

Gavin's Woodpile – The Bruce Cockburn Newsletter

Edited by Daniel Keebler

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Success Without Compromise

The following is from The Canadian, written by Patricia Holtz. It was originally published in 1976.

Bruce Cockburn has been thinking. About love and myths and life on the road; about living on his songs. And after all this time – nearly a decade of writing, performing and watching his following grow – you'd expect him either to have reconciled himself to the unceasing adulation of his fans and the machinations of industry men – or to have quit, disillusioned.

But he's done neither, and in the process of ignoring nearly every convention of the music business Cockburn (pronounced Coe-burn) has established a rock-solid reputation for himself. More significantly, at a time when critical applause often echoes down halls of poverty and the prime requisite of musical marketability is not necessarily, ah, exceptional talent, he has earned his reputation while unobtrusively, but regularly, making his way to the bank.

Bruce Cockburn, 31, engaging young man from the Ottawa Valley, today enjoys a measure of success and professional recognition previously known only to a handful of his contemporaries and never before to one who has chosen to keep his career solely within this country. His thoughtfully crafted jazz- and folk-oriented lyrics and considerable talent with the guitar, dulcimer and a variety of more esoteric ethnic instruments, have sold more than 300,000 albums in the last six and one half years (roughly 70 per cent to Canadians) and gained him a French- and English-Canadian audience that is amazingly devoted. (His songs are in English, but the last three of his five albums have included French translations and he speaks enough French to explain his songs and converse with French-speaking audiences.) Though no one associated with Cockburn even breathes when the word money is mentioned, it's safe to say he's comfortable. An associate of Sam "The Record Man" Sniderman coughs uncontrollably when asked if \$100,000 is a possibility this year and only catches his breath long enough to apologize and gasp, "At least." Later, Walt Grealis of RPM, the industry's trade paper, estimates Cockburn's earnings for 1976 – based on a 33-concert tour in progress now and projected sales this year of close to 60,000 albums – as well over a quarter of a million dollars.

That rarity of rarities, Cockburn is a success. Though his music has never received Top 40 airplay (FM stations, and Toronto's CHUM-FM in particular, have been his biggest supporters), it is widely known. And though his reputation at this point extends far beyond national borders, Cockburn still has no immediate plans to extend his performing beyond Canada. In fact, he parted company with his first record distributor, Epic, because he wasn't interested in lengthy tours to promote his songs elsewhere.

No, he definitely doesn't want the sort of fame that calls for servitude or endless compromise, and when he says quite simply he'll only have fame on his terms, he's not being arrogant so much as ingenuous. It can hardly be called naïveté if he's already managed it so well on his terms for so long.

So who is this fellow and why isn't Cockburn a household word? He's an unpretentious little guy, with a penchant for old corduroys and well-aged sweaters, and even though he spends as much time as he can manage out of doors and in the country, the first impression he exudes is that of a fellow in a college library digging through the stacks. When I met him for the first time just before Christmas he wore a battered felt fedora over the wispy mass of strawberry hair, and wire-rimmed glasses, and looked like some eager young Whole-Earth cousin and absolutely not like a musical whiz kid.

In everyday surroundings, he tends to fade into the background. His manager's bare feet make a greater impression than anything about Cockburn, and I realize almost immediately that nothing could please Cockburn more. Sitting down to talk, he seems to blend with the chair he's in, until – very soon – I'm listening to a voice, like Dorothy and the Wizard, more than to another person. Cockburn's thoughts surface only after each one has been carefully screened – he is shy and cares an extreme amount about his privacy. He verbalizes much more slowly and deliberately in an interview than when he is performing, simply because he takes time to study every question from every possible angle before deciding to answer it. The whole idea of interviews seems to him like an unnecessary intrusion – after all, the music is all that should matter, and if it is good, then it should be able to survive on its own merit. "I'm glad if my music can mean something personal to other people," he says, "but if it doesn't, I'm not going to worry. And I certainly can't try to change it to make it work for others if, in the process, it's not going to work for me."

So far, that hasn't been a problem. When Cockburn performs, it is almost always to sold-out houses. "Anyone who likes Bruce's music," one friend tells me, "likes it so much – it means such a lot to his fans – that he's almost bound to attend any Cockburn concert he can get to." He doesn't inspire a casual following, but those who do fall, fall all the way. Most Cockburn fans are young (younger than Cockburn, I should guess, by five or 10 years) and earnest – and they know all the lyrics of all the songs so well that in concerts there is often a great burst of applause at the recognition of a favorite song after no more than the first chord has been played. They are a reverent bunch, most of them undergraduate types who give the impression of coming to sit at the feet of the master. Anyone who dares whisper during a song will quickly be glared into silence, and after a Cockburn concert, everyone files silently out, whispering their way into the night.

Cockburn's songs today, if they've become a bit harder or wiser, are also expressive of a deeper, more intense faith and understanding than his early ones, and his mastery of the guitar is sufficient to impress even the most concert-hardened critics, who almost routinely now call his playing "accomplished and amazingly complex," "technically perfect," and "probably the best music ever recorded in Canada." A writer for RPM has speculated that Cockburn "is one of the finest guitarists anywhere and that his technical virtuosity is nothing short of brilliant."

Those most likely to be called his contemporaries – other soft, folk-oriented performers – seem to have virtually no effect on his style or content, probably because his roots are not limited just to folk but instead run deep into ethnic music and jazz. As for writing for those other performers, Cockburn won't.

Though his songs have been recorded by Tom Rush, Valdy, John Allan Cameron, Anne Murray, Mary Hopkins and others (and he allows as how, yes, it is flattering), it basically strikes him as weird to hear private thoughts piped back by someone else's voice. Jazz (he mentions the influence of the French gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt), traditional folk tunes, African and Indian patterns, the music of street-corner beggars, songs perhaps only heard once, never written down, all impress him far more than Top 40 or other FM music. We talked about the simplicity of some of the music (none of it commercial) that has inspired Cockburn and about the ethics or the responsibility of composing, and in the end Cockburn shrugged and very slowly said, "I wonder sometimes. You see, I'm just not all that sure that the best music should be recorded."

Of the small collection of people and things that do matter to Cockburn, first and always is his wife, Kitty. It is quite obvious to any Cockburn fan that the muse-like Kitty, whom he married in 1969, has been a constant inspiration and guiding light for her husband, and that her own interest in music and poetry has functioned as a kind of alter ego. According to Cockburn, she plays guitar quite well herself and also writes nicely. Her one published song is the popular Starwheel, co-authored by Cockburn, on his newest album, Joy Will Find a Way.

Of all the ways their relationship has been reflected in Cockburn's compositions, perhaps the most moving example is his strong and rhythmic new Seahorse, written for their first child ("you were like a voice calling in the night"), due to be born this July. Given an extremely personal subject, the contrast between a Cockburn song and someone else's – a song, say, with the impersonal supper-club quality of You're Having My Baby – is considerable. It is true that much of Cockburn's material deals with subjects other writers would consider too personal, but he does so simply to express important feelings and he manages it without ever making it seem that he's marketing what should be left as private emotions.

Next to Kitty, at the centre of Cockburn's life, is his Christian faith. Though his songs are often a reflection of the things he loves dearly, he is a hard person to pin to actual answers on this particular subject. But one thing is certain: of late, Cockburn's religious

imagery has been more visible. Deceptively simple on occasion, it is also more fully thought out, more intellectual than in his younger writings. What six years ago was “God has buttered the land with sunlight” or “Lord, will you trade your sunlit ocean/with its writhing filigree/for any one of my thousand faces?” might today be “Oh, Satan take thy cup away/for I’ll not drink your wine today/I’ll reach for the chalice of light that stands on Jesus’ table.” This particular journey, that of poet-intellectual toward and understanding of some higher order, is by now a familiar one, but it is surprising to find Cockburn so far along at such an early age. He sees his present state of mind as the end of a long, gradual process of thought: he has said he felt for a long time he was “playing hide and seek with God” and that it wasn’t until he and Kitty were in Europe two years ago that all the thoughts came together and he acknowledged and accepted his own faith. “I had to break down and admit I was a Christian.”

Judging by his recorded music, only since then has he seemed completely free and ready to do his most searching moral work. But the new moral and, especially, the religious symbolism have been misinterpreted in a number of ways, one of them being that people have come to associate him with Jesus freaks, Pentecostal movements, hare Krishna practitioners and just about everyone else under the cosmic roof, when really he is just celebrating something essentially private.

Ironically, in a business full of compromises, Cockburn seems to have made just one, and that was the compromise that got him totally involved with music in the first place. Having haphazardly bummed his way from Norway (he got there by freighter) to France after dropping out of Grade 13 at Nepean High School in Ottawa about 13 years ago, Cockburn ultimately found himself playing simplified international Dixieland in Paris with a French trumpet player and a clarinetist from the U.S. Until, that is, they were arrested for unlawful begging (one needs a license to beg in the City of Light) and searched. Fortunately the gendarmes didn’t find a small amount of grass held by one of the trio, or a switchblade that belonged to Cockburn, but the scare was sufficient to bring him scuttling home to his parents in Ottawa.

Following his dubious Grand Tour, Cockburn agreed to study at the Berklee School of Music in Boston, Mass., to appease his anxious parents who wanted him safely enrolled in college. “Let’s just say at that point bumming around was no longer a popular idea, and since college didn’t appeal, the next best thing seemed to be music school.”

Which marked the beginning of a whole new phase of life. His previous experience had been limited to those French jazz-playing improvisations and before that to clarinet, piano and trumpet classes, and guitar lessons that began at age 14, when “for the first time, I really felt like I was a part of the music I was playing.”

It was while at Berklee that the structure of music, the philosophy of composition, and serious jazz influences first crossed Cockburn’s path. Though the quality of his best lyrics today is touched by, at most, a very few other thoughtful songwriters (singer-poets like Randy Newman, Joni Mitchell, and Phoebe Snow), his first songs were simply written “for something to do when everyone I knew was trying to write songs.” He cocks his

head sideways, then tucks his chin under in a way you soon come to associate exclusively with him. Cockburn breaks into grin and chuckles softly. He won't quote from those first lines and professes not to think about them anymore, but does admit that they were "very [chuckle] bad." And then he nods and chuckles some more. "We spent most of our energy then being stoned." The words became important a bit later.

