

## Heart of Gold : Thirty Years of Canadian Pop Music

by Martin Melhuish, published by CBC Enterprises, 200 pp., \$24.95. ISBN 0-88794-112-5.

In his introduction to *Heart of Gold, 30 Years of Canadian Pop Music* (published as a companion to last year's *Heart of Gold* Superspecial), author Martin Melhuish tells us that he hopes the book "will act as a primer for anyone interested in Canadian popular music." And it does - in several senses.

Like any good primer, *Heart of Gold* gives us a broad overview of the subject. Jazz, blues, rock, folk, country, new wave, MOR and heavy metal are covered. The music centres in Vancouver, Toronto and Quebec are noted (the chapter on Quebec is the best in the book). Large numbers of artists, stars and sidemen alike, are named and their careers outlined in terms of the bands they played in, when they left them, the other facets of the music business they've become involved in, the levels of commercial and critical acclaim they've received and the records they've made. The outlines appear to be complete enough, though no actual discographies are presented, to make the book a valuable item for collectors, journalists and fans of any particular artist. I say 'appear' because nowhere in *Heart of Gold* is there a single word given to either Stompin' Tom Connors or Sneezy Waters and his performance in *Hank Williams: The Show He Never Gave*, both major omissions that cast doubt on the rest of the book's coverage.

Also in typical primer fashion, *Heart of Gold* doesn't go much beyond its lists. If you're looking for something in the way of description, depth or perspective, this isn't the place to find it. In an entire (brief) chapter devoted to Gino Vanelli, we learn nothing of his music, except that his band uses no guitars and that he had a following among American blacks. His character is summed up in "chutzpah" (his own word) and criticism is confined to the statement that Herb Alpert liked his demo tapes. While it can be argued that criticism is not a legitimate function for a primer, description surely must be. Melhuish, however, consistently avoids both.

Though Yorkville and the hippies and the political context of Quebec pop are discussed, everywhere else Melhuish tends to avoid making any connections between the music and the times that produced it. Thus, though we're told that rock in the '50s grew out of rhythm 'n blues, black American music, and that white vocal groups, like the Diamonds, covered black originals, we're never told why (the short answer is racism), or how the cover versions changed the sound (less impassioned vocals, a tendency to use lush strings and a smoother, more produced overall sound).

Similarly, though we're told time and time again that "so-and-so got a recording contract", we're given no idea of what is given and what received, nor that there are such things as good recording contracts and bad ones. It's an omission that effectively banishes from *Heart of Gold's* pop world any question of the exploitation of the artist or of a career suffering from record company mishandling.

In discussing the record business itself, we're told that once Canadians had to go to the U.S. to record and make it big and now, thanks in part to the CRTC's Canadian content decision, they don't, and that once Canadians didn't like or support local talent and now they do. And that's all we're told - no word on the politics, economics and work of making and distributing a record, either as a subject on its own, or in terms of facing American competition and protectionism. Once again, we get pop divorced from the real world.

Melhuish's prose style is just as much geared toward the primer as his content. Though we do get the occasional howler: "English-speaking musicians tend to band together though, and on any given night... you could often find many of the top English-speaking acts... rubbing elbows with the superstars... of the French side of the industry," (p. 188), we're more often treated to the likes of, "For all of the hype and stardom, Murray has been virtually unchanged by her life in show business." Press release for the under-fives.

What Melhuish does with his words of gold is tell anecdotes. Some of them are even amusing; it's hard to make somebody like Ronnie Hawkins bland. Most of them, however, focus on the ways luck, pluck and perseverance pay off for nice, talented people. And nice they are. Every hint of ordinary human vice, suffering, nastiness and conflict has been carefully removed or sanitized for your protection. The mindset is one hundred per cent *Readers' Digest*.

By the way, there are lots of photos. Most of them are publicity stills and the captions make the rest of the writing look good.

It's not hard to imagine somebody reading this and thinking, "Give it a break, eh. It's a coffee table book on a trivial subject. It's not supposed to be serious." Well, no, it isn't. But it is supposed to be an introduction to the subject. I can only think of one other primer that approaches its subject by pretending large parts of it don't exist and sanitizing the rest: the subject is life in the 20th century and the primer is *Dick and Jane*.

Andrew Dowler ●

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## For Reference and Research

In *The Film Director's Team*, two experienced Hollywood assistant directors, Alain Silver and Elizabeth Ward, describe with thorough professionalism their essential and complex job. In this explicit and comprehensive manual, they cover in detail the duties and procedures of 1st and 2nd ADs, production manager, unit production manager, location manager and production coordinator. Sponsored by the Special Projects Committee of the Directors Guild of America, this is an authoritative guide to a pivotal production activity (*Arco \$14.95*).

A valuable source of information for television commercial production in the Eastern U.S., *NYPG: New York Production Guide*, edited by Joan Babchak and Susan Paskoski, lists over 200 suppliers of goods and services in categories correlated with the standard bidding forms of the Association of Independent Commercial Producers (*NYPG, New York, \$45*).

An exhaustive survey of worldwide film, television and video industry facilities, *Kay's International Production Manual* provides reliable and detailed data on the availability of technical personnel, equipment and services in 55 countries around the globe (*Birns & Sawyer, Hollywood, \$30*).

