindeer gumball dispenser; mini-playing cards; Oreo cookies 2-pack (3 for \$1); decorative mittens; milk chocolate Santas (2 for \$1); Santa-emblazoned gift stocking.

Toronto Star

Sunday, December 7, 2003









Toronto Star

Sunday, May 30, 2004

# Striking mementoes

By Kim Hughes

Few topics currently swirling in the mist get local restaurateurs and bar owners – not to mention casino, billiard hall, bowling alley and racetrack operators – fired up quite like the forthcoming anti-smoking bylaw, set to take effect in the before-mentioned places June 1.

That's understandable: it's a divisive issue. But if you want to give public house proprietors pause – and be greeted with blank stares – ask them their plans for their customized matchbooks.

Will they continue printing up matchbooks with their establishment name, address and logo for advertising purposes, providing what one Toronto bar manager describes as a “kitschy, sparkly little memory” of a place worth revisiting?

Or will bar owners use the incoming bylaw as a reason to scrap the practice altogether, heeding the bottom line, and leaving matchbook collectors scrambling to score the last remaining books for posterity?

Admittedly, of all the contentious issues associated with the non-smoking bylaw, matchbooks rank low on the ladder of concern. For bars and restaurants catering to a cigarette-smoking clientele, new restrictions could mean a precipitous drop in business. Or it could bring a boost if non-smokers begin patronizing places once avoided because of the presence of smoke.

Still, you don't have to be a smoker to collect and use matchbooks. Even those who never spark up a bar-be-que, light a fire or burn incense would acknowledge that matchbooks are the ultimate souvenir; a tiny, perfect, free reminder of time spent somewhere, whether abroad on holiday or at the corner bistro with friends.

So what's the fate of all those nifty, memorable made-to-order matchbooks across the GTA after June 1? That depends on who you ask.

Larry Isaacs, marketing director for the Firkin Group of Pubs – the country's largest chain, operating 41 pubs in Ontario and B.C. – refuses to comment, saying the non-smoking issue as a whole is “too hot for us.”

Others, like Helen Mark, manager of Hernando's Hideaway on Wellington, are more committal. Although the Tex-Mex eatery is already non-smoking, Mark insists she will continue printing and distributing her distinct neon-coloured packets featuring a grinning hombre nestled against a cactus.

“People take them by the handful,” Mark says, adding that she sees the matches as a terrific and relatively inexpensive advertising tool. “Even though I don't smoke, I take matches myself when I go out,” she adds.

Yet uptown, at Hernando's Yonge and Wellesley, where smoking is currently permitted at the bar, manager Chris Blinn admits he stopped printing up customized matchbooks months ago in anticipation of the bylaw, relying on generic matches instead. “I was just looking at the bottom line in that regard,” he says. “I wasn't really taking the nostalgia factor into consideration.”

And so it goes across the city. At Squirly's on Queen West, manager Carys Jones, who reckons her clientele is “90 to 95 per cent smokers” says she'll probably stop ordering her funky matchbooks featuring a convivial squirrel clutching a martini glass and wearing, um, diapers.

“We're more worried about making money as a bar than about printing matches,” Jones laughs. “If we don't stop printing them altogether we'll almost certainly cut down our orders significantly.”

A little farther east at the Paddock on Bathurst, manager Laura Marshall has a different view. “As far as we're concerned, we'll keep printing them,” she says of her bar's sleek deco-style books featuring the Paddock's address, phone number and Web site.

“People always need matches for something,” Marshall adds. “They represent a kitschy, sparkly little memory. They're a good way of referencing a place, of saying, 'I've been there.’”

Colette Zarry, owner/operator of the Jersey Giant on Front Street agrees, as does Julie McNall, general manager of Las Iguanas restaurant and The Tap bar on Bloor West.

Megan Davies, manager of Langolino Wine Bar and Grill on Clinton Street, will also keep printing matchbooks, adding her matches were always intended more as a promotional tool than as a light for smokers

Rivoli nightclub co-owner David Stearn is one of the few to have engineered a contingency plan for his matches in the wake of the non-smoking bylaw. According to Stearn, he's printing up business cards for the Rivoli and its sister establishment, the Queen Mother.

“So the jury is still out on this one,” Stearn says. “If we find people keep asking for matchbooks, then we may decide to keep printing them. If the cards work instead, then we might not.”

Stephen Marr, proprietor of the Jason George restaurant on Front Street, has found a way to keep an eye on costs and still provide patrons with a take-away memento: Marr will sell advertising space inside his matchbooks to offset the cost of their production. Comers welcome.

Such innovation is music (flint?) to the ears of David Pigott, president and co-owner of Ontario-based Eddy Match Company.

Founded in 1851 and once owned by depression-era Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, Eddy Match is “by far” North America's largest manufacturer of customized matchbooks. In addition to Eddy, Pigott and his partners also operate Atlas Match in the U.S. Past and present clients include the Four Seasons hotel chain and the infamous Mustang Ranch in Nevada.

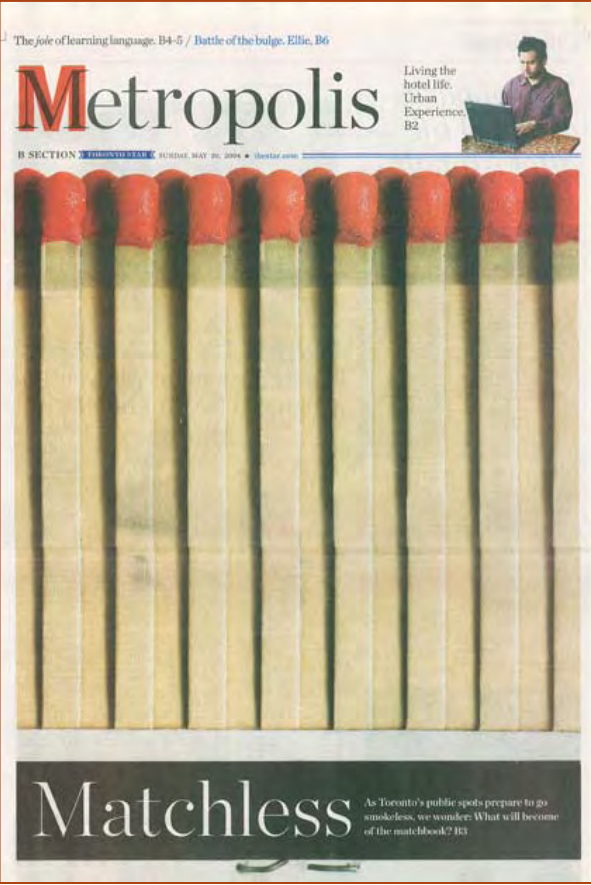
While Pigott admits he felt some trepidation with the start of non-smoking legislation in the 1990s, he says his business hasn't suffered significantly because “We're in the business of advertising as much as we're in the business of matches.”

Pigott notes that a matchbook in the hands of a potential consumer is looked at repeatedly during its lifespan, offering more bang for a proprietor's buck than mints or toothpicks, two other popular restaurant freebies that sometimes carry logos and other information.

And like the Paddock's Marshall, Pigott agrees that matchbooks have uses far beyond simply lighting up a cigarette. As long as people need instant, portable fire, “There is always going to be a market for matches,” he says.

So while hording matchbooks from your local might be premature, tucking away a few favourites is probably wise.

After all, generic store-bought matches don't have the cachet of booklets emblazoned with fancy restaurant names or squirrels wearing diapers. ♦





# Food

The Saucy Lady speed-dates some meat (er, men) in uniform. D-4



## Soy long, meat

Here's a tip that vegetarians and meat eaters already know: Mock meats are tastier than they used to be and lower in that frightful duo, calories and fat. They're also more accessible than ever in grocery stores and fast food joints, writes Kim Hughes



On previous page, we humbly thank you for sharing your views and the way you've allowed your words to be heard. We're sorry we couldn't do more to help you. We're sorry we couldn't do more to help you. We're sorry we couldn't do more to help you.