In concert, on tour, perhaps more than in any other situation, Cockburn's refusal to play celebrity can be clearly seen. This Great Canadian Success is happiest with a tour schedule that gives him time to drive from one concert to the next. In good weather, he and Kitty usually make their way about in an eight-year-old camper, overloaded not just with tape decks, musical instruments and notebooks, but also with their sheepdog, Aroo, and a pet cat.

Cockburn never travels with an entourage, but sometimes he is really out there by himself. Late in February, after a serious bout with flu and bronchitis that caused part of the current tour to be postponed, Cockburn returned to the road with only his manager and a collection of Jorge Luis Borges' poetry for company. This time they headed west, with a third plane seat booked for the cutaway, custom-made John Larivee guitar Cockburn plays – one of the few evidences anyone is likely to see of Cockburn's financial success.

Several hours before any concert, Cockburn heads for the hall. There he will lock himself away, talking to no one, tuning and retuning, practising the more intricate guitar work over and over – a combination of nerves and total concentration that builds until he is summoned to the stage, where for close to two hours he will be calm, relaxed, conversational, assured, and very, very good.

In concert today, all that he has been is quite evident in the assortment of material he performs – it spans nearly a full seven-year period (as long as he's been recording on the True North label) and combines some of his old, simple good-time music, and a variety of instrumentals, with some quite recently written, still-unrecorded music. Other songs that are most likely still favorite worn spots on old Cockburn albums he refuses to sing, much to his fans' – and his manager's – chagrin. One such oldie is Musical Friends. Its composer says merely, "I don't have anything to say anymore with certain old songs. I can't play Musical Friends so it makes any kind of musical sense, even though a lot of people would probably like to hear it." Out with the old.

The thing you are brought to realize, seeing Cockburn in concert these days, is this: that whatever he has been and done, the man and his music are growing up, and today he is at what strikes me at least as being a very exciting crossroads. A contract with the hit-prone Island Records is a good possibility, an appearance this fall on a Murray McLauchlan special (Cockburn turned down the chance to do one of his own), and maybe in a year or two he will take his music abroad to see what the reaction is there. The dreams of a 20-year-old with few experiences aren't failing, they're being borne out in reality. The basic conflicts have been resolved philosophically and musically, and now the imagery, the structure are becoming more sophisticated, more complex. You have to wonder – since

the process is so clearly under way – if a faithful following that still adores the old songs and gets itchy listening to the new can keep pace. Will they let him go and wish him well, or expect a rehash of what’s already been done and demand their money back when he refuses? Cockburn fans are used to lyrics they can easily intellectualize. Whether they can manage the stark images of Indians poisoned by mercury – “government gambler with mouth full of steak” – that pass before the singer’s eyes as he slams newly cut wood on to a pile, and accept the implied challenge (since with Cockburn there is always a challenge), remains to be seen.

There is a song that Cockburn sings these days, Hand-dancing, and at the end the sound very slowly, very gradually fades until all that remains is the vibrating air between Cockburn and his audience. The night I heard this song, 2,600 people, a capacity crowd, were absolutely silent for those last seconds and it seemed that invisible fine gold wires of affection and shared thought ran from each person listening to Cockburn, who sat quite alone on stage.

Thinking.

**Breakfast In New Orleans Dinner In Timbuktu
Tour Dates 2000**

February 7	Nanaimo, British Columbia	The Port Theatre
February 8	Victoria, British Columbia	The MacPherson Playhouse
February 10	Vancouver, British Columbia	The Vogue Theatre
February 11	Seattle, Washington	The Moore Theatre
February 12	Portland, Oregon	The Roseland Theatre
February 13	Eugene, Oregon	South Eugene High School*
February 15	Santa Rosa, California	The Luther Burbank Center*
February 16	San Francisco, California	The Warfield
February 18	San Luis Obispo, California	Cuesta College Auditorium*
February 19	Los Angeles, California	The House Of Blues*
February 20	San Juan Capistrano, California	The Coach House*
February 22	Phoenix, Arizona	Alice Cooperstown*
February 23	Tucson, Arizona	The Rialto Theatre*
February 25	Santa Fe, New Mexico	The Paramount*
February 26	Denver, Colorado	The Paramount*
February 27	Fort Collins, Colorado	The Aggie Theatre*
March 1	Minneapolis, Minnesota	The Fitzgerald Theatre*
March 2	Madison, Wisconsin	The Barrymore Theatre*
March 3	Chicago, Illinois	The Vic

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Bruce Participates In War Child Concert

On December 31, 1999, Bruce Cockburn participated in a concert marking the official launch of War Child Canada. The event was held at Harbourfront Center in Toronto.

War Child, founded in 1993, aims to draw attention to the plight of children in zones of armed conflict. In addition, War Child implements vital humanitarian projects in support of childrens' psychological and physical rehabilitation. While the activities of War Child focused initially on war-affected children in the former Yugoslavia, in recent years the organization has expanded its operations to include relief and development projects in war-affected regions in Africa, Asia, Central America and the Middle East. By raising money through public appeals, concerts and other entertainment events, War Child is able to bring immediate material and psychological aid to traumatized children of all ages and ethnic backgrounds.

For more information visit www.warchild.ca.

A postcard marking the release of Bruce's latest CD, *Breakfast In New Orleans Dinner In Timbuktu*, is now available from Gavin's Woodpile. Cards come ten to a packet at U.S. \$6.00 which includes postage. Payment should be made to Daniel Keebler at the usual Snohomish address (see page six under "Subscription Information").

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When our correspondent in England was told that Bruce Cockburn included Feast Of Fools in the set list for the current "Breakfast In New Orleans Dinner In Timbuktu" tour, he decided to revisit the album on which it was released.

OBSERVATIONS AND BACKGROUND TO

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF

BRUCE COCKBURN

TRUE NORTH TN 33

Released 1978

Produced by Eugene Martynech

Engineered by Ken Friesen
Recorded at Eastern Sound April - May 1978
All songs written by Bruce Cockburn

(Currently only available on CD in Canada- TRUE NORTH TNBD 0033)

This was Bruce's ninth album and it is a wonderful diverse mix of music and artwork released after three predominantly jazz influenced records. Cockburn does not usually follow a particular theme for more than three records and this is a transitional album before re-orientating himself on a new path. This time Bruce writes in a wide variety of styles, employs many background vocals from a range of singers he has worked with in the past, and uses influences from his first tours outside Canada. He also includes a couple of blues/rock songs with wailing electric guitars tipping the hat to the changed musical landscape of the mid-Seventies by such exponents as Television.

Bruce Cockburn: Expanded horizons — first tours outside of Canada — Japan, small club circuit in Northeastern U.S.. Was told I must be the reincarnation of Kenji Miyazawa, a fine Japanese poet. Sounds good from my end, but what bad things did he do to deserve me?(a) (b)

The nucleus of the band comprised Robert Boucher, the bassist from Cockburn's first live band who recorded **Circles In The Stream** and Bob Di Salle, the drummer who played on **In The Falling Dark**. Producer Eugene Martynec, one time lead guitarist with Kensington Market, plays electric guitar.

Face 1

1. *Rainfall*

Bright, clear acoustic guitar picking opens the album joined by drums, bass, the flute of Kathryn Moses(m) and the voice of Beverley Glenn-Copeland(c). The lyrics centre on Cockburn's observations of precipitation on the landscape and the truck while out on the highway. The iridescence referred to in the lyrics is reflected in the album title lettering on the front cover, in the rainbow on the rear sleeve, and multicoloured pages of the log in the gatefold sleeve.

2. *A Montreal Song*

Acoustic guitar and warping bass play while Cockburn escapes the hotel TV to enjoy the company of fellow citizens in the city. Kathryn plays beautiful flute and Shingoose(d) provides the backing vocals.

3. *Outside A Broken Phone Booth With Money In My Hand*

Deep electric guitar and cymbals surprise the ears as a rock four piece of drums, bass and two electric guitars weave blues meets Television. A rock song - unusual to date in the Cockburn songwriting canon. In 1978 Ken Emerson interviewed Cockburn for Rolling Stone(e) and asked Bruce which songwriters he admired: "Tom Verlaine, I don't like what he is saying particularly — I don't see things the same way — but I think he's a

terrific writer.” Ken went onto to write “the luminous intensity of Cockburn’s best songs shines through. In this song the coins remind Bruce first of stars then of stigmata.”

The title to Bruce’s previous album, **Circles In The Stream**, can be found in the lyrics to this song.

4. *Prenons La Mer*

The title is French for Let Us Set Sail. Cockburn sings two verses in English, and the chorus and final verse in French. On this buoyant, rhythmic performance Bruce is playing stunning acoustic guitar backed by drums, bass and Ronney Abramson(f) on backing vocals. The wonderful lyrics combine visions of spirituality and light as it breezes along with a brightness and optimism topped off with a beautiful guitar solo. “Let us set sail on the solar waves you and I among the spirits of light.”

5. *Red Ships Take Off In The Distance*

Bruce Cockburn: I don’t know why it’s called that, except that’s what it suggested to me. It’s a duet with bass player Bob Boucher.(g)

This 5:15 instrumental with Cockburn on acoustic guitar and Bob on talking bass is longer than most of the songs on the album. For me this tune conjures up the freighters on the nod on the surface of the bay from the next album!

Face 2

6. *Laughter*

Bruce Cockburn: It covers a lot of things in fairly short time.(g)

Stream of consciousness lyrics revolving around the song title. The song canters along with a small choir singing the “ha ha” refrain interwoven with Kathryn’s skipping flute. The backing vocals are provided by Beverley, Marty Nagler(l), Tommy Graham(n), Brent Titcomb(h) and Shingoose. *Laughter/Prenons La Mer* was issued as a 7 inch vinyl single on True North TN4 -142.

7. *Bright Sky*

Bruce Cockburn: I wrote these words on the way south from Faro, Yukon after my one experience of the Farrago festival — lots of communal spirit (and spirits). The guitar part was inspired by a record I heard of traditional Swedish fiddle duets.(i)

Bruce’s nimble acoustic guitar picking and Martha Nagler’s bodhran(j) are illuminated on this call and response by the backing vocal choir from *Laughter* singing the refrain of the song title.