The historic role of Russian and Soviet films in the development of cinematic art is assessed with scholarly concern and sharp attention to detail in the updated edition of *Kino*, Jay Leyda's fundamental study. It probes with keen insight the impact of war and revolution on the content of films (*Princeton U. Press \$40, \$12.95 in paperback*).

In its second yearly edition, Mike Kaplan's *Variety International Show Business Reference 1983* carries some 6500 current biographies of film, TV and stage personalities, as well as a complete compilation of Oscar, Emmy, Tony, Grammy and Pulitzer Prize winners and nominees for the last two years (*Garland \$75*).

In *Halliwel's Film Guide* (2nd edition), over 10,000 movies produced during the last 50 years are catalogued and expertly evaluated. Leslie Halliwell's encyclopedic survey provides full credits, synopses, ratings and excerpts from reviews in a useful, fact-filled volume (*Scribner's \$16.95*).

Able edited by Dan Georgakas and Lenny Rubenstein, *The Cinéaste Interviews* assembles stimulating colloquia originally published in the independent quarterly *Cinéaste*. The emphasis is on film's social thrust, political censorship, creative freedom. Notable directors (Fassbinder, Bertolucci, Paul Schrader, Bernard Tavernier, Gordon Parks, Costa-Gavras) speak their mind on art and politics in contemporary cinema (*Cinéaste, New York, \$25/11.95*).

## Aspects of Cinema

John Culhane's definitive study of an animation classic, *Walt Disney's Fantasia* explores with imagination and scholarly knowhow the making of that milestone movie. Lavishly illustrated with sketches, storyboards and film frames, quoting office memoranda, conference transcripts and interviews, Culhane follows in details the creative

process that established a new art form (*Abrams \$35*).

Edited by B. Nelson Bridwell, *Superman: From the '30s and the '80s* tells the full story of the Superman character from comic books to film spectacles in over 300 color and b&w reproductions of the original strips. A knowledgeable introduction describes Superman's evolution over his 45 years of adventurous existence (*Crown \$14.95*).

Identical in format and design, three attractive and profusely illustrated books focus on popular movie stars. *The Film of Burt Reynolds* by Nancy Streebeck, *Cary Grant* by Donald Deschner and *Clint Eastwood* by Boris Zmijewsky and Lee Pfeiffer include complete bio-filmographies, plot summaries and press review excerpts (*Citadel \$9.95 ea.*).

In *Great Hollywood Movies*, a sumptuous, outside (10 x 13) volume, Ted Sennett pays homage to seven decades of film history. His discerning selection in each genre singles out motion pictures of lasting value which he describes in a lively, informative style and illustrates with 375 handsome color and b&w photographs (*Abrams \$49.95*).

Richard Prince's hauntingly scripted scenes create, in *Why I Go To the Movies Alone*, the film-like atmosphere of an urban world in transition, waiting for the directorial touch of a Bunuel or an Antonioni (*Tanam Press \$5.95*).

## Crafts and Techniques

How to get the most out of your home video system is effectively demonstrated in *The Home Video Survival Guide* by Henry B. Cohen, editor of the popular *Video* magazine, and Bruce Apar. While their earlier volume, *The Home Video Book*, spelled out the fundamentals of video, their new book provides practical and detailed guidance to its current state-of-the-art technology. Extensive descriptions of equipment, utilization and maintenance, expert shopping advice, and overall experienced approach recommend it highly to home video enthusiasts (*Watson-Guptill/Amphoto \$9.95*).

Larry Langman's timely volume, *The Video Encyclopedia* brings welcome understanding to the terminology of the spreading video medium. Comprehensive in scope, the book defines with precision and clarity over 1000 words, phrases and acronyms current in video language, including television and satellite-related terms (*Garland \$19*).

Available now in paperback, a detailed and clearly written manual by an experienced producer, Gregory Goddell's *Independent Feature Film Production* deals with privately financed, modestly budgeted movies. Planning, shooting and completion, as well as legal matters, financing and distribution/marketing are expertly discussed (*St. Martin's \$7.95*).

Anton Wilson's popular columns in *The American Cinematographer* are collected in *Cinema Workshop*, a volume of valuable advice on the techniques of camera work. Conventional and electronic cinematography, cameras and accessories, raw stock, lights, sound are expertly covered among other subjects in this authoritative reference manual (*American Cinematographer, Hollywood, \$8.85 + \$1 postage*).

George L. George ●



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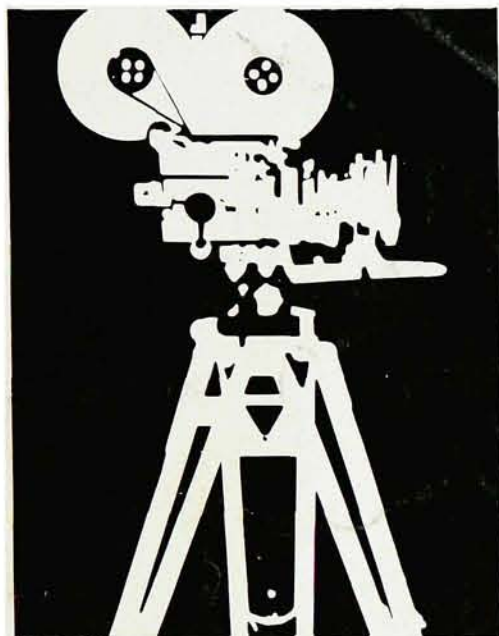
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