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**Sell Anything**

# Soy long, meat

By Kim Hughes

Here's a tip that vegetarians and savvy menu planners have been sitting on for more than a decade. And it's a good one. What if you could indulge in all your favourite foods such as nachos, pizza, spaghetti sauce, burritos, deli sandwiches, bacon, and chicken fingers, but with a fraction of the saturated fats, calories and cholesterol usually associated with those foods?

What would you say to a juicy, delicious burger with 12 grams of protein but less than 100 calories and less than one gram of fat? Impossible? No. The method: replacing traditional animal-based meats with meat alternatives.

If the words "meat alternative" conjure images of bland, blobby tofu and side trips to the health food store, here's welcome news: your local supermarket has a full range of meat substitutes fashioned to replicate the taste and texture of bacon, pepperoni, ground round, and chicken strips but without the heart unhealthy cholesterol and fat.

Welcome to the world of soy-based meats. Soybeans have a long and varied history, dating back to ancient China. Soy is highly digestible and high in protein. It's also high in fiber but with negligible fat and cholesterol. Indeed, soy is versatile enough to be consumed in products ranging from soy milk and cheese to the above-mentioned mock meats.

"One misconception [about veggie meats] regards taste," says Kurtis Hooley, managing director of Hain Celestial Canada, the parent company of Vancouver-based Yves Veggie Cuisine, North America's leading supplier of packaged, soy-based mock meats.

Yves supplies McDonald's Canada with their veggie burgers. Hotdog carts nationwide, meanwhile, offer Yves jumbo veggie dogs alongside their Polish sausage and regular wieners.

"Meat alternatives have come a long way and many consumers remember tasting tofu years ago and believe soy-based meat alternatives will taste the same," Hooley adds. "All tofu is soy but not all soy is tofu."

Mock meats represent one area where meat and non-meat eaters converge. Since most processed meats don't resemble animal body parts anyway – having already been skinned, boned, chopped and otherwise modified – the potential ick factor is largely moot for vegetarians and vegans. Similarly, meat eaters will find processed faux meats akin to their preferred lunch slices and breakfast patties.

While some items, like veggie burger patties, simulate real meat, there exists many unmistakably grainy, vegetable-based options ideal for non-meat eaters who prefer less realism with their dinners or for meat eaters who want the full vegetarian experience.

Animal rights group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, or PETA, recommends faux meats, with their recently launched Golden Bun awards recognizing the best in veggie burgers. And meat eaters can tuck into that Friday night T-bone knowing they've banked all kinds of calories, saturated fats and cholesterol during the week by lunching on mock meat instead of animal-based products.

PETA pegs annual sales of veggie burgers in the U.S. at \$200 million, which may be a drop in the bucket compared to the billion-dollar fast food industry, but many marquee chains on both sides of the border, including Burger King, Harvey's and McDonalds, now offer veggie burgers nevertheless. Even mom-and-pop carnivore havens like Apache Burger in Etobicoke and Dangerous Dan's in downtown Toronto make room for veggie burgers on their regular menus.

That's a point well taken when comparing veggie ground round with its animal-based equivalent. Since chuck is normally used in concert with a riot of other flavours in chilis, sauces, nachos, and shepherd's pie, substituting a meatless alternative can mean negligible taste difference but substantial caloric savings.

Yves brand Veggie Ground Round – found, as are all their products, in the produce section of supermarkets – is pre-cooked and only needs to be warmed up. A five-minute toss around the frying pan with a bit of oil yields moist, delicious chuck that looks like the real thing.

Boca brand frozen Ground Burger, by comparison, is heated in the microwave, and is tastier if slightly drier than Yves. Both brands, however, are virtually fat-free. To put it in perspective, a 70g burger patty made with soy meat, such as Boca, contains 0.9g of fat, about 67 calories and 1mg of cholesterol. By contrast, a same-sized burger made with lean ground beef contains 11g of fat, about 150 calories and 40mg of cholesterol.

Commercial, pre-formed veggie burger patties measure up, too (see sidebar) while eliminating the risk of contracting E.coli 0157:H7, or what Health Canada refers to on its Website as "hamburger disease," caused by undercooked or poorly handled meat. Moreover, the U.S. National Cancer Institute reports that barbecuing beef, pork, fowl, and fish causes the formation of at least 17 different carcinogens called heterocyclic amines or HCAs. These HCAs are found only in meats that have been cooked at high temperatures, never in vegetables or grains.

As Yves' Kurtis Hooley points out, "There is good news about soy all the time. The findings of the [U.S.] Food and Drug Administration further explain its appeal: Diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol that include 25 grams of soy protein a day can reduce the risk of heart disease.

Again, to put that in perspective, each serving of Yves' brand veggie meats, according to the company, contains "at least 6.25 grams of soy protein." So one serving per day – say, two Breakfast Patties in the morning or a veggie dog or burger at lunch – would provide roughly half the recommended daily dosage of soy protein.

Products from veggie bacon to burgers can be prepared stovetop, on the BBQ or in the microwave and most pass the toughest test of all: satisfying finicky children. Yves pre-formed "Neatballs" served with spaghetti and tomato sauce went down well with seven-year-old Evangeline and four-year-old Beatrice. Neither child reported a taste difference from beef.

But just as lean ground beef yields better taste than cheapo chuck, there are notable quality differences between the various commercial soy-based meat alternatives. That proves especially true in the area of faux-chicken. Three brands of breaded, faux-chicken nuggets make our survey – Yves Veggie Chick'n, Boca's Chik'n Nuggets and Zoglo's Golden Meatless Nuggets – with Zoglo's emerging as the clear winner.

Their nuggets (147 calories for four, or 72g, with 12g of protein and 7.2g of fat) are the biggest and, despite being frozen, come out of the frying pan crispy outside and moist inside. The dusting of sesame seeds is also a welcome touch. By contrast, four McDonald's Chicken McNuggets (about 75g) are 190 calories with 11g of fat and 11g of protein.

Next are Boca Chik'n Nuggets (165 calories for four, 15g of protein, 5.5g of fat). Cooked using the toaster oven as recommended on the box, the Boca nuggets, though slightly mushier than Zoglo's, are tasty sided with plum sauce and hold their form well.

The pan-fried Yves nuggets (187 calories for five, 13g of protein, 3.0g of fat), however, are awful. Despite being fresh and not frozen, Yves nuggets are gummy, bland and leave an aftertaste. Still, we'll forgive Yves their nugget transgression in light of their terrific Canadian Veggie Bacon.

Toronto Star

Wednesday, July 30, 2003



Individual slices are round and – conveniently – about the size of an English muffin. One serving, or two slices, equals 52 calories with 11g of protein and 0.4g of fat. A serving of traditional bacon slices – defined by Maple Leaf on their packaging as three to four slices – yields 331 calories before cooking, plus 7.8g of protein and 33g of fat.

Like the nuggets, chicken patties tested are similarly varied. Yves Chick'n patty, the only one not breaded, has a passable chicken consistency; served on a bun with lettuce, tomato and mustard, it's every bit as good as real breast. Boca's Chik'n patty, made as directed in the toaster oven, is also very good though heavily breaded. It's the most cutlet-like of the bunch, and while Boca serves well on a bun, it also passes plain or sliced and served atop salad.

No such luck with Lightlife's Smart Cutlets, also found in the produce section of supermarkets. Heavily breaded, this cutlet is chewy, bland and chalky in flavour. This is not good, as Lightlife is new to the Canadian market; a spokesperson places the company's presence here to about a year. Let's hope Canadians make an introduction via Lightlife's Steak-Style Strips instead. They're a solid addition to stir fry or fajitas.