8. *Feast Of Fools*

More liquid, snaking electric guitar in the style of Tom Verlaine for another rock song similar in composition to *Phone Booth*. In the album acknowledgements Bruce thanks author Harvey Cox for inspiration. Cox wrote Feast of Fools — a theological essay on

festivity and fantasy and *The Secular City* — secularization and urbanisation in theological perspective. Bruce fashions a wonderful “it all adds up to nothing” lyric with Shingoose on backing vocals. At 6:42 this is the longest track on the album.

9. *Can I Go With You*

Bruce asks to go with his maker when the time is right. Bruce’s acoustic guitar and Eugene’s electric guitar duck and dive, interspersed with flute and Beverley on backing vocals. Sublime.

10. *Nanzen Ji*

Bruce Cockburn: The song title is the name of a Zen temple in Kyoto, Japan. The song is basically a description of things, almost in chronological order, seen at the temple in fairly abstract terms.(g) (k)

A calm, sparse plaintive song of guitar harmonics and voice conjuring a Zen-like atmosphere closes the album. Bruce’s dog, Aroo, barks on the fade out.

This is one of Cockburn’s more eclectic albums musically with lyrics rooted in faith, god and spirituality. Bruce expresses this through observations of the world around him — nature, light, water, etc.

Bruce Cockburn: I’m a Christian and for me it’s the most important thing in my life and the area around which everything else has to revolve. Because it determines really how I see everything else that I go through, it ends up in the songs a lot. The songs are reflections of whatever I happen to go through during the period that the songs are being written.(g)

The bright sound has been captured by Ken Friesen, the engineer of the previous three albums and the trusty Eugene Martynec who produced all Cockburn’s previous eight records.

The original gatefold record sleeve is a wonder to behold — one of those weird and wonderful covers from the Seventies. Designed by Bart Schoales the sleeve resembles a leather bound travellers log. I’ve always thought that the cotton wool clouds swirling round the Northern Hemisphere of a globe on the front cover let down the concept slightly. However this is more than made up for with a great rear sleeve including a compass and a black and white photo of Bruce in a hotel lobby (he told me in ‘81) with rainbow tiling in the window. The rear cover was re-mixed as a giant promotional poster.

The inner gatefold is a photograph of the opened log with pen and rainbow coloured pages similar to John Sinclair’s 1972 book *Guitar Army: Street Writings/Prison Writings*. All the lyrics and credits are hand written plus pen and ink graphics to illustrate each song. These include rain on a windshield for *Rainfall*, satellite and dolphin for *Prenons La Mer*, Bruce & Aroo for *Laughter*, and a Japanese garden for *Nanzen Ji*. As if that wasn’t enough the dust jacket reproduces the whole inner gatefold in French reversed

white on black. So much to read, so much to take in and so much more meaning to the music and lyrics.

In the US, Island Records contemporaneously released this LP in the gatefold format minus the French dust jacket and in 1988 East Side Digital released the album on CD for a limited time.

This is the last album where Bruce Cockburn was Canada's best-kept secret. The next album, **Dancing In The Dragons Jaws**, included the single *Wondering Where The Lions Are* which received radio play in several different parts of the world.

by Richard Hoare

(copyright Cala Luna 2000 where not already stated)

Footnotes:

- (a) Quote from 1986 **World Of Wonders** tour programme.
- (b) For more on Cockburn's involvement with the work of Kenji Miyazawa refer to Cala Luna No 4.
- (c) Beverley previously sang on the album **Joy Will Find A Way**.
- (d) Shingoose is a Canadian Indian who spent 10 years playing everybody's music but his own. Then in 1970 he discovered the roots of his Native tradition. Cockburn played on and produced his 1975 four track EP entitled **Native Country** released by the Native Council Of Canada.
- (e) Rolling Stone 16th November 1978 - Mystic From The North.
- (f) Bruce played guitars and dulcimers on Ronney Abramson's 1977 True North album **Stowaway** TN 27.
- (g) From an interview with Cockburn on WBAI, New York 5th May 1978 by Edward Haber who produced and engineered the show which included Bruce playing three live numbers solo from the then unreleased **Further Adventures Of**.
- (h) Brent Titcomb was in 3's A Crowd with Bruce.
- (i) Quote from songbook: All The Diamonds, Vol. One, 1969-1979, OFC Publications, Ottawa, Canada.
- (j) Martha is the wife of Eric Nagler who played on **High Winds White Sky** and **Sunwheel Dance**.
- (k) Tom's Cabin people referred to in the albums acknowledgements promoted the 1977 Japanese dates with Murray McLauchlan.
- (l) Marty Nagler sang on **Sunwheel Dance**.
- (m) Kathryn Moses played flute on **In The Falling Dark**.
- (n) Tommy Graham played tambura on **Joy Will Find A Way**.

Worldly and Wise- Itinerant Troubadour Bruce Cockburn Maps The Human Experience

by Dave Irwin-

The Tucson Weekly
February, 2000

“It’s me leaving a trail,” Bruce Cockburn notes of his 30-year musical career. “I feel like it’s all part of one picture. And it’s a picture of a spiritual journey, more than anything.”

Over the course of his 25 album career, which includes three platinum and 13 gold recordings, Cockburn has worn many hats simultaneously: folk singer/songwriter; world traveler; political activist; Christian and more. His songs chronicle a life of conscience and passion with a richness and consistency to which most artists can only aspire.

However, “there have been many bumps,” he admits. “Sometimes there are chasms that have to be crossed. And sometimes you’re crossing them on a thread. I think everybody’s life must have those things. That’s how you grow.”

Cockburn’s songs, like “Wondering Where The Lions Are,” “If I Had A Rocket Launcher,” “Lovers In A Dangerous Time” and “If A Tree Falls,” are informed by both an intelligent lyrical sensibility and a mature sense of ethics. Already engaging with well-turned phrases and organic constructions, his songs become even more interesting once you realize they’re non-fiction. Cockburn lives the events and describes what he sees, whether visiting “The Mines of Mozambique” or “The Tibetan Side of Town.” Cockburn’s political travelogues are not imaginary abstractions but the correspondence of a global life.

“All those songs sprang from direct experiences and they wouldn’t have sprung from any other thing,” he explains. “It’s part and parcel to the way I write, to how I approach songwriting as a whole. The songs are attempts to do something with an emotional response I’m confronted with. Without that confrontation, that emotional response, there would be no songs. For me, what is essential is to write about as much of the human experience as I can. That includes political songs, but it doesn’t preclude love songs, and songs about sex and whatever else might come up.”

As a testament to his journalistic writing style, Cockburn generally chronicles a song’s birth with its date and location of inception, although such information is absent on his current album, *Breakfast in New Orleans, Dinner in Timbuktu*.

“On this album, they were left off in an unfortunate oversight,” he says. “People were wondering if I had some new agenda, but I don’t. It was just an oversight.

“In theory, the songs are supposed to be comprehensible in some way without that information. In some cases, I think it helps give a sense of where the song is coming from. It’s helpful to know that a song that’s related to a particular place and time was actually inspired in that place and time.

“In other cases,” he concedes, “it’s not so critical to anybody’s understanding of the song. A song like ‘Mango,’ it makes no difference where the song was written. Some of the other ones, it does, and it would have been helpful for people to know that the imagery of ‘Use Me While You Can,’ for example, all comes from Mali, West Africa, where Timbuktu is. It might have been helpful to know the lyrical content of ‘When You Give It Away’ came from New Orleans, which makes sense in terms of the title of the album.”

Part of the enduring nature of Cockburn’s music is in its textures and chordal complexity. His songs blend folk, jazz, pop and world sensibilities with his incendiary guitar skills.

“Originally, I thought I wanted to be a jazz guitar player,” he confesses. “Then I got into attempting to learn composition for big bands and jazz groups of various sizes. That’s what I went to Berklee to study. But after being there about a year and a half, I realized that that wasn’t my road. So I dropped out and joined a rock and roll band. It was in the context of that band that I first saw myself as somebody who wrote songs. But I had already been playing ragtime and country blues. I was in a jug band in Boston the same time I was going to Berklee.”

In 1997, Berklee College of Music awarded Cockburn an honorary doctorate of music degree in recognition of his lifelong achievements.

Asked how his style has changed, he says, “Musically, I feel like I’ve got a better...well, hell, no, I shouldn’t say better. I’m a lot fussier than I used to be,” he laughs. “That’s the thing I notice most about my evolution as a writer. I settle much less easily for things than I did. I feel I have a better grasp of how to distill events and images into words than I did when I started. I think the songs generally tend to be more subtle and multi-layered lyrically.”

Now on the road with a drummer and bass player, Cockburn is touring in support of *Breakfast In New Orleans*, as well as offering a retrospective of his career. Continuing to enthusiastically endorse political stances about the environment and the poor, he has most recently joined the movement to eliminate the use of land mines as a weapon of war.

“For me, it’s all one big issue,” he says. “All of these things are aspects of how we treat each other and how we relate to the nature of which we are part. Anytime I can address any of those aspects, I’m happy to do it. It’s all really about human dignity and human survival.”

Mumbo Jumbo

Dates Added Since Last Issue: March 5 in Charleston, West Virginia at the Cultural Center Theatre. This was a taping for the Mt. Stage radio program, to begin airing on Public Radio stations on April 21. March 14 in Camden, Maine, at the Camden Opera House. March 21 in Peterborough, Ontario, at the Showplace Theatre.

Dates Cancelled: February 18 in San Luis Obispo, California and February 20 in San Juan Capistrano, California. Shows were cancelled due to illness.

Sony Music– *The Best Of Soft Rock Vol. 2* (IDK 85033). This various artists CD was released in 1994 and contains “Great Big Love,” from *Nothing But A Burning Light*.

Over Canada- An Aerial Adventure (Warner 2 89523). This 13 track 1999 compilation CD provides the soundtrack for the video of the same name. Included is the studio version of “Train In The Rain.”

Bruce recorded an **interview with NPR** (National Public Radio) in early December, 1999, while in California for a benefit concert. The interview was aired on February 6, 2000, and ran about 18 minutes.

