

LITERALLY SPEAKING

Issue no. 9 • FREE

Edited by Stet Press

Saturday 21st October 2000

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Booktastic

By ANDREW PRIMROSE

'Darling, you can't find women who aren't gainfully employed on a Friday afternoon' explained one of the exclusively male panel assembled to choose the Best Books of the Century yesterday. There were twenty categories - some with blurred boundaries - out of which time constrained the panel of Geoffrey Moorhouse, Sheridan Morley and Frederic Raphael to discuss only five. The selection of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* as best novel led one questioner to define important books as 'unreadable'. Indeed, neither Morley nor Moorhouse has finished the epic, though the former jokingly referred to himself as a 'measure of pretentiousness'. Raphael defended Proust, telling the audience that it took 'time and cowardice' to question its supremacy.

In the travel section, Byron's *The Road to Oxiana* won, having received a great deal of praise for its casual scholarship and enlivening flippancy. The decline of objectivity in this genre was bemoaned by the panel, who all agreed: 'These days you are lucky if the travel writer is not a celebrity chef - or worse'. (They get worse?)

The shortlist contained many oversights. The panel concurred that the primary among these were the lack of short-listed material from the last 30 years and the absence from the list of Vladimir Nabokov.

For, like the endless debate on literary merit, 'a classic is a book that has never finished saying what it has to say'. Long may it continue.

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Morley's the Pity

By JAMIE STREET
& SIMON WALKER

Undoubtedly one of the highlights of the festival, although the connection with literature seemed fairly tenuous, Sheridan Morley and Michael Law presented a nostalgic journey through the cabaret of the 1930s and 40s from New York, Paris, Vienna and the 'Indo-China' continent. The singer/pianist/director, Law, and Radio 2 presenter, Morley, alternated between music and anecdotes to present a thoroughly enjoyable presentation.

Morley relished reminiscing about long-gone figures such as Noel Coward, Jack Buchanan and Ivor Novello. He enjoyed recounting stories of theatre, such as when Stanley Holloway emerged from a stage door to see a disliked colleague being pestered by a woman autograph



hunter who was tapping his arm with her autograph book. The actor pronounced, 'This is truly a unique occurrence; for the first time in history the fan has hit the shit.' He also read from books by authors including Noel Coward and Alan Bennett.

The set from Michael Law included classics such as *Mad Dogs and Englishmen*, *Paris in The Spring* and *Hungry Women*. Cole Porter's songs also made a welcome appearance. The spectators were roused by stirring and often humorous renditions. It was, however, ambitious to attempt to fill an hour and a half slot with quality songs; there were dull periods, and the music was sometimes too soothing for the audience's OAPs. The climax of Tom Lehrer's *Vatican Rag* took us out on a high of retrospective memories, though. Look out for further performances by the talented pair.

Creative Carpentry

By ZARAH HIBLE

The fundamental question about writing musical biography is 'does the man make the music or the music make the man?' Wherever the biographer begins, the essence is literally 'getting the record right', in lives surrounded by public myth.

In their individual styles, Humphrey Carpenter, David Cairn and Humphrey Burton illuminated that dilemma.

What makes a musical biography so fascinating and challenging is that composers provide 'music (instead of words) as the inner text of the life story'. One must listen to the music to 'get to the heart of the life'.

The idea that 'in life is the explana-



tion of what is in the music' provoked arguments about a 'Freudian Insight'. These distinguished speakers challenged each other's conflicting views.

Was Carpenter reading too much sexual tension into the music of Britten (a homosexual)?

Or was Burton refusing to see that music traces 'the clues and meaning we avoid'? With Berlioz, for example, 'one cannot psycho-analyse the dead'. Nor understand the workings of the mind; but a biographer should try. Also, one must explore creativity. Though this is a challenging task, everyone on the panel agreed that the greatest problem is the lack of market for musical biographies. Are we less musically literate as a society?

Diplomas & Diplomacy

By ROSS JONES

& MATTHEW LAING

Libby Purves and Katie Hickman strutted on stage accompanied by their trusty reader, Stephanie Cole, and the audience became ecstatic with anticipation. They were not disappointed - the threesome treated them to a blistering live set of diplomatic anecdotes, interspersed with emotive readings from Purves' work.

With an informal style, the two stars interviewed each other about the plight of diplomatic wives everywhere which has been largely ignored by the mainstream media. The talk was littered with comic moments, but did not shy away from the more serious aspects of the job.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHTS

•
Tony Hawks & David Aaronovitch
Everyman, 12-1pm

•
The Laurie Lee Lecture, by Andrew Motion
Town Hall, 5:30-6:45pm

•
Linton Kwesi Johnson & Fred D'Aguiar
Town Hall, 7-8pm

•
2000 & Two Space Oddities
Town Hall, 10pm-late

101 Winner: 'Flood'

BY SUE JOHNSON

Julia's house was disappearing under a layer of dust. Flies crowded the window sill beach, legs in the air. The muddy kitchen floor was patterned with paw prints of stray cats. Cobwebs hung like grey curtains.