Still, faux chicken patties add up to marked caloric savings over their fast-food cousins. Each 71 g Boca Chik'n patty, for instance, is 143 calories with 12g of protein and 5.6g of fat. KFC's Original Recipe Chicken Sandwich with sauce and bun, by contrast, weighs in with 450 calories, 27g of fat and 29g of protein.

The bottom line is to experiment to find out what you like, knowing that substituting even a few meals a week with faux-meat could save you many calories and grams of fat. 🔥

Soy-based veggie burgers – and there's plenty of ready-made commercial brands at the supermarket – cook up beautifully on the stove or Barbie and contain a fraction of the cholesterol, saturated fat, and concentrated protein found in conventional ground round.

And many veggie burgers look, taste, and feel so much like beef that they could pass a blind taste test even before the ketchup and onions.

While some vegans/vegetarians might be disconcerted with the beef-like texture and taste of veggie burgers, there exists a range of grain-based alternatives that are unmistakably meatless, such as Amy's brand, reviewed below. These are equally serviceable as burger filling and just as easy to prepare.

Of course some are better than others. Using the fry pan over medium heat with a bit of olive oil for about five minutes – a method recommended by all the brands tested, along with BBQ and microwave – we put five marquee brands to work, listing them in order of preference. Here's what we found.

Brand: Lick's Nature Burger  
Price: \$6.99 for a package of four  
Caloric content per patty: 215 for 113g  
Fat content per patty: 13g

Background: The kid-friendly Lick's burger and ice-cream chain is a Canadian success story with 25 locations across Ontario. Makers of what is widely considered the best veggie burger in the province (country?), the chain also offers frozen versions of its Nature and beef "Homeburger" patties in Dominion and AP stores.

**Verdict:** Like its store-bought cousin, the Lick's take-home Nature is far and away the best of the bunch sampled here. Thick, juicy, flavourful, and the most similar to beef in look and feel, the Nature is scrumptious even served plain. Nature patties can also be bought directly from any Lick's restaurant: \$16.99 for six, including buns and a generous tub of the chain's own "Guk" (or signature garlic-mayo) sauce.

Brand: Boca Burgers  
Price: \$4.99 for a package of four  
Caloric content per patty: 67 for 71g  
Fat content per patty: 0.9g

Background: Among the most popular meatless burgers in the States – it recently won PETA's Golden Bun award for best commercially available veggie burger – the Boca has less of a profile in Canada but that could be changing soon if manufacturer Kraft has anything to do with it. Products can be found in the freezer section of most major chains.

**Verdict:** The Roasted Onion Boca is delicious, with a distinct BBQ flavour. Though not as plump as the Nature burger, the Boca nevertheless cooks up well and could pass for beef in a blind test. And did we mention it's delicious?

Brand: President's Choice World's Best Meatless Burger  
Price: \$5.99 for a package of four  
Caloric content per patty: 314 for 142g  
Fat content per patty: 18g

Background: Another in the family of the PC brand's various BBQ-ready burgers, found in the freezer section of Loblaws and sister chains such as No Frills.

**Verdict:** A claim of world's best is a doozy and in this case, it's unwarranted. But, like Lick's, the PC meatless emulates the taste, texture, and look of real meat, which means it would doubtless hold up as well on the outdoor grill as the stovetop pan. Though less tasty than Boca – and slightly less juicy than Lick's – the PC is a serviceable and tasty meat alternative.

Brand: Yves Veggie Burger  
Price: \$2.99 for a package of two  
Caloric content per patty: 105 for 75g  
Fat content per patty: 4.0g

Background: The Vancouver-based Yves Veggie Cuisine has a wide range of meatless products, including veggie wieners, deli slices, breakfast patties, and ground “round.” Unlike most other meatless products, Yves products are pre-cooked and “fresh,” not frozen, and usually stored in the produce section of supermarkets.

**Verdict:** Complete with “grill” marks, the Yves burger also looks, feels, and tastes much like meat, though less so than the Lick’s, PC or Boca burgers. Yves supplies McDonald’s with their veggie burgers which may be many people’s first introduction to meatless meats. And Yves veggie wieners – found on hotdog carts across the GTA – are unparalleled in real-thing taste and texture.

Brand: Amy's  
Price: \$5.99 for a package of four  
Caloric content per patty: 130 for 71g  
Fat content per patty: 2.5g

**Background:** The California-based Amy's is notable for using organic grains and vegetables along with soy in their products, some of which also contain nuts. Like Yves, Amy's makes an assortment of meatless products with many entrée-style frozen meals plus burritos, pizza, burgers and pot pies. Unlike Yves, Amy's products are frozen, and usually stored in the health or organic sections of grocery stores.

**Verdict:** The most vegetable-like of the bunch, the Amy's Texas burger is grainy in texture and rather dry but ideal for vegetarians or vegans put off by meat-like textures, or those who prefer an organic diet. 🍷

# Battle of the healthy burgers

By Kim Hughes

Is there anything more agreeable than the humble hamburger? A delicious patty on a fresh Kaiser roll with an army of condiments is a meal that seldom wears out its welcome, especially in summertime. That homemade burgers are also relatively cheap and easy to make is beside the point. Burgers equal pleasure.

But traditional beef burgers can also equal high fat, cholesterol, and calories – hardly a happy cocktail for the casual diner. Additionally, the U.S. National Cancer Institute reports that barbecuing beef, pork, fowl, and fish causes the formation of at least 17 different carcinogens called heterocyclic amines or HCAs.

NOVEMBER 2001 • NOVEMBER 2001

Cover Story

# Battle of the healthy burgers

We put five big brands of meatless patties to the test in a home taste-off

## THE WINNER

In this sampling round-up, we found that the healthiest hamburger is a home-made burger. That's because burgers are so easy to alter and you can make a healthy burger in a heartbeat. We used a meatless patty from *Earth's Best* and topped it with a slice of tomato, a slice of onion, a slice of pickled jalapeño, a slice of avocado, and a sprig of fresh basil. The result was a burger that was both healthy and delicious. The other four brands of meatless patties were all good, but they didn't quite match the home-made burger.

## THE LOSERS

**Beanitos Veggie Burgers** Beanitos Veggie Burgers, 100 calories per patty (21 calories for the 120 grams)

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**Five Veggie Cakes** (meatless burger) Five Veggie Cakes, 100 calories per patty (21 calories for the 120 grams)

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of carbohydrates in the veggie burgers, beans, and nuts in veggie burgers.

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## Books



Barbara Carrey  
Poetry

### Candid voices behind mask

Debut collections delve into the personal past with sharp eye and emotional punch

Spring 04  
By Tracy Stapp  
Reviewed by Kim Hughes

Love Her  
by Bruce McDaniel  
McClelland & Stewart, \$25

Autobiography is the starting point for most poets, but for 17 is a poet's life as a whole, as when you read it, you are living it. Love Her, by Bruce McDaniel, is a collection of poems that are both personal and universal. The poems are written in a simple, direct style, but they are also deeply emotional. The collection is a testament to the power of poetry to capture the human experience.

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### Social Affairs

## Stroke, stroke

A no-nonsense veteran and a smooth hipster show us the way  
Sex guides as different as their authors, writes Kim Hughes

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by Sue Johanson  
Penguin Canada, 292 pages, \$22

Bedside Manners  
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# Stroke, stroke

By Kim Hughes

Sex, Sex, and More Sex

By Sue Johanson

Penguin Canada, 292 pages, \$22

Bedside Manners: Sex Etiquette Made Easy

By Josey Vogels

HarperCollins, 181 pages, \$26.95

Even by the rubbery literary standards of summer reading, sex books are the ultimate indulgence. We can rationalize all we want about how they can be vital windows into our primal urges – or better, tantalizing glimpses into other people's urges – but at the end of the day, Jackie Collins titles probably have more gravitas than anything focused exclusively on the well-worn topic of folks bumping uglies.