Bruce also appeared on **CBC Television** during the month of February on *Midday*, and *On The Arts*.

On the evening of March 29, 2000, Bruce will appear on **The Late Show with David Letterman** performing “Last Night Of The World.” The show will be taped the afternoon of the 29th in New York City. Steve Lucas and Ben Riley will participate as well. The last time Bruce was on Letterman was in December 1991, performing “A Dream Like Mine,” from *Nothing But A Burning Light*.

Bruce was nominated for **Juno Awards** in the following categories: Best Songwriter for “Last Night Of The World,” “Mango” and “Pacing The Cage” (as performed by Jimmy Buffet). Best Roots and Traditional Album- Solo, for Breakfast In New Orleans Dinner In Timbuktu. Best Recording Engineer– John Whynot & Colin Linden for “Last Night Of The World.” He **received the Juno for Best Roots and Traditional Album- Solo**, for Breakfast In New Orleans Dinner In Timbuktu. The awards were held in Toronto on March 12, 2000.

NEW DATES!

May 5 Grand Rapids, Michigan Calvin College Arts Center
May 8 Chapel Hill, North Carolina Cat’s Cradle
May 12 Austin, Texas Texas Union Ballroom
May 18 Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Whitaker Center
May 20 Collingswood, New Jersey Scottish Rite Auditorium

Watch for more dates. Keep connected with the Woodpile website.

Postcards marking the release of *Breakfast In New Orleans Dinner In Timbuktu* are still available from Gavin's Woodpile. Packets of 10 cards are U.S. \$6.00, which includes postage. A better look at the postcard can be seen at the Woodpile's website at www.seanet.com/~danjer. Payment should be made to Daniel Keebler at the address you see to the right.

Please note that I have moved. The new address is:

Daniel Keebler
12715 Dubuque Road
Snohomish, WA 98290

Tel/Fax: 425-334-5001

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Robin D. Cradle [Apr00]

Check it out.

Issue Number 39

June 2000

The Pure, Uncluttered Spaces Of Bruce Cockburn

The following article comes from *Saturday Night*, a Canadian magazine. It ran in the July 1972 issue. Story by MYRNA KOSTASH.

The Ottawa Valley is a region of this country like the Lakehead is, like the Eastern Townships, Labrador and the Peace River Valley are. A culturally autonomous territory, which means it doesn't make reference to any other place but lives inwardly on itself with its own speech, time sense and mythology. Or so it seems to me, judging from the way the Valley's children talk about it in new books, songs and interviews. Matt Cohen calls it a subculture, a "kink in the megaculture of the cities" and the hero of his novel, *Johnny Crackle Sings*, minor pop-star, survives on flights into the country outside Ottawa. The city is only a place where he hucksters; nothing happens there. The Valley. A way of speaking and gesturing to keep the privacy between people. Grey barns and pink stucco houses. Farmers and city people who come out on country roads, park their cars in the ditch and climb the hills on a weekend. Cheeseburgers and Pepsi Cola in Arnprior.

Bruce Cockburn was born in an Ottawa suburb, lives in Ottawa and sings a lot about the country. He's never actually lived in the country, just spent a lot of time going through it. Bruce, Kitty and the dog Aroo in a camper for months at a time, back and forth at a leisurely roll from Vancouver to Cape Breton, mistrusting any speedier and hollower means of learning the lands lay. "I prefer the country to the city because I feel better there and I like myself better there." You can tell this even by the way he lives in the city. In a house for three months and already he and Kitty are restless. But the house still has a domesticated air about it, as if there had been a family and kitchen harmony for years. Is this a gypsy couple? Old pine furniture waxed until it dazzles even under the February sunshine, patchwork quilt and old dolls. Batiks, wall-hangings and old photographs. Plants and dried things. Pottery teapot. The crafts of the country. The house looked to me like a romantic and tidy version of what I had imagined the pioneer homes of Upper Canada to have been. But I can't know for sure. What I do know is that there is a perfect consonance of Cockburn's music and the rooms it has come out of. Songs of pacific enterprise, cautious examination and touching dignities. And the house, the camper (cramped and utterly livable), the small clubs and the homes of musical friends, all of these attentive to and respectful of the work that is going on within. Bruce Cockburn is a lucky man.

Cockburn's origins are Scottish. He spoke of the Highlanders dispersed from their homeland by the English authorities in the eighteenth century. Considered racially inferior because of their tribal culture, these Scots were scattered like victims to strange places. The Ottawa Valley, for example, where Bruce's uncle still lives near Pembroke, the last survivor of an unbroken line of rural people. Sober, straight-forward, narrow-minded and forth-right. But Bruce himself is a city man, brought up in a middle-class suburb in the 1950s so that the Presbyterian passions of a Bible-reading grandmother have not been inherited. So that the grandmother, in all her piety and steadfastness, would not understand what Bruce calls the "religiousness" of his songs. Celebrations of earth and revelatory moments of introspection.

So the city it is. "You drive past the Parliament buildings and they look like a museum. Hard to take seriously that this is the political centre of the country." The place is overrun with apparatchiks whose jobs go on and on through all the political vicissitudes. You feel closer to the brain cells of power in Toronto; in Ottawa, you are close only to the sweat and bellyaches of the creaking machine.

And to the French Canadian who drives the taxi, works at the A&W, sweeps the street and packs the groceries. Who speaks to you in English and it is almost the same feeling you had when a black man shined your shoes or when an old Indian, waiting by the side of the road in the rain, finally got a ride in your shiny car and he never stopped saying, "Thank you sir, thank you," wringing his hands and hating your guts. If there is a difference in the feeling it is a racial one; the distance between you and the black man and the Indian is devastatingly visual and loaded with ancestral memory, whereas the French Canadian is disarmingly white and familiar, as homely as the cleaning lady making bombs in your basement.

Cockburn grew up middle-class in Ottawa, making forays out of his parents' home into the streets, carrying a guitar and the self-conscious style of the folkies like Bob Dylan and Phil Ochs. Shabby coveralls, torn shoes, cheap wine, butt hanging off the lower lip, fallen friends - oh it was a splendid episode, a bittersweet entanglement with a mysterious tribe of Negro slaves and New York prodigies, all mixed up with the beer in the bars of Hull, the weary bar bands whose natural inclination was Country and Western, everybody choking up on the smoky atmosphere and the lamentations of another country. If my generation has a saga, that was it. It was Cockburn's only briefly.

When he had finished high school and had read *On The Road*, he left for Europe. Hellbent after the Beats. Sleeping under bridges and in open fields, dusty and hungry, he believed he was living at last "close to the roots of existence." Especially in Paris. Where else? With a six-string banjo, he joined the company of two other musicians, an American on clarinet and a Frenchman on trumpet. They made the rounds of Montmartre, playing trad jazz and Dixieland while a demobbed Algerian collected the money in his hat. When a Parisian plainclothesman, pistol stuck in the pocket of his jeans, told them they were no longer welcome to play in Paris, Bruce was off the road.

He went to Berklee School of Music in Boston for a year. In the end, it wasn't so much the school as the city which had an effect on him. This was the mid-1960s and the tail end of a folk boom in Boston. A thriving club scene brought in old blues singers, "dragging them out of old age homes to come play again." Eric Anderson was still scuffling around for local gigs and Tom Rush had just cut his first album on a local label. It wasn't the influence of any one musician but the cumulative effect of so much music so well played that seems important now to Cockburn. And the fact that he lived awhile in the States.

He didn't think much then. He was mostly stoned and living at night, not eating or sleeping for long periods, then eating chocolate bars and sleeping on people's floors. But that is almost everybody's growing-up when they first leave home and he was still an adolescent then, with slower perceptions than those around him. But he picked up an attitude which he says is part of who he is today: a mistrust of America, a great gratitude for not being himself an American, and a sensitivity to the atmospheric tension so that he could tell, even in his sleep, when his bus had crossed the border to the States. But it obviously did make a difference to spend that year in Boston instead of Ottawa: "Ottawa is staunch and righteous; Boston had gangsters and corrupt politicians."

It seemed to me that our interest in American pop music was not so much the curiosity of the cosmopolitan as the conceit of the colonized. Accepting, indeed experiencing, as reality that which has been defined by the oppressors as the meat of real life. Their life. Their music and rhythms and complaints and martyrs as the sources of our self-analysis so that we are oppressed as much by the Yippies as by Richard Nixon. Even by the singers with their dirges from the cities and rhymes from the remote countrysides which we clasped so admiringly and so tearfully to our patriotic bosoms. But Cockburn was not happy with this estimate:

“While it’s true that the music I was hearing and playing was a product of what went down in America, it was also just music. Sometimes music does exist as an artifact, as a thing with an existence separate from its original context so that it is from it but not of it. But there are other kinds of music, like protest songs, which can only be sung within the experience of anger. Because they can feel anger about America, Canadians can sing them without being absurd.”

Can it be said, then, that events and places in America have the potential of becoming archetypes of human experience, *standing for* the particulars of that experience in a generalized form which is imaginatively accessible to all who plug in? So that the Western movie stands for every community’s political struggle between order and subversion, and the Vietnam protest song stands for every person’s revulsion at the spectacle of war? So that Canadian stories are only regional variations on the monumental themes of America? Oh, but that is so hopeless and so offensive to the national palate. A more invigorating pastime would be to turn our critical perceptions to our own history, to see ourselves as organically placed within this country’s evolution and - most revolutionary - to accept that the past has had an effect on us. And yet. There are our songs, for instance. Cockburn:

“When you’re young, you tend to act out roles with a passion and our role in Ottawa in the 1960s was to be folkies and to sing mostly the folksongs of other countries. The problem with Canadian songs was that they borrowed so heavily from other traditions; for instance, logging songs of Ontario set to English ballads.

“Sure, this happened in the States, too, but they went on to develop the borrowings with the vigour and violence of their experience. They ‘exploded’ the traditions and we never did. So, if you examine traditional Canadian songs, you won’t find anything applicable to today. Paddling songs and one about three Irish loggers in the Ottawa Valley who crashed a Polish wedding and were killed. And, because social developments in the States always happened a generation before they did in Canada, we soon began borrowing the social commentary and the songs that went with it.