Julia did not care any more. Her mother's sampler mocked her. 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness.' Julia turned it to face the wall.

Then the rain started. A torrent of water that was Biblical in intensity. The stream at the bottom of the garden swelled and crept until it surrounded the house like a moat.

Julia stared at the rising water. Too late to repent.

Congratulations to Sue Johnson. She wins a copy of Dan Rhodes' Anthropology and her story, 'Flood', will appear in The Independent. Four runners-up, Geoffrey Adams, Derek Skinner, Jill Williams and Maureen Dew, also win a copy of Dan's Book. A big thanks to all those who participated.

Herstory

BY KATE NICHOLLS

Historical novelist Alison Weir today delivered a well-researched discourse on the roles of women in history. With wit, vitality and pace, this talk focused specifically on Henry VIII's six wives and his daughters, Mary and Elizabeth. Weir's talk provided us with a valuable insight into the confines and oppression that existed before female emancipation could finally be reached. With classic quotations such as 'women were made to serve and obey man' and 'woman was an instrument of the devil', she made her point effectively.

A large proportion of the talk focused on the largely unknown sexual activities of Henry's wives (Anne Boleyn was accused of adultery 22 times). This was a talk which allowed Weir to engage with her readers and demonstrate her detailed research. Her other knowledge, however, may be lacking; when asked who is England's strongest modern woman, there was long hesitation until she reluctantly named Victoria Beckham!

Oh, the Horovitz!

BY JON ANDRIESEN

I was chasing a lead, something about poetry and jazz, the man said, 'jazz and poetry. Subtone; be there'. I walked in, Sam bought the drinks. I like Sam.

Stan Tracey played piano, jumpin' jazz piano, reminded me of Mingus and the audience responded.

Inga Elsa Laird read from *The Pop Anthology*, tapping a stick on a lyre as she harmonised 'all things white'.

Next up Michael Horovitz, reading passages from his anthology, *Poetry Olympics Weekend*. Tom Jones tomfoolery and a haiku from John Cooper-Clarke (ending 'diffic'), and then some spirited stuff of his own. Memories of Oliver Postgate flooded back during a passionate whimsy with

the Larkinesque ending, 'words fail'. An ode to Tony's Britain sang to the tune of *Auld Lang Syne* allowed a fine air of levity to sweep the floor.

After the break Stan came back with more chopping chimes and a smile on his face. I guess the interval drinks had taken effect.

As the audience bulged, we met Adam Horovitz - a man prepared for this. A presence as large as his audience's response, Adam held

cheer and applause after every stanza. This was something real, something true, something to sound the trumpet of Voices Off. *The Lloyds Prayer* left satire looking for a new definition 'in Lloyds as it is in Nat West'.

Great joy, great fun and a damn fine venue left me with no new leads, but a very happy heart.



War of Words

BY JOCELYN WALBRIDGE

A relaxed and responsive audience enjoyed readings by Kate Clanchy and Sophie Hannah yesterday afternoon. Clanchy's poems received much approval, particularly *War Poetry*, which gave a popular topic a refreshing touch. This was a well balanced selection with funny, sad and thought-provoking parts that kept the audience attentive.

Sophie Hannah followed with her collection of amusing poems, although the forced rhyming was hard to bear at times. A pity, as her chosen subjects had scope for much more. However, ripples of laughter circulated the room at regular intervals, even at her comment: 'I don't hold with audience participation'.

Listening to the poets explaining the ideas behind the poems provided an invaluable insight into their work. Overall an enjoyable event.

The right to Romesh

BY JOCELYN WALBRIDGE

& CHRISTIAN PAYNE

This weekend welcomes the second guest director of the Festival, Romesh Gunsekera, who has programmed six events over the past two days. Having only previously been involved in festivals as a performer, this invitation has offered him a completely different experience.

Exploring the theme of space, he has focused on the idea that space must have boundaries which can be crossed. He has tried to include writers in his programme who will add an

international flavour to the Festival and who investigate a sense of place in their work. He admires writers who 'break out of the bounds' of novel and verse, fiction and non-fiction, and

who challenge the idea that poetry cannot or should not be translated. He hopes that the audience will be 'excited by writers that they may not have come across before' and, in addition, hopes that when they visit the Festival they will 'feel that they have discovered something new'.

As a writer himself, he is influenced by 'everything you have read before'. Enthusiastic, intelligent, amiable; he should present an energetic and vibrant series of events.



The Stoat

Libby Purves wasn't always the star she is today. Her first book, *All About Siam*, ascertained: "Bangkok is very hot. That is why there is no snow there."

David Aaronovitch, after two people left his event in wheelchairs: "I'm not taking it personally."

THE TEAM

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