This is both good news and bad news for Sue Johanson's Sex, Sex, and More Sex and Josey Vogels' Bedside Manners, two new titles with sex as their subject and each woman's particular expertise as their chief selling points. For potential readers, forewarned is forearmed.

In this corner, much-loved sexpert and registered nurse Johanson: longtime radio and TV host; unflappable, non-judgmental dispeller of urban myths; sex toy advocate; foil for those who still think you can't get pregnant the first time out.

And in this corner, hipster lifestyle columnist Vogels: Canada's Carrie Bradshaw, according to her publisher; bon vivant with a fistful of invitations to the coolest parties in town; firm believer that good graces abandon us the moment we're naked.

Johanson's book is nobody's idea of frivolous. Nor is it likely to be titillating to anyone over age 12 which means it resolutely does not fit the breezy summer mold despite the timing of its publication. This is one is a keeper.

Like the woman herself, Johanson's Sex, Sex, and More Sex is blunt and larded with facts though admittedly not quite as entertaining as watching her demonstrate a dildo by strapping it over her chin, as she famously did on David Letterman's show, rendering him uncharacteristically speechless.

As Johanson says in the introduction, her book is "as simple as using a phone book." That's precisely how it's laid out, with topics gathered alphabetically. Advice letters serve as a springboard for Johanson's succinct, straightforward responses. Curious about bladder infection, celibacy, circumcision, anal sex or anorexia's affect on one's reproductive capabilities? This one's for you.

Indeed, it's hard to imagine a progressive parent who wouldn't be keen to equip their pubescent-age kids with a copy of Sex, Sex, and More Sex. Those who would insist such sensitive information should come from a relative, not a relative stranger, have clearly never been hit with a question like what, exactly is this oral sex thing everyone keeps accusing President Clinton of while they were shopping in the canned goods aisle at Wal-Mart.

And Johanson brings depth when it's needed. Her counsel on Aging and Sex, for example, is reassuring and thoughtful and while it's not nearly as sexy as discourse on the wisdom of threesomes, it's no less welcome.

Moreover, Johanson touches on the ancillary stuff like trust, guilt, jealousy and boredom that inevitably trip up even those of us who already know which parts fit where.

Vogels assumes we know the basics and we're frenetically putting this knowledge to use. But she reckons we're forgetting our manners in the heat of the moment, blurting out wicked comments and forgetting to thank our one-night stands for their labours as we dart out the door.

Hence, an etiquette book for the aspiring perfect lover, albeit one that reads more like a long magazine article complete with pithy sidebars and saucy illustrations.

Counsel such as "Don't point and laugh" when confronted with a new partner's manhood might reasonably fall under the banner of common sense. But putting one's left turn signal on before entering an intersection is common sense too, and people don't do that.

Even so, many passages in Bedside Manners are simply beyond the pale. How to untangle genital piercings or artfully choreograph an orgy? Sorry, but the world was not waiting for that information. And Vogels' delivery isn't amusing enough to pass as satire.

To



Cultural Affairs

And pop goes the weasel

A former metalhead ponders all that's fluff around us

If you have a real life, one beyond TV and MP3, don't go here

**Sex, Drugs, And Cocoa Puffs: A Low Culture Manifesto**  
by Chuck Klosterman  
Scribner, 235 pages, \$34.50  
newswatch

Chuck Klosterman is the kind of guy we pray to be seated beside at our second cousin Tammy's most wedding-reception. He's such a pop-culture nerd, with a head full of random but fascinating notions that one reader the more someone seems meaningful.

Just tonight... "When the air fills for the first time with the tinkling of forks against stemware, Klosterman could lose it with a surging proclamation, pointing to the other 'Being a second cousin' had intense with a conspiratorial whisper and Cheshire grin, 'is sort of like being the frontman for an Orange County punk band: As soon as you can explain why you're necessary, you're over.'"

Later, as you catch your creepy, well-oiled brother-in-law making eyes at a bridesmaid who is maybe 14, Klosterman would offhandedly remark that *The Empire Strikes Back* is "the seminal foundation for what became Generation X," and that, "in a roundabout way, Boba Fett created Pearl Jam."

Also, if your passion is more literature than Lisa Loeb, Klosterman's stellar *Sex, Drugs, And Cocoa Puffs*—following, if at all, with creepy tie-backs—is not for you.

Film, TV, sports and especially pop music references are to Klosterman what the state of Maine is to Stephen King—defining topography. If you're not up on your pop culture, the book won't make much sense. You won't even get the jokes.

For those steeped in pop culture, what follows is smart, funny and, inevitably, spot-on. More than once the author nails something that's always been kind of obvious in a perhaps long but never brought into focus. Klosterman's background as a rock journalist (he is a contributing editor with *Spin*) also yields choice insights and humor. Of course he fired Bobby Young, guitarist in Guns N' Roses cover band Paradise City, Klosterman wryly observes: "What's ironic about Young's shortcomings as Slash is that—in a traditional band—his job would be the most secure."

What's ironic about Young's shortcomings as Slash is that—in a traditional band—his job would be the most secure.



TV junkie Chuck Klosterman rocks, coming as Slash is that—in a traditional band—his job would be the most secure... Unfortunately, Young can't learn how to look like a mulatto or heroin addict, and this is the only occupation in America for which that is a job requirement."

Genius might be found in Klosterman's dispatches on why soccer sucks and will never be truly adopted into the hearts of North Americans; why Pamela Anderson really is the Marilyn Monroe of her generation; why country is the most visceral genre of music; and why deadlines doom all newspapers and their reporters to object subjectivity.

That anyone could produce anything fresh relating to Pamela Anderson—or porn or journalism or other such familiar topics—is testament to Klosterman's engaging style and angular thought processes.

On the downside, the book's dependence on name-checking and branding ensures it a shelf-life equal to Douglas Coupland's fiction, a point which Klosterman concedes. Even the most ardent fan will be reluctant to follow the author on some of his nuttier tangents, especially the one about Billy Joel being cool in spite of himself, and that women of a certain age simply cannot resist John Cusack (though admittedly, I know two who categorically fit the mold described). He has a weird obsession with people who have known or encountered serial killers.

Still, With enviable grace and buckets of wit, Klosterman shows us that cultural detritus is only garbage when we soak it up reflexively, without considering its ramifications.

In Klosterman's eyes, the universe really can be decoded by staring into the book's eponymous bowl of Cocoa Puffs. You just have to keep eyes open, nose clean and your cynicism fully intact. It also helps if you watch a lot of TV.

Kim Hughes is an editor with *Wheatland* and a book reviewer for *Wheatland*.

# And pop goes the weasel

By Kim Hughes

**Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs**  
**A Low Culture Manifesto**  
by Chuck Klosterman  
Scribner, 235 pages, \$23

Chuck Klosterman is the guy many of us pray we're seated next to at our second-cousin Tammy's banquet hall wedding reception.

Just imagine... When the air fills for the 83rd time with the tinkling of forks against stemware, Klosterman leans in with a vaguely meaningless but snappy proclamation that suddenly re-aligns the universe. "Being a sexual icon," he intones with a conspiratorial whisper and Cheshire grin, "is sort of like being the frontman for an Orange County punk band: As soon as you can explain why you're necessary, you're over."

Later, as you catch your creepy, well-oiled brother-in-law making eyes at a bridesmaid who is maybe 14, Klosterman offhandedly remarks that *The Empire Strikes Back* is "the seminal foundation for what became Generation X," and that, "in a roundabout way, Boba Fett created Pearl Jam."