“How much history can you have in a hundred years? Sure a lot of things happen, but it takes a long time for their significance to sink into the collective consciousness. We haven’t had the time to develop a historical momentum or to see the big shapes.”

After the year in Boston, Bruce learned of friends who were putting together a rock ‘n roll band in Ottawa. He joined them as a songwriter and organist and the group went through four transformations before Bruce quit to become the artist he is now. A singer of his own songs in clubs and at universities. Three albums and two Juno awards as Canada’s top folksinger. A master musician in impeccable control of his instrument and his vocabulary, he speaks with a singular voice. It is impossible to tell from listening to Cockburn who his influences have been. He has absorbed them and gone on to create a body of songs which are strong and unique enough to influence other musicians. This is surely an important development in Canadian pop music. Cross-pollination among our own artists. Moreover, Cockburn is not replaceable.

But “pop music” is an uncomfortable terminology in his case. Cockburn is its antithesis. No hype or flashiness, commercial adventurism or careerism, exhibitionism or egomaniacal outbursts attach to his reputation. He moves discreetly, if furtively, and kindly. He is the opposite of macho. He is, even, feminine; and I don’t mean effete. But conservative, as he himself admits, and concerned with themes of domestic attachments, marriage and courtliness, the shape of the land and his relationship to it, renewal and fortification, beginnings and ends. Remarkably, he is free of the need to impress himself on you and free of the frenetic urgency to lay down propaganda, which may be construed as the city poet’s trip. Cockburn is no pop star and he thinks this has to do with self-definitions. He has no image of himself in sociological relation to North American music, no concept of his work as representative of the grand movements in the continental subconscious or even as a contribution to a communal effort among Canadian artists to publicize a unifying reality. Music is just what he does. A way he can keep himself alive without sacrificing principles and maintain attitudes far enough away from centres of corruption. If he has nightmares, one of them must be to be forced to work at something which would endanger his “inner being”; work that involves concentrations of money or drudgery with no exit for the imagination.

It follows, then, that he does not get off on the disordered energy of masses of people, the crippling destinies of the dispossessed. He is not a social commentator. He speaks only for himself, and maybe for his wife, and so his songs relate only his own experiences and only those insights which are his. He admires writers like Bob Dylan, say, who are able to speak through the mouths of other characters, who can make the creative leap into another person’s mind, attaching themselves to life through several *persona*, who may even end by constructing archetypes of character, overcoming the personal and idiosyncratic to make general statements about essential personality and experience (as in Dylan singing not about George Jackson but about George Jackson-ness, which may include a whole generation’s worth of history). But Cockburn will not make this leap. He says he is uncomfortable with the social imagination, the vicarious wisdoms of the social realist. Nor does he trust himself to transcribe honestly the soul of another man or the themes of his biography. Besides, he says, he would run the risk of being disbelieved.

He is too modest. Far from being merely private, intimate and exclusive in his songs, he achieves a kind of ironic distance between the intensity of the moment when the song was first thought possible and the final cool elaboration of the idea. It is the distance between feeling and artifice, spontaneity and discipline. Those who call his songs “confessionals” give him no credit for being able to look on himself with detachment and a sense of history: after they become written and sung, they are “documents” of a particular narrative with a life all their own yet which parallels his. The songwriter changes and grows old; the songs remain vividly associated with the “moment”, remarking chorus-like on the nature of the past, on the situation of the artist within the matrix of evolution and memory, and on the function of roots and sources in the development of his art.

But more than just depersonalizing his own experience, Cockburn’s songs also comment generally on sensation and perception, so that they become everyone’s who will listen.

He does this with suggestive images: “eyes can be archways”; when we come again/to search beside the Fool”; “she carries all the lines down in her palms”; or “High winds/pyramids/glittering ring/blood of the king.” And by rounding off an introspective concern with a sudden broad statement which again generalizes it. From a dreamy landscape to “are no men/is only Man seeking one love”; from the arrival of Spring to “when we come again/to celebrate renewal/at the heart/at the heart of us/our eyes will touch life”; from a windy sky to “Falsehood lies panting like a fish in the palm.” In a way, his use of metaphoric language (and the fact that he sings in public) belie his contention that he is not a social commentator. He is, in fact, constantly referring to the larger shapes of human experience from the touchstone of his own life. This may not be political engagement, but neither is it selfish privacy.

“I think that a lot of the songs that are being written are distinctively, if not obviously, Canadian. Playing something close to American music but not of it. I think it has something to do with space that isn’t in American music. Buffalo Springfield had it.

“Space may be a misleading word because it is so vague in relation to music, but maybe it has to do with Canadians being more involved with the space around them rather than trying to fill it up as the Americans do. I mean physical space and how it makes you feel about yourself. Media clutter may follow. All of it a kind of greed. The more Canadians fill up their space the more they will be like Americans. We seem to take it so much for granted. Perhaps because our urban landscapes are not yet deadly, and because they seem accidental to the whole expanse of the land.”

Although Cockburn disclaims any conscious attempt at creating a Canadian music together with other songwriters - “There is no Group of Seven among us” - filmmakers seem to find in his songs a visual quality which nicely counterpoints the pan of the camera across the nation. He is, of course, the man who wrote the music for *Goin’ Down The Road*, a touch of poetic justice. Remember that it was Kerouac’s *On The Road* which propelled him as a traveller abroad; in Don Shebib’s film, he pays his dues as the troubadour to the story of two Nova Scotians “abroad” in Toronto. Ironically, he hadn’t yet been in the Maritimes when he wrote the music, but when he finally did travel there he discovered that his song from the movie was a great hit in Cape Breton. Accidental authenticity.

What Cockburn learned in Nova Scotia was that it is “as much a place as anywhere else” and that there are a lot of proud Maritimers who resent the way the media represent them: they haven’t all gone down the road in pursuit of a dubious future. They live on with conviction as the conscious heirs to a Gaelic and maritime tradition which they sustain simply, but not easily, by staying home. When Cockburn says it is more exciting for him to meet singers and writers from the West and fiddlers from Cape Breton than to encounter Torontonians, he means, perhaps, that a man or woman working in relationship with his or her specific derivation is more credible as a Canadian artist than one who works on second-hand material from other peoples’ sagas. In other words, autonomy is more interesting than colonialism. And our story is right under our nose.

Another project with films is Cockburn's association with Filmwest in Edmonton, a company assembling a feature film on the life and work of Ernest Brown, a photographer of prairie realities at the turn of the century. Cockburn is writing the music for the film. He's travelled at length through the prairies, once taking a month to drive from Winnipeg to Edmonton. And he believes his relative newness to, if not naïveté about, the West will help him distil more readily the striking images and commonplaces of the prairies than someone who is a native; for the reason that he is wide open to the West, ready to be impressed with its substantial beauty and heavy complaint without pre-judgement.

"I aim for the total coexistence of lyric and music. If the thought behind the words is complex, it makes no sense to have complicated music. And I try not to limit the meaning of my songs. Pop music in general is evolving this way. Away from the concrete statement. Becoming a middle-class art.

"I'd rather use an effective image than a statement. It's more pleasing and you can fill it out with the words around it or with the music or by the way you sing it. It's a mysterious process how the image carries many meanings at once. Maybe it connects up with the Jungian archetype. The mind taking all kinds of trips between images and into the meanings behind the word you've chosen."

Cockburn has flashes of being near to the point of writing what is uniquely and absolutely his own music. But he worries that he has been exposed too long to too much music - blues, ragtime, jazz, pop - and too close to indoctrination in cultural prejudices ever to put together a "pure kind of music, free of sophistication" and refined only through evolution, not artfulness. He is careful about the music he listens to. Mostly blues and ethnic music, because he finds them direct and honest and at the root of all other music.

If he has an ambition, it is this struggle towards the simplest possible expression of a human situation. The space thing again: it is so important. The lack of clutter and cunning. If there is a reward for this ambition, it will be to know that in writing pure music he will have spaciousness. *end*

My thanks to Myrna Kostash for permission to reprint this article.

Jazz Guitarist Michael Occhipinti Records The Music Of Bruce Cockburn

NOJO co-founder Michael Occhipinti is in a Toronto studio recording his new album which will feature original jazz interpretations of the music of one of Canada's most celebrated singer-songwriters, Bruce Cockburn.

The new release, with Occhipinti (guitar), Andrew Downing (bass), Barry Romberg (drums), and guests Kevin Turcotte (trumpet), Mike Murley (sax), Hugh Marsh (violin) and Jonathan Goldsmith (piano/organ), is Occhipinti's third album. His previous releases are 1998's Surrealist Blues and his 1994 debut CD Who Meets Who?

Asked about the inspiration for the project, Occhipinti remarks: “Lately, I’ve been trying to incorporate a lot of the different music that I heard growing up into my own group’s repertoire. It’s a different experience to play music that you’ve absorbed from radio or television, as opposed to performing the jazz standard tradition, which most of us haven’t grown up with and have had to seek out and learn, although I enjoy that too. I don’t have to learn the melody to “Lovers In A Dangerous Time.” I can sing all the lyrics, simply because I heard it so often when I was 15, just as Miles Davis would have absorbed what was on the radio in his day. Of course, with this project, I’ve been choosing music from 25 albums, and have learned so many great tunes I didn’t know. I’ve also been reminded what a wonderful guitarist Bruce is. It’s been challenging adapting the music to the personalities of the musicians involved, and making the songs work apart from the lyrics. I’m hoping people will be surprised.”

Scheduled for late-summer release, the recording is being produced by Jonathan Goldsmith, and features the Cockburn repertoire Michael has been developing at his regular Friday appearances at Toronto’s Rex Jazz Bar.

NOJO, the Neufeld-Occhipinti Jazz Orchestra, is creating a stir with its daring and joyous music. The group features 16 of Canada’s best improvising musicians performing the original music of pianist Paul Neufeld and guitarist Michael Occhipinti. The influences draw from a diversity of styles, incorporating funk, blues, west African music, and a century of jazz. NOJO’s self-titled debut CD won the 1996 JUNO Award for Best Contemporary Jazz Album, and the follow-up, FireWater, was nominated for the same award in 1997.