Alas, if your passion is more literature than Lisa Loeb, Klosterman's stellar *Sex, Lies And Cocoa Puffs* – a followup, of a sort, to his surprise bestseller – is not for you.

Film, TV, sports and especially pop music references are to Klosterman what the state of Maine is to Stephen King – defining topography. If you're not up on your pop culture, the book won't make much sense. You won't even get the jokes.

For those steeped in pop culture, what follows is smart, funny and freakishly spot-on. More than once the author nails something that's always been kind of obvious is a peripheral way but never brought into focus.

Klosterman's background as a rock journalist (he is a contributing editor with *Spin*) also yields choice insights but, blessedly, without platitudes or gratuitous hipster parlance. Of soon-to-be-fired Bobby Young, guitarist in Guns N' Roses cover band Paradise City, Klosterman wryly observes: "What's ironic about Young's shortcomings as Slash is that – in a traditional band – his job would be the most secure.

"He is clearly the most skilled musician, having received a degree from Cincinnati's Conservatory of Music in 1987. Unfortunately, Young can't learn how to look like a mulatto ex-heroin addict, and this is the only occupation in America for which that is a job requirement."

Genuine freight is found in Klosterman's dispatches on why soccer sucks and will never be truly adopted into the hearts of North Americans; why Pamela Anderson really is the Marilyn Monroe of her generation; why country is the most visceral genre of music; and why deadlines doom all newspapers and their reporters to object subjectivity.

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Toronto Star

Sunday, September 21, 2003

# Kiss

## Sleazy superheroes pucker up for another mass groupie grope

By Kim Hughes



*NOW Magazine*

*November 26-  
December 2, 1998*

BOSTON – Cynics may scoff and critics can howl derisively, but Kiss – the grand poobahs of glam, arena-rock royalty and the gnarliest metal maulers of all time – are cool again. Best, our sinister, snazzily attired superheroes are back to snap the rock world out of its premillennial narcoleptic stupor with the most awesome show ever staged. Really.

### ARGUMENT – WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?

Never mind that by the early 80s the group had morphed into a parody of itself, or that prior to their 1996 reunion, the four original members now touring and recording together openly hated each other’s guts, a point illuminated in the song You Wanted The Best from the new Psycho Circus CD.

With lyrics lifted from band-member interviews conducted in the 80s, choice though sadly unattributed lines like “Who died and made you king” and “Hey, you live in fairy tales” pretty much make the point.

Still, that Kiss slapped on the greasepaint and lycra after a dark decade-plus of dodgy new members, exposed faces and (eek!) a flirtation with civilian clothing – scoring the biggest-grossing tour of 1996 and returning to scorch the masses again two years later – says more about what today’s discerning consumers want for their discretionary concert dollars than music-biz pencil-pushers might like to admit.

Go ahead, laugh. But Kiss’ legacy is spread out before you like a sumptuous backstage rider with breads that actually fit the cold cuts. Marilyn Manson wouldn’t exist without them. Neither would Poison, Motley Crüe or Twisted Sister.

And let’s not even talk about the less conspicuous thieves who nevertheless built on Kiss’ template showing how mind-boggling stadium rock shows can be given 12 trucks, several huge video screens, a pre-rig of gear and enough pyro to threaten eyebrows in the first five rows.

Teenage boys in the 70s who grew up to score hits of their own in the 80s and 90s wouldn’t have had a reason to wail sloppily on a guitar had Kiss’ deliriously seductive promise of obscene amounts of money, screaming fans and girls! girls! girls! not been stomped into their dopey suburban skulls with thigh-high platform boots.

Skeptics at this juncture can review not one but two star-studded Kiss tribute discs, not counting 96’s collector-friendly Swedish-bands-only covers album.

Kiss is more than a band. It’s a brand name. Only real merchandising whores could conceive of such overkill items as Kiss action figures, snow globes, comics, Christmas-tree decorations, prepaid phone cards, double-jacquard-weave cotton throw blankets, mousepads, minted coins, wallets and – wait for it – a fully operational Kiss car.

Repellent, yes, but it’s safe to say that the entertainment world would be infinitely drearier had serpent-tongued bassist Gene Simmons, lovable-lug lead guitarist Ace Frehley, singer/guitarist and studmuffin Paul Stanley and wild-man drummer Peter Criss not gathered in New York in 1972, convinced that the New York Dolls’ vision of glam rock could be inflated to grandiose proportions and given a full-scale theatrical production.

Meanwhile, those of us with humdrum regular lives could only marvel at the attendant supermodels, private jets, five-star hotels, round-the-clock limo service and rivers of Dom Perignon in the group’s orbit.

We’re still marvelling. Set aside for the moment Kiss’ bombastic thud, perilously Tap-like lyrics and, sparing maybe Frehley and Criss, their generally revolting attitudes toward women – women who inexplicably go out of their way to be exploited by these geezers – and what emerges is a full-stop rock-and-roll wet dream.

True to their earliest egomaniacal prediction, they rewrote rock and roll history as – drumroll, please – Kisstory, and today, there’s no tour on the road as fabulous, over-the-top or eye-popping as Kiss’ gimmicky but irresistible 3-D Psycho Circus. So take that, you feeble, shoe-gazing runts strumming out important music in a basement somewhere beneath a crappy naked lightbulb.

“There were some bad feelings between us before the reformation,” Frehley asserts cautiously over coffee with Sweet-and-Low in a main-floor sitting area of the Boston Harbor Hotel. Just like brothers and sisters have fights. “But Kiss is a big family and we kissed and made up. And now,” he cracks, “we have our makeup back on.”

“Everybody has ups and downs, but ultimately we succumbed to the will of the boss – the fans,” Simmons intones, spreading decidedly unsexy low-fat cream cheese on his dry bagel and keeping an eye on a sluttily turned-out bottle blond in lace-up vinyl boots and a fabric swatch – um, I mean skirt – prowling the lobby and waiting for the Demon man.

“We made it work. At one point, Peter’s daughter wanted to see the old costumes, and he called me in L.A. and asked if he could come down to what was then the first Kiss Konvention (glorified fan shows begun by nostalgic Kiss fanatics and collectors as a means to meet with like-minded others; in 95, Kiss got in on the action, creating an “official” Kiss Konvention that they attended).

“Ironically, Eric Singer, our drummer at the time, suggested Peter could play with us and that the fans would love it. When he got up there, there was such electricity.”

Always thinking ahead, Kiss made sure to capture it all on video, to be sold (like, duh) as Second Coming. Keep those wallets open, kids, ’cause the celluloid feature Detroit Rock City, now filming in Toronto, is also coming soon.

“That video really shows us being ourselves as we were getting back together for the first time in years,” Simmons insists. “It really touches you emotionally, because you see four people, us, who have almost nothing in common with each other but somehow belong with each other.”

Love conquers all. Nevertheless, the reunion, such as it is, amid rumours that Frehley is contractually bound to remain sober, has resulted in this righteous new tour.

“I love rumours,” Simmons declares. “We’re so far beyond having to deal with that. How about the one that has a cow’s tongue surgically attached to mine? Or that we’re devil worshippers.

“As a matter of personal choice, I don’t drink or smoke, and I’ve never gotten high. But people refuse to believe that. People expect me to be high 24 hours a day, swinging from the chandeliers. It’s just the way it is, part of the machine. Every week, women line up at checkout counters and buy tabloids because they eat that stuff up.”

Just women? “Yes, mostly.”

That’s what I’m up against in Boston. Though I do get to hang out, briefly, with Kiss, the drawback is, I must hang out briefly with Kiss, beginning at the Fleet Center on, fittingly, Friday, November 13.

### THE CONCERT – WHEN PERFORMING LIVE JUST ISN’T 3-D ENOUGH

Like Tom Jones, Paul Stanley (who’s 47 on January 20) gets a ton of lingerie heaved at him onstage, night after night. Unlike Tom Jones’ fans, Stanley’s don’t politely tote extra bras along in their purses.