Since its inception in 1994, NOJO has been a creative asset to the Canadian scene. Both in performance and on record, NOJO covers a broad stylistic range with an enthusiasm and intensity that few groups can match. The band’s live performances have been described by The Globe & Mail as a “happy sort of chaos,” as NOJO is a group where multiple soloists improvise in contexts which are challenging and complimentary. *end*

An Invitation

by Jerri Andersen

“Wouldn’t it be great to jam with Bruce?” “I’d sure like to invite Bruce over for a nice long talk.” “Maybe Bruce will show me how he fingers that part.” “Don’t you think Bruce would like to play here (in the back yard) for a few of our closest friends?”

Now, I know I’m around perhaps more than my share of Bruce followers but I have a sense things like this get said more often about Bruce than, proportionately, is said of other musicians. This is a curious thing.

Perhaps it’s because we think Bruce would just be darn good company. After all, here is a guy with something on his mind who’s not afraid to say it. He’s well traveled, articulate and sagacious, with a sense of humor. I’m sure he’s got stories that would rival

those of *my* most interesting company: like Arnold and his exploits with the Grateful Dead, magic, and drugs (not necessarily in that order); or Sue and her adventures in wanting a baby, making a baby, and buying a baby (in that order). Who wouldn't want someone like Bruce over for dinner?

Maybe we want his attention because it is inherent that as a fan we act fanatical, that is, we get carried away beyond reason by our feelings or beliefs about him and want, no *need*, to check them out. Hmm. I'm sure this is true for some but most of the time when I hear "Let's have Bruce over for dinner tonight" it has less to do with being carried away beyond reason and more to do with reason itself.

We want to *learn* something. Something we think Bruce knows. Something that is reflected in his music, his playing, his lyrics, his performance. We want to know the *reason* he arrived where he did with that syncopated style, that worldly melody, that opaque lyric. We want in on the mystery of his inspiration.

I think, however, that the mystery of Bruce's inspiration is something we can't be in on because it is his own individual identity with himself. It is his ability to enter into himself and find the God Who utters him. Not someone he thinks he should be or someone others think he should be, but him as he was meant to be from the moment God first thought of him. He is not pretending. He is real. No masks. No false self.

If I find him to be talented, full of grace and virtuous, it is only because he is real enough, *clear* enough, to let Creation shine through. I can't be in on this, I can't *really* even understand it. If I were, he would not be himself and I would have no hope for being myself. It is better, then, that I seek my own individual identity with myself. It is better that I find the inscape of *my* sanctity.

I could still use some good company for dinner, though...

Tour Dates- Spring/Summer 2000

April 16 (solo)	Boston, Massachusetts	Sanders Theatre (Farm School Benefit)
May 5	Grand Rapids, Michigan	Calvin College Arts Center
May 6	Bloomington, Indiana	Buskirk Chumley Theatre
May 8	Chapel Hill, North Carolina	Cat's Cradle
May 9	Atlanta, Georgia	The Variety Playhouse
May 11	Houston, Texas	Arial Theatre
May 12	Austin, Texas	Texas Union Ballroom
May 13	New Orleans, Louisiana	The House Of Blues
May 15	Nashville, Tennessee	328 Performance Hall
May 16	Ashville, North Carolina	Diana Wortham Theatre
May 18	Harrisburg, Pennsylvania	Whitaker Center
May 19	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania	The Rosebud
May 20	Collingswood, New Jersey	Scottish Rite Auditorium
May 21	Manchester, New Hampshire	The Palace Theatre

May 23	Montreal, Province Of Quebec	The Spectrum
July 1	Ottawa, Ontario	Parliament Hill*
July 6	Milan, Italy	TBA
July 7	Monforte, Italy	TBA
July 8	Cesena, Italy	TBA
July 10	Salerno, Italy	TBA
July 12	Isola, Italy	TBA
July 14	Catania, Italy	TBA
July 23	Calgary, Alberta	Calgary Folk Festival
July 24	Kelowna, British Columbia	Community Theatre
July 26	Seattle, Washington	Woodland Park Zoo
July 28	Portland, Oregon	Portland Zoo Amphitheatre
July 30	Santa Cruz, California	Fat Fry Music Festival
July 29	Redway, California	Mattiel Center
August 1	San Francisco, California	Slim's
August 2	San Luis Obispo, California	Cuesta College Auditorium**
August 3	San Juan Capistrano, California	The Coach House**
August 4	San Diego, California	4th & B Theatre
August 6	Salt Lake City, Utah	Red Butte Garden
August 7	Boulder, Colorado	The Boulder Theatre
August 10	Missoula, Montana	University Theatre
August 12	Edmonton, Alberta	Edmonton Folk Music Festival
August 15	Duluth, Minnesota	Marshall Performing Center
August 16	Minneapolis, Minnesota	Music In The Zoo
August 19	New York City, New York	Damrosch Park***
August 24	Buffalo, New York	Lafayette Square
August 26	Chicago, Illinois	Ravinia Festival Pavillion
August 27	Interlochen, Michigan	Kresge Auditorium

*Canada Day Show– one song only ** These shows were originally scheduled for February 2000.

*** Outdoor performance at The Lincoln Center (American Roots Festival)

Guess who's coming to Breakfast. Well, not Bruce Cockburn in this case. The record club, BMG Direct, released *Breakfast In New Orleans Dinner In Timbuktu*, but forgot to invite Bruce. Visually this release is as it should be right down to the photo of Bruce on the disc. The only catch is that *it's not Bruce's music* on the CD. What you'll find is some instrumental jazz music. At this writing I've not made an effort to confirm who the musician (or musicians) is. Information on the back sleeve includes: D131239
Manufactured for BMG Direct- Indianapolis, Indiana.

Festival Of Political Songs– The 80s (Plane 88839) - This 19 track variable artists CD contains a live version of “Nicaragua,” which I believe comes from *Bruce Cockburn Live*. The CD is a German release from 2000.

In German: *Festival des Politischen Liedes– Die Achtziger*.

Issue Number 40

August 2000

Ernest Brown- Pioneer Photographer

Daniel Keebler

Tom Radford is the director of this 1972 hour-long movie which documents the contributions of Ernest Brown, a turn-of-the-twentieth century photographer who made his home in Alberta. Bruce provides the soundtrack. I spoke with Tom from his home in Edmonton in June 2000. DK

Tom, when and where was the film shot?

It was filmed the summer of '72 and it was all filmed in Alberta because, as you know, the story is about this pioneer photographer and his early life in Western Canada. Our locations came all the way from the American border - we filmed the wedding scene right down on the Montana border. The scene where Ernest Brown is up on a high knoll and the wind is blowing like Hell and he is trying to take a picture [of the Rockies] - that was *right* on the border itself. It was in a place called Birdseye Knoll, on the edge of Waterton National Peace Park. That was the most southerly location we shot.

We filmed around Banff and up towards the Columbia Ice Fields. We filmed right up to Edmonton, and a town north of here called St. Albert would be the farthest north we filmed. As much as possible we tried to go to the locations that we'd seen in *his* work, in the still photographs. I think the charm of the film was being able to match a still photograph from what is now a hundred years ago to a dramatic scene that came out of it. It's a technique that's been used a lot since but back there in '72 it was quite a novel technique in terms of an old still photograph that suddenly turned into a documentary scene from the present day.

Very early in our planning of the movie Bruce's first album came out. I heard his music and thought we didn't have much money but, wouldn't it be wonderful to work with this guy? [His music] just had the kind of energy and intelligence we wanted for that film. Ernest Brown was just not your average photographer. He was a photographer with a very strong point of view. He had a very distinctive view of history and what the West was going to be as the “New Land,” as all these immigrants were pouring in to the West

at that time. When I heard Bruce's music I just felt there was the same kind of feeling in it as to where we wanted to go with our film and how we wanted to tell our story. Two or three days later we see that Bruce is going to be coming through Edmonton playing in a small coffee shop in the basement of the old United Church in Strathcona at the University District in Edmonton. We went to the concert and went backstage after and said "Can we take you out for a coffee? We want to describe a project to you and see if we can convince you to work on it with us." The rest is history.

In those days his concert tours were - and this is what I love about Bruce and it sort of remained for the next ten years or so even as his fame grew - he would drive across the country in an old pickup truck with his wife and his dog. There would be a concert every week or so and in between he'd just wander. I think a lot of his early writing came from those trips across the country and the people he met and the places he would explore. His music had this great sense of the land. I think that's the other thing when I first heard his music is that this guy, Brown, was so fascinated by this incredible wilderness, nearly like an Eden that the West was- where were we going to go with this? Were we going to screw it up like we'd screwed up the East coast or was it a real second chance for Canada? I think that something I've always felt is very much in Bruce is a great faith that things can be better. A faith in human beings that if they can just get their heads screwed on right we can *make* things better, but never dodging the issue of all the horrible messes we've left behind us in different parts of the world. I guess in a funny way, Ernest Brown, at the turn of the century, was very much that kind of a social commentator as well. He took pictures of this beautiful land. He was very aware of what an economy running out of control could do to it if that was the only priority with which we developed the West.

Bruce came to Edmonton in his pickup truck with a camper on the back and he said that night "Take me to the places this guy took pictures and let's spend some time together. If I do it I want to get into the guy's head." We wandered around Alberta for two or three days before we did the filming. It's something that has always stayed with me as a film maker - if ever I have an opportunity to do my music quite early on in the process, I'd like to do that. Working with Bruce - he was playing around with musical ideas as we traveled - we decided we were going to score the movie with a guitar and fiddle. We were going to keep the orchestration acoustic and very simple. Many of the scenes in the movie started to come out of the music, so that the music nearly *precedes* the images, as opposed to ninety-nine percent of the time in film where the film is shot and cut before the composer comes in and composes music to the final images. That was my first big film and I've tried to hang on to that ever since because I think music is so *powerful* in films. You can write all sorts of things into scripts. You can have actors say things and narrators say things but I think music follows the heart-line of the movie.

We were immensely, immensely lucky to work with such a gifted guy. We were a film collective of eight people. It was called Filmwest Associates. Bruce just fit right into the spirit of that. It was a very collaborative company the way we made our movies. Bruce just became a part of the collective. It was the beginning of a wonderful friendship. We try to see each other once every year or so when he comes through the West.