During Rock And Roll All Nite, the last song of the set, three ecstatic lovelies positioned up front – Playboy models from L.A. who’ve recently done a shoot with Kiss, it turns out – decide it’s time.



A cameraman positioned nearby, whose live-action images of the performance fill the Jumbotron screen behind the band, jumps on stage and points.

Whammo! Six absolutely bare nipples are instantly blown up to the size of hubcaps and projected on-screen for 12,000 to see. Rows of slack-jawed teenage boys suddenly take their seats.

It’s almost enough to make you forget the barf puddles and thorough search of your cigarette pack for joints. Naturally, our dashing Starchild won’t allow such enthusiasm to go unrewarded. After Stanley dramatically smashes his guitar in half, he struts to the edge of the stage.

The guitar body is handed to the bare brunette. The guitar neck is lowered toward the blond, and everyone within eyeshot can see the three coveted, gleaming laminates (conveniently attached to lanyards, ’cause, hey, where they gonna clip ’em?) dangling down for her to grasp.

Even amid maniacs wearing copycat makeup, Kiss Army recruits are easy to spot. They’re the ones wearing the special 3-D glasses with Kiss scrawled in black letters across the cardboard arms – special delivery to Kiss Army members – not the generic white ones handed out at the venue.

Despite Kiss’ endless protestations of love for their fans, you can’t help but feel the 3-D joke is on us. It must be hysterical for the band to look out at tens of thousands of sheep people wearing goofy 3-D glasses like some shabbily dressed, 50s movie audience.

For the benefit of the thoroughly blunted, the video screen instructs us when to put our glasses on and take them off in accordance with the pretaped action on the monitors. Not that it matters, because the real spectacle is onstage anyway.

Pounding us with hits, plus confetti guns, lasers, smoke, fire and the by now requisite solos, with their individual stunts (Simmons flying through the air suspended by piano wire, Frehley “shooting” out overhead lights with his customized rocket-launching ax, Criss’ levitating drum riser), Kiss’ full-on barrage doesn’t permit reflection. Look closer, though, and a human drama is unfolding all around you.

Apart from the rock and roller thigh-slapper of “We’re doing this for the fans, not the money,” there is no older, more disingenuous cliché in the business than bands who claim their audiences comprise people from five to 50.

But with Kiss, it’s actually true. Sure, there are loads of lugans playing air guitar, but there are also families here. All over the place, moms and daughters are strapping on those glasses and getting down. Kiss-approved prams can’t be far behind. As for me, the warm, fuzzy mood is about to be sullied.

**HOTEL BAR, POST-GIG – PAUL MAKES FRIENDS**

Simmons, 49, Frehley, 47, and Criss, 53 come December 20, aren’t here. But that’s OK because Stanley’s pulling enough action for all of them. Reclining on a low-slung couch and surrounded by women who may or may not be the breast babes (they’re dressed, so who knows?), the astonishingly fit, slender Stanley looks like a pasha.

The second I walk in for a crucial martini, he’s got me scoped as potential prey (tee hee!). I smile, he smiles, and then he returns to his chitchatting companions. Clearly, a gal wearing plain-jane jeans ain’t angling for lovin’. Not that I’m hurt.

Banished to surrounding tables and clearly not part of the equation are gobsmacked male fans and the girls not cute enough to be ornaments but clever enough to have cleared security at the hotel’s front door. While Kiss can rightfully claim their share of female fans, it’s the guys who’ve kept the flame burning over the years. But with Kiss, dudes don’t rank.

The reason is elementary, I guess, but if I were a smart cookie like Stanley, I’d quickly grow tired of having conversations with misguided chicks who think they can somehow advance their social status by sucking my dick. Maybe life is too short for semantics.

**THE INTERVIEW PROPER – GENE AND ACE SCARE US**

Diana Ross did it. So did Cher. And now it’s my turn. Try to get Gene Simmons off the subject of his cock long enough to focus on life, business, stuff. Not easy. As former longtime Kiss business manager Chris Lendt points out in his 97 warts-and-all tome, Kiss And Sell, the biggest stated regret of Simmons’ life was “not having two dicks.”

“Close,” Simmons purrs when queried point-blank about the quote’s veracity. “Actually, my only regret in life is that I wasn’t born a porcupine, because a porcupine is covered in pricks. Everywhere a porcupine goes, he’s poking into people.

“Would I prefer to have more appendages? Of course. I want it front, back. I want to be covered in them. They’re like these sensors. When you hit it, it’s like, ’Bing! Third floor, lingerie, I’m coming!’

“But it’s never been about numbers,” intones the keeper of reportedly thousands of homemade pornographic Polaroids. “Though there have been numbers. There was this one bizarre game where there were five girls and me, and the game was Pin The Donkey On The Tail.



“I was the jackass and I was blindfolded. The game was that various local talent would back into me. And when the, ahem, the event happened, when the moment of singularity occurred, I would have to guess which one actually got the prize without removing my blindfold.”

Oh, dear. At least Simmons is unperturbed by the loud gagging noise I’m making while he tells me this.

Kiss may project heathenism, but both Frehley and Simmons meet me on the dot of 1 pm, as agreed. Their organization is run like a business, which it is, and you just know there isn’t a single detail that escapes Simmons’ scrutiny.

The plainspoken, polite Bronx-born Frehley’s my favourite, as he is for many people. He’s the most approachable and his love for his daughter, whom he’s mentioned in both interviews I’ve done with him, is genuine and touching.

As he told Tom Snyder during an infamous drunken interview in the 70s, “I’m a Taurus, a down-to-earth guy,” which means he barely gets a word in edgewise, especially when Simmons is on a roll.

“We take the point of view that what’s important to us is what’s important to our constituency – that’s a big word, like gymnasium.” Cheers, Gene. “All we want to do is put happy faces on our fans, and ultimately we can’t appeal to all the people in the world.

“So whether or not the critics get it or not is beside the point. There’s so many things in life that the masses love with all their hearts, like Whoppers. Food critics will tell you of the exquisite joy of frogs’ legs. When was the last time anyone ate frogs’ legs?

“Our main consideration is what the fans like. If critics like it, too, that’s nice. But otherwise, c’est la vie. When you were throwing your own parties as a kid, did it matter to you that Mom and Dad didn’t get it?”

“We do spend tons of money on the tours,” Frehley says. “But that’s because we care so much about the fans. Our show is probably more expensive than any other show out there today.”

“You know,” Simmons says, “you’re right. We could do cheaper shows. We believe the extra money we put in the show is worth every penny. You don’t really need that extra bomb or 3-D technology that’s never been done before on the face of the planet, that we know of.

“Would we sell any fewer tickets if that wasn’t there? No. But are we dumb enough to actually care and give more? Then, yeah. We’re dumb because we love the fans.

“And love makes you do dumb things.”

**EPILOGUE – NOT QUITE A QUINN MARTIN PRODUCTION**

And that’s the key to Kiss’ longevity and staggering appeal. Their politics suck, there’s almost nothing – save cigarettes – that they won’t slap their image on, their music is more anthemic than inventive, and yet nothing about their shows is exclusionary.

All are welcome, all are dazzled and – here goes another music-biz cliché – Kiss in concert really do make you forget the outside world for a while.

Like their motto says, “You wanted the best, you got the best.” God bless ’em. ♦

# Here comes Lillix, the next Canadian stars on Madonna's hot label

By Kim Hughes

When it comes to the potential fortunes of emerging pop-rock group Lillix, the brain trust at Maverick Records are taking no chances.

The all-girl quartet originally from tiny Cranbrook B.C. possesses many attributes out of the gate: they write their own highly catchy songs, play their own instruments, sing in mellifluous harmony, look like models, and are managed by an entertainment lawyer.

Yet the label has armed them with the musical equivalent of life insurance by procuring some of the best producers in the biz to sculpt and tweak Lillix's chiming, guitar-driven "Falling Uphill" debut, dropping in Canada and the U.S. May 27.

It's not as if the label founded by Madonna hasn't had wild success with Canadian artists before. Recall Ottawa native Alanis Morissette, whose '95 release "Jagged Little Pill" — issued by the L.A.-based imprint after Canadian labels unanimously passed based on Morissette's teen queen past — sold tens of millions.

But the stakes today are clearly higher and while the recent success of teen singer-songwriters like Avril Lavigne and fellow Maverick signee Michelle Branch have paved the way for acts like Lillix — average age 19 — it can't hurt to cover all the bases.

As such, the production credits on "Falling Uphill" read like a Sunset Boulevard marquee: Glen Ballard (Morissette, Dave Matthews), Linda Perry (Pink, Christina Aguilera), John Shanks (Michelle Branch, the Corrs), and fast-rising production team the Matrix who, not coincidentally, also helped the aforementioned Ms. Lavigne find the perfect balance between riot grrrrl angst and teenage whimsy.

While some may equate the abundance of outside help with a lack of singular vision, Maverick's Danny Strick — who along with legendary label boss Guy Oseary is A&R-ing "Falling Uphill" — insists multiple producers allowed the young act to experiment.

"From the standpoint of growth as writers, we really wanted them to have a chance to stretch and experiment," Strick says from L.A. "We wanted them to explore writing and they got along great with everybody. I could see them working with any of these people again.

"And they make a lot of sense for us at Maverick," Strick continues. "We were very early out of the gate with Michelle Branch and I think Lillix are a good fit. They're very organic; they write their own songs, they play their own instruments and they've been playing together since they were little girls, so they're not manufactured.

"I think they're going to work with a broad demographic of people. Yes, people 18, 19 are going to get it, but there's definitely the potential to reach people in their 30, so I think the core will be more age 14 to 34 of both guys and girls. The great thing about Lillix is they're girls that other girls want to be and girls that guys want to date, so they really have it all."

It also doesn't hurt that the now Vancouver-based Lillix — guitarist Tasha-Ray Evin, her sister, keyboardist Lacey-Lee Evin, bassist Louise Burns and drummer Kim Urhahn — have attorney Jonathan Simkin as manager. Simkin, who also co-founded label/production company 604 with Nickelback's Chad Kroeger, discovered the band in an earlier incarnation as Tigerlily, and can be counted on to steer the group around many potential business pitfalls.

And though Warner Music Canada inherited the band from an affiliate label, Marketing Manager Jo Faloona says their strategy for north of the 49th parallel is their own. Moreover, Faloona insists the label is committed to the group despite the fact they were signed outside of the country.

"Touring across Canada is key for us," Faloona says, noting that Lillix "has been getting fantastic response at radio. Indeed, their first single, "It's About Time," was number one most added at AC, second most added at CHR and second most added overall in Canada. The band is likewise soaring on MTV's TRL Countdown.

Faloona continues: "We expect to have a lot of time with the band, both on tour and press dates around the release of the record. We want to have access to the band and we want them in the market.

"And yes, they're committed to us, we're committed to them. We've had situations before where acts that were signed in the States began to slow down there, but our pace remained steady. We've been able to continue breaking singles here even when things weren't happening in America.

"With Lillix, we're off to a strong start and everyone here is very excited." ♦



*Applaud!  
Canadian music  
on the world stage*

*June 2003, Vol.1 #4*



Kathleen Edwards:  
A rootsy songwriter  
scores internationally

There's one thing the people working with rootsy singer-songwriters Kathleen Edwards have learned, it's that deeper, darker winter, traditionally a slump season for rampant music, is the ideal time to launch a new artist.

Consider the achievements already banked by the Ottawa native's debut *Failer* disc, released in the United States in January through Rounder and re-launched in Canada by MapleMusic Recordings.

First, she earned a major plug as one-to-watch (alongside John Mayer and White Stripes) in *Rolling Stone*. That was followed by slots in *Time*, *People* and *Entertainment Weekly*, an appearance on *The Late Show* with David Letterman, singles from L.A. to Boston, and major video support across Canada for the single, "Six O'clock News." Even critical comparisons — in Edwards's case to heartbreak honey Lucinda Williams — have been leveled with an enthusiasm bordering on rapturous.

That's impressive stuff for anybody, but it's downright huge for a virtual unknown crafting sepia-toned, country-dusted tales about heartache, booze, and the space in between. Clearly Edwards's songs, though quietly compelling, are punching through. "Timing was key," insists manager Patrick Sambrook, whose Eggplant Management also represents another major pop singer-songwriter, Sarah Harmer. "Last year was tough for the majors and they stacked a lot of heavy releases in the fourth quarter. By the beginning of this year, that wasn't

much left. That's where we came along, right through that little window."

As is typical with Canadian artists, success abroad — mostly in the U.S. — has sparked heightened interest back home. Although MapleMusic unleashed *Failer* in late fall with what GM Kim Cooke describes as "an intentional soft launch," the album has soared since January, thanks to Edwards's ubiquitous U.S. press presence. Cooke notes correctly, however, that Canadian press was similarly positive when the album first dropped.

The background right now is radio," says Cooke. "In the U.S., she's not in getting Triple-A, and Hot AC is on the verge of adding it. Of course,

there is no comparable format (or Triple-A) in Canada, so the battle is finding believers at what may be termed hot AC. "Considering that right now there are a few records with some degree of country getting spins (The Dixie Chicks' "Waiting Soldier" and "Landslide" and Kid Rock's "Picture," with Sheryl Crow) we're taking that as a positive sign."

Strong interest in Europe and insistent support from Rounder likewise point to positive events in Edwards's future. Manager Sambrook says early notices in the hype-friendly British press have been great and tour dates throughout the UK, France, Holland, Belgium and Scandinavia are planned for spring.

Wandering into the frame at exactly the right time

Music Week, the British trade magazine, and *Spin* (Canadian singer-songwriter has spent possibly wandering into the frame at exactly the right time," adding that the move was "intuitive and lovingly put together."

Response like this helped land

Continued on page 3



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Canadian Music on the World Stage

3

# Kathleen Edwards: A rootsy songwriter scores internationally

By Kim Hughes

If there's one thing those working with rootsy singer-songwriter Kathleen Edwards have learned, it's that deepest, darkest winter, traditionally a slump season for marquee music, is the ideal time to break a new artist.

Consider the achievements already banked by the Ottawa native's debut *Failer* disc, released stateside in January through Rounder and re-launched in Canada by MapleMusic Recordings. First, she earned a major plug as one-to-watch (alongside John Mayer and White Stripes) in *Rolling Stone* magazine.

That was followed by raves in *Time*, *People* and *Entertainment Weekly*, an appearance on *Late Show* with David Letterman, airplay from L.A. to Boston, and major video support across Canada for the single, "Six O'clock News." Even critical comparisons — in Edwards's case to heartbreak honey Lucinda Williams — have been leveled with an enthusiasm bordering on rapturous.

That's impressive stuff for anybody, but it's downright huge for a virtual unknown (albeit classically trained) crafting sepia-toned, country-dusted tales about heartache, booze, and the space in between. Clearly Edwards's songs, though quietly compelling, are punching through.

"Timing was key," insists manager Patrick Sambrook, who also represents pop singer-songwriter Sarah Harmer. "Last year was tough for the majors and they stacked a lot of heavy releases in the fourth quarter. By the beginning of this year, there wasn't much left. That's when we came along, right through that little window."