You mentioned introducing Bruce to the idea of scoring the movie and then doing a bit of driving around Alberta. Did that come right on the heels of that concert or was there a gap before that happened?

No, I think the concert was Saturday night and on Sunday we were out driving through wheat fields, going to the various locations this guy had taken pictures. It was literally the next day. That's Bruce. The moment he bought into it as an idea he was just smack in the middle of it. It was the way we liked to make movies and I think we were quite unique in those days. From the director to the writer to the cameraman to the editor to the composer, everybody was making the movie together. Bruce was suddenly the new member.

Where was the soundtrack actually recorded?

On a tape recorder we could record some of the ideas. "Sunwheel Dance" was one of the pieces he was playing with. He was writing Sunwheel Dance [the album] when he was here. So there must have been two albums out then. It was between the second and third album we worked. We started instrumentally. He kept sending us tapes. For example, when he wrote "Dialogue With The Devil" he sent that out before it was recorded and we said "That's wonderful, let's use that as our final song in the film." It was that same summer he was writing songs for that album. Who knows Bruce's creative process? To what degree some of the songs influenced by the work he was doing with us or whether they were still quite stand-alone in terms of coming out of his head and just being applicable to our film... only Bruce could answer.

He kept sending us out material and we would shape scenes around that material in a rough form. Then I went down to Toronto and stayed with Bruce. He was at that time working with Gene Martynec. Gene produced for us. I can't remember if he played a few licks on the backs of some of the tracks. I know Bruce brought in John Allen Cameron to play fiddle. There are a couple of wonderful old Celtic dirges in the movie.

Was the fiddle music written by Bruce?

It was written by Bruce and played by John Allen.

It sounds like the music was ultimately recorded in Toronto.

Yes, in Toronto.

In the scene where Ernest Brown is shooting photos in very windy conditions high up on the butte - was this a chosen situation to film or were you guys just having a bad day with the weather?

[Laughter] This is very much why it worked so *well* with Bruce. The way I like to work is in a very improvised way. A lot of the scenes in that movie just grew out of what happened that afternoon. I think when we had scouted that location we had scouted it because it was an absolutely stunningly beautiful view down into Waterton Park. From

up on that hill you looked down to this great lake that lies on the border to this range of mountains at the end of the lake. It was a big picture postcard kind of scene. The day we got up there we could hardly stand up. These great storms were rolling across the Rockies and it just became a completely different kind of scene. It became a scene that ends up critical to the movie in terms of the dark side of what was going to happen to the West.

A day later we were driving up to a coal mining area called Crow's Nest Pass, just an hour to the north. I saw out the car window, in a field of old coal miner's houses, a faded old sign on top of a house that said "photographic." Or at least I *thought* it said "photographic." We drove into this old town and found the house and it *was* an old photo studio. We couldn't believe our eyes. Knocked on the door and this old woman, Mrs. Guschul, came to the door. She and her husband, who was dead by then, had been the first photographers in this coal mining area. She took us into this old studio covered with dust that hadn't had a person in it in thirty-five or forty years. That's where we filmed those scenes of the couple getting married. There had been nothing like that in the script, we just improvised. On the way out of the Crow's Nest Pass area we came upon this incredible field of blue bells and we shot the scene where Ernest Brown takes their picture in the field of blue bells. I love making movies that way.

Things to come...

I've got a new film I started shooting in Africa last year. We're going to be finishing the shooting in Alberta and probably Washington State later this summer. It's called **The End Of Evolution**, from a book by Dr. Peter Ward, a Paleontologist at The University of Washington. Bruce has agreed to do the music for it. It's fun, after twenty-three years we're going to collaborate again. This is a project on mass-extinctions. What Peter Ward does is study these very, very ancient gravesites, some of them going back 500 million years, to see what was happening to the environment at the time the earth has had these massive extinction's take place. It's his thesis in *The End Of Evolution* that we are, in fact, in the middle of another great extinction right now which is connected to the million years of man, with the size of brain that we've had and what we're doing to the planet. It'll be very interesting working with Bruce on that particular project. We'll be collaborating probably in the Fall, but we'll have all our shooting done in the Summer and do all the mixing and sound recording in October/November of this year.

Joy Will Find A Way...

There was one summer when Bruce was here in Alberta and we went with this wonderful painter and photographer named Harry Savage, a great painter of the Canadian prairie. We went to a hill that Harry and I had visited many times near Drumheller, Alberta. There's a town there called Delia and there's this great hill above from which you can see about a hundred miles in every direction out over the prairie. We spent a weekend driving down there with Bruce and Kitty and his dog, Aroo. We got up an hour before dawn and went up on top of this hill and shot these shots of the sun coming up over the prairies which became the interior spread on that album. **END**

You can purchase the video titled *Ernest Brown, Pioneer Photographer* at:

Filmwest Associates
2399 Hayman Rd
Kelowna, B.C. V1Z 1Z8
Canada
Tel: 250-769-3399
Email: info@filmwest.com

Tour Schedule Update

July 6	Milan, Italy	Villa Arconati
July 7	Monforte, Italy	Auditorium Horszowsky
July 8	Cesena, Italy	Castle Cesena
July 10	Salerno, Italy	Arena Del Mare
July 12	Isola Liri, Italy	Boncompagni Square
July 14	Catania, Italy	Square (CANCELLED)
August 20	Northampton, Massachusetts	Iron Horse Music Hall
August 21	Northampton, Massachusetts	Iron Horse Music Hall
August 23	Syracuse, New York	Styleen's
August 25	Ann Arbor, Michigan	The Ark

My apologies for misspelling Duluth on the tour schedule in the last issue.

Cockburn- The Reluctant Star

*The following article was published in Music Canada Quarterly in the summer of 1974.
Written by David Farrell.*

When a man desires to accomplish something to the very best of his ability it is only natural that he should look to others to give him recognition. Just where the end of one's ability lies is something that one can explore over a lifetime, and some more; but generally we all set ourselves projects which we accomplish over a period of time and then go on to another, and another. All the time feeling your way over insecurities and

tribulations, perfecting small skills until we feel that we have conquered the basics and can truly explore with the imagination at work.

Musicians are very much the same way in that they learn the rudimentary steps involved in playing their respective instruments, and then go on to improvise, re-arrange and in turn to create music of their own making. Music can be both a personal experience, and a vicarious one; but in both cases some external force must motivate the creator to develop and inspire a mood, a feeling, a pointed concept, and some internal desire must be within the musician to execute these conceptual expressions.

The overlying feeling one gets from listening to Bruce Cockburn on record is that he is very concerned with 1) the space about him, and 2) the extent to which he can convey his expressionism without becoming excessively vague. With the aid of Gene Martynec, Cockburn has been stripping off musical embroidery from his compositions like some fastidious Victorian gentleman suddenly converted to Calvinism. The starkness of sound in “Déjà Vu,” or in the haunting quality of “You Don’t Have To Play The Horses” are classical Cockburn compositions. The austere design of his “serious” works have all the pleasing beauty about them of a vaulted crypt at full moon; and yet one gets drawn into them, infected by their ringing spiritualism and then dropped cold as he pronounces an end to the intermezzo. The brooding delivery of Cockburn is best projected through his album works, on stage – wisely, I think – he injects the levity of his country-heart into such optimistically cheery pieces as “Foxglove” and “Up On The Hillside.” According to Cockburn, who I was lucky enough to catch by chance in a coffee shop in Toronto recently, the instrumental shrubbery of his compositions is still being pruned, the next album being written for two guitars and a sniff of synthesizer. It took John Mayall a full twenty years plus Led Zeppelin before he reached his Turning Point. Bruce has somehow managed to reach his in less than half that time – and only one pseudo-commercial rock band, ironically called 3’s A Crowd.

Very much in keeping with his adroit musical simplicity, Cockburn refrains from any extraneous involvement in the music industry, including the giving of interviews as I was to find out.. The veil is drawn close and tight when he steps off from the performing stage, and the studio is tightly barred from onlookers when he records. It is no understatement to say that he is in fact hell-bent on preserving the image of rural rhapsodizer to the very “T,” even if it means passing the chance of amassing a small fortune over a short period of time. Perhaps durability is his design; the ability to stay perennially active as opposed to becoming a flash-in-the-pan with the sickly taste of having been and falling rock bottom downwards again. It is a characteristic of Canadians actually, when you stop to think about it. Even going back as far as Paul Anka – which, is really going back in time – the stars that this country has produced have remained as durable as the Rocky Mountains. From Anka through to the Guess Who, they have managed to stand firm in an industry that shifts its gaze more frequently than a child’s attention span. Not that Cockburn is to be considered in the same category of either the Guess Who or Anka; he is neither an international star, nor a commercial success. Durability however, is one [word illegible] rod that he shows every sign of brandishing, intently.

Cockburn is a very real presence within the Canadian folk scene: something of a national phenomenon.

“I have no inclinations to become a big star. I have a desire to play music ... To play to the very best of my capabilities, that’s what I offer. Nothing more. The giving of interviews, in my eyes, does not necessarily add anything to my music.”

Thoroughly affable to meet, Cockburn is also demure and aloof in his manner with those he does not know intimately. And those who know him intimately are much alike, guarded in what they say and concerned in why you wish to nose in matters that bear no pertinence to the fact: the fact being the written score.

To be perfectly honest, this entire story, from conception to finish (which I might add, has not arrived) revolved in symmetrical circles in my mind, absolutely refusing to interlock into one sensible piece with a lead, thesis and end. It was like chasing over hell’s half-acre trying to find the Watergate Hotel from directions given by Ron Ziegler; or even worse, in trying to pin down Trudeau on what exactly his anti-inflationary policy is. The facts were either nonexistent, or so misleading that I wondered if in fact certain people had attended the same philosophy classes as Ziegler.

As an example, I had researched a bit about Bruce from the True North files. Nothing truly impressive had been written about Bruce; a number of mixed reviews and some comments that rural papers had ceremoniously printed relating to one or another of the two national tours that he has performed on. The one real chunk of interesting reading was handed to me as an afterthought by Bernie Finkelstein, manager and guiding force behind True North. It was a four page spread from a 1972 copy of Saturday Night magazine (of all things), and it contained all of the pertinent biographical data that one generally digests before picking up the phone to make further inquiries ... spread evenly over four pages, including one 8x10 grinning glossy of the feature portrait.