As is typical with Canadian artists, success abroad — notably in the U.S. — has sparked heightened interest back home. Although MapleMusic unleashed *Failer*, sans video, in fall of 2002 with what GM Kim Cooke describes as an "intentional soft launch," the album has soared since January 2003 thanks to Edwards's ubiquitous U.S. press presence. Cooke notes correctly, however, that Canadian press was similarly positive when the album first dropped.

Of 8,000 units shipped to Canadian retail since January, Cooke estimates 3,500 have scanned, adding, "The battle-ground right now is radio. In the U.S., the record is getting Triple-A, and hot AC is on the verge of adding it. Of course, there is no comparable format (to Triple-A) in Canada, so the battle is finding believers at what may be termed hot AC.

"Considering that right now there's two records with some degree of country getting spins (Dixie Chick's "Landslide" and Kid Rock's "Picture," with Sheryl Crow) we're taking that as a positive sign."

Strong interest in Europe and resolute support from Rounder likewise point to positive events in Edwards's future. Manager Sambrook says early notices in the hype-friendly British press have been great and tour dates throughout the UK, France, Holland, Belgium and Scandanavia are planned for spring. The disc, distributed in Europe through Rounder via the Holland-based Continental Record Services (CRS), is expected to help land Edwards a spot at this year's Glastonbury Festival, which could open the doors even wider.

According to Sambrook, an appearance at last year's South by Southwest Festival pretty much sealed the deal for straight-shooting 24-year-old singer who now makes her home in rural Quebec. Sambrook says that while several labels were sniffing around, Rounder was especially well represented. Manager and label already had a relationship — Harmer is also handled by Rounder — and Sambrook says Rounder publicity head Jeff Walker "absolutely loved the record."

James Horan, Rounder's Senior Director of Product Management, seconded Walker's declaration when he caught Edwards later in 2002 at Toronto's North by Northeast Festival. "I was blown away," Horan says. "It was one of the best shows I have ever seen, and I do not use those words lightly. After her first song, "National Steel," I knew that she had "it"; that she could be a star. You don't see that very often."

Horan says the initial marketing plan for Edwards was to target alt-country and Americana radio, adding, "We knew it would be a big press record, but we had no idea how big. And we knew we'd get some Triple-A radio, but we had no idea how quickly it would be accepted there either.

"The plan has definitely changed," Horan confirms. "When the crossover begins on day one, the focus quickly shifts in all areas. We still want the "No Depression" crowd to dig the record, but we're already selling it to the *People* magazine crowd. Our target audience became "all music buyers" very quickly.

"There are a lot of people saying that Kathleen could be the Norah Jones of 2003," Horan says, referring to the dark horse jazz-pop artist who recently emerged as 2002's Grammy queen.

"That is our hope. At the very least, she has a long career ahead of her, and it's very encouraging to see great music like hers accepted so readily by the public. It gives me hope for the future of this business." 🍷

Applaud!  
Canadian music  
on the world stage

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# The basic truth: you reap what you sow

By Kim Hughes

Cliches are clichés for a reason – they point up basic truths. Absence does make the heart grow fonder. Money can’t buy happiness. Those rare successful marriages are made in heaven. And you absolutely, positively reap what you sow.

This last point I know to be irrevocably true because of a legally blind, partially deaf, ridiculously fit and feisty 72-year-old man named Merle. In the course of a recent weekend, Merle reminded me that the rewards of simple human generosity and richer than the random for 1,000 kings.

Rewind to January, 2001. I am living and working in Seattle, having been lured there by the promise of a snazzy job with a cutting-edge firm. The reality? The job is a snooze, the city makes Grimsby, Ont. seem cosmopolitan and I discover that I am very, very fond of the boyfriend I left back in Toronto.

Frustrated and lonely, I decide some volunteer work might help assuage the bad karma I seem to have somehow accumulated. A quick Web search leads me to Community Services for the Blind and Partially Sighted. This seems perfect. I am screened, letters of recommendation are drafted and, a few weeks later, I am handed a telephone number and an address. An assignment. Merle.

Luckily for us both, you sometimes get a second chance to make a first impression. Following the advice of the Community Services worker, I call Merle to arrange an informal meeting. My duties are basic – opening his mail, writing cheques, reading newspaper clippings – but I’m working alone with him in his home. Chemistry counts.

A Tuesday evening, 7 pm. Eight rings before a muffled hello. “Good evening, is that Mr. Griff?” I ask cheerily. There’s a pause before I venture forth again. “Sir?” And then he lets me have it. “Are you one of those people trying to sell me things? I’ve had just about enough of these phone calls. If I want something I’ll go to the store and buy it. You’ve got a lot of nerve bothering folks in their homes at night.”

I am dumbstruck, horrified, but I learn my first lesson about Merle. He has, in his words, a big mouth, and that’s crucial for a single old man with failed vision and so-so hearing trying to negotiate a caffeinated world.

I stammer an explanation about Community Services and how I was advised to contact him and, oh, um, I thought he was expecting my call. He’s convinced (although not contrite) and soon Merle and I are discussing Vivaldi and Europe and what night works best for an introductory cocktail (!) before we get down to business.

On that introductory-cocktail day, it takes all of 10 seconds for me to realize that Merle and I are going to get along fine; he greets me warmly at his apartment, gives me a gentle hug and tells me I smell terrific before grabbing his white cane and leading me toward his favourite neighbourhood bar.

There, he vividly grocery-lists a life lived well – travels through Israel, Russia and Japan, three marriages (four daughters, one son), and the value of a good glass of scotch. As with most volunteer work of this kind, it’s clear the gig with Merle is as much about companionship as it is hydro bills being paid on time. But he makes it so easy, what with the trips to the Seattle Symphony and the dinners and the endless stories recalled with unfailing detail. For a few hours each week, he gets a friendly ear and I get to feel like I’m not a continent away from every member of my family.

Many months later when it’s time to tell Merle I’ve negotiated a new job back in Toronto and will be leaving Seattle for good, I know it means more than just another call to Community Services. This is very likely the end of our relationship, a predicament exacerbated by the fact that Merle deftly expands his roster of admirers by wowing my boyfriend when he comes to Washington to help me pack.

Letters and phone calls help bridge the distance between Merle and me, but after seven months apart, our intimacy is eroding. Merle isn’t getting any younger, and we’re not solvent enough to withstand the brutality of the exchange rate. Something needs to be done.

With the three-day Canadian Thanksgiving holiday looming, my boyfriend and I decide, on a whim, to invite Merle to Toronto. It’s a tall order – he’d be traveling alone and he’d have to stay in a hotel since we can’t properly accommodate him. But, as they say, a change is a good as a rest, and Merle could use both. He agrees. He arrives.

On one outing, we arrive midday Saturday at Niagara Falls. It’s the one thing Merle most wants to see, and while we have a full schedule of dinners, drinks and introductions ahead of us, this quickly emerges as the trip highlight. We walk along the railing that overlooks this most magnificent of spectacles and are drenched from the mist. Merle keeps stroking his splattered jacket in amazement. But he’s beaming; he’s having a ball.

He asks about a million questions and marvels at how close we are to New York State. With conspiratorial flare, he actually leans in close to suggest that he’s heard the Canadian side of the Falls is better than the American side.

On the drive back to Toronto, as Merle merrily recalls a chance meeting with Albert Einstein at a Passover Seder in April of ’45, my boyfriend and I exchange astonished, can-you-believe-this-guy looks in the rear-view mirror.

Before the weekend in done, Merle will dazzle our friends, tell us more stories than we will ever remember, cheekily enjoy a glass of Red Breast Irish whiskey, learn the names of half the Novotel’s staff, make us laugh out loud, flatten us with his sorrow over his prematurely deceased daughter, declare his new-found confidence, propose a future meeting in Chicago, and proclaim our friendship one of the best things that’s ever happened to him.

Oh Merle: Likewise, I’m sure. ♦