Myrna Kostash authored the story, and even back then it didn’t read as if Bruce was doing too much talking. The greater part of the story rambling through his Celtic background, the Presbyterian influence on his later life and the outings to Arnprior for Cheeseburgers and Pepsi Cola. Perhaps these revealing insights don’t maketh a man, but I’d say that Myrna Kostash sweated a good bit over that piece before it was finished, and through that particular magazine probably turned a lot of people on to a name that they had never heard before.

One other clipping that I remember from the file actually underlines the futility of trying to do a story about a person rabidly non-publicity conscious. Without trying to confuse issues, that being that he (Bruce Cockburn) is quite indifferent to the media, publicity or success, and that he is a very articulate songwriter and accomplished musician, the fact remains that stories are going to be on occasion written about him, simply because he is a part of the performing arts, and a much respected one at that. Anyway, I think the clipping that I read was by Peter Goddard who at times can be quite humorous. Although

not that long, the story read quite logically from the time he walked into the True North offices, relating firstly the absence of Bruce who was supposed to be there for an interview, secondly, of Bruce's arrival and noticeable quietness of disposition, trailing off at the end with Bernie tap, tap, tapping away on his desk with a pencil. It was indeed a marvellous exercise in filling up space when absolutely nothing was occurring. Probably exactly the same situation that our political writers encountered while covering the election trail this past summer.

Born in Ottawa, Cockburn spent the early part of his life on a farm near Pembroke, in the Ottawa Valley. His boyhood was influenced by a structured discipline and respect for the church, something quite alien to a vast majority of the younger masses today. The spatial independence that he was able to find in the rural outposts, combined with the domestic discipline that he received in the home were to significantly stay with him after his carefree dip into the Beat generation which took him on brief jaunt to Europe with the folkie axe in hand.

The novelty of day to day living on the road soon wore the heels of his boots down and he returned to North America to take his turn at the books. Two years at the Berklee School of Music in Boston 'confirmed suspicions that he had previously spoken of, that was that America was not his cup of tea ... to quote from Saturday Night "... Ottawa is staunch and righteous; Boston had gangsters and corrupt politicians."

The episode at Berklee was undermined scholastically by his external endeavours which caught him droopy eyed in morning and unprepared for academic theory. While in Boston he became personally influenced by local musicians in the coffee houses of the area, where Tom Rush, and Eric Anderson, to name a few, were trying to eke out a living. The influences were nurtured, and when fully comprehended he was ready to move on, back north to home.

After the "back to the roots" approach of Europe and playing in Boston he joined up with a local band that was looking for an organist. Four transformations later, the Children and 3's A Crowd became nothing more than good experiences and pleasant memories. He was ready to go it alone, in his own way, on his own terms. David Wiffen, also a part of the latter band, was to break out on his own around this time, as was Richard Patterson who joined with Tom Rush as drummer. All from the Ottawa area.

Since that time, Bruce travelled and played solo for two years before meeting Bernie Finkelstein who was about to launch True North. In 1970 the first album was released: titled effectively, Bruce Cockburn. Following the same pattern as Gordon Lightfoot, he has recorded one album per year, which in order of release appeared as follows: High Winds White Sky, Sunwheel Dance, and the most recent to date - Night Vision.

The dominating influence of ex-Kensington Market guitarist Gene Martynec has become more and more apparent since Sunwheel Dance, and much of Bruce Cockburn's production knowledge has been learned from him. One of the biggest "home grown"

sleepers of last year - Coast To Coast Fever, by David Wiffen, being produced by Cockburn.

He has been a Juno Award winner three times consecutively in the Folk artist category and has scored the soundtrack for two films: Going Down the Road, and Birth of the West.

Since Night Vision, this year's album has been recorded bringing Martynec a little closer to the forefront, on second guitar. At the time of writing no title has been decided on. A second major endeavour which Bruce underwrote financially was an album of poetry written by a close friend, Paul Stoddard. Having only heard a brief snatch of one of the pieces I cannot really give a very honest appraisal of the work. The album was recorded at Thunder Sound with Bruce in the capacity of producer. He also plays a muted lead guitar throughout the pieces, plus some very tasty bass and percussion. The title of this album is Day Coach Rider, taken from the title cut, which runs the entire A side. This particular work appears to have little commercial application, and I think says a lot about the man who made it possible. As the portly Bernie Finkelstein ruminated, "I hope it breaks even for him, we scouted a lot of other sources for funding before I allowed him to distribute it through here, unfortunately nothing came through and it was something that he seriously wanted to do. So we did it. I think it important though that people realize that this project was funded entirely from Bruce's pocket."

"IT DON'T TAKE MUCH TO MAKE YOU LOSE SIGHT OF THE OBJECT OF THE GAME..."

Taken from "You Don't Have To Play the Horses," it probably summarizes everything that this typical artist believes in. The unequivocal right to pursue his own interests without contention. He is almost a curio amid a swirling mass of jaded glitter. Never to become a star, always will he continue to shimmer.

End

NOTICE

I am working as a Park Ranger again this Summer at Mt. Rainier National Park here in Washington State. I'll only be in Snohomish on Thursdays and Fridays until I finish my service around October 1. I will be checking mail, email and phone messages once a week. If you are in the park this Summer stop by and say howdy. -DK

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Walker Thompson

*In 1965 Bruce Cockburn was attending The Berklee College Of Music in Boston. While there he was a member of a jug band called Walker Thompson And His Boys. In June 2000, I spoke with **Douglas Grossman**, another member of the band. –Daniel Keebler*

I went to Boston in 1963 to go to college. I'd started college in St. Louis and transferred up to Northeastern University. I'd been involved in music since the '50s. I had my first Rock and Roll band in '58 or '59. Somewhere pre-Beatles the scene turned from Doo-Wop Rock and Roll to Folk Music, ethnic music and acoustic music. There was a pretty good scene going up in Boston. Electric wasn't really in at that time.

I can't remember where Bruce and I ran into each other— whether it was a coffeehouse or perhaps I may have lived across the street from his dormitory where he was going to Berklee. We may have just met on the street. In any event we discovered we had a lot in common musically and we started playing together. We'd just jam together for long periods of time. I was also in a jug band and I brought him into the band. He was a great player, a great addition to the band. His musical knowledge as well as his musical skill was *vast*. He had great eclectic taste; he knew his roots, blues and folk music. He was a bright guy. I would have to say he was certainly head and shoulders above not only everybody in *our* band, but I would say most people who were in the scene at that time, and there were some highly recognizable people; Jim Kweskin and his jug band, Tom Rush, Taj Majal, Tim Hardin. Jesse Colin Young used to come up from New York City. Bruce was every bit as good as all these people. Of course we had no recognition. I guess these were his *budding* years.

There was a guy in the band named Jim Thompson and his middle name was Walker. We thought that had a nice ring to it. It sounded kind of folkie.

Bruce was one of the few four-finger pickers. Most everybody in those days who was playing guitar was finger-picking with three fingers. He had that extra finger that he played with which allowed him to create a lot more music. He was playing a Martin.

He did a lot of singing. We distributed the singing but he was a good singer. We did a lot of covers; some Beatles, some Rolling Stones as well as a lot of folk music. We weren't doing any originals. We played local folk clubs, mostly around Boston. We were never signed or never recorded.

We did play that one club up in Ottawa (Le Hibou). Bruce got us that gig and that was a good gig for us. We did very good there and we were well received. I remember the club was a really nice venue to play in. The audience was very receptive to us. Bruce's family had a summer house up on some lake and we spent our days out by the lake. It was a real nice trip.

As for his affinity for school, I think he went there to augment his musical knowledge. Berklee was a *really hip* school at that time. Where could you go to school to learn that kind of music? It was a real musician's school.

Thank God he's basically fulfilling his destiny because this was a guy who was extremely talented early on. It was apparent that he was the *real deal* and that he had something to say. Bruce was his own person and he was a hard guy to read. Even when you spent time together you never really knew where he was at or what he might be thinking. He could get very internal and he could be very aloof, but he was very deep and introspective.

The best memories I have are *pre-jug* band when he and I used to just sit around and play all night together. It was kind of a one-on-one thing and we just enjoyed the music and the commonality of the blues and the Beatles or whatever. Once we became involved in the band I don't remember a lot of outside-the-band times spent together.

The people that went to Berklee weren't really the people who were in the folk and rock scene. They were studying *jazz*. So Bruce in a way was moonlighting, which is a good thing. I'd say he was more involved in the Boston *music* scene than he was in Berklee.

Bruce Cockburn On Love, Spirituality & Firearms

From The Oregonian, February 2000. By Marty Hughley

Bruce Cockburn is a world traveler. Not just through his three decades of touring as one of the most accomplished contemporary folk musicians around, but also as a noted activist who has spent time in locales as far-flung as Nicaragua, Tibet and Cambodia learning firsthand about the complexities of war, political struggle and ecological crisis.

So perhaps it was only fitting that when the Canadian singer-songwriter last visited Portland - during a rapid-fire media tour to promote the September release of his latest album, "Breakfast in New Orleans, Dinner in Timbuktu" - his interview with The Oregonian took place at the Portland International Airport. As he awaited his outgoing flight, Cockburn talked about his recent work, longtime interests and future concerns.

Cockburn will return to town Saturday, along with drummer Ben Riley and bassist Steve Lucas, for a show at the Roseland Theater. A remarkably adroit guitarist, Cockburn can sound terrific in any setting. But the jazz-informed flexibility of his current rhythm section should be particularly apt for his latest material. After pursuing a folk-blues simplicity for a few years, "Breakfast in New Orleans..." and '97's "The Charity of Night" have moved back toward the worldbeat influences that sparked such albums as "The Trouble With Normal" and "World of Wonders" during his mid-'80s creative peak.

It was during that period that Cockburn gained MTV exposure with "If I Had a Rocket Launcher," a moving yet morally ambivalent response to the civilian casualties of war in

Central America. It's not like Cockburn to take the easy view of a subject. He's described himself as a "left-wing redneck" for his convictions about both social justice and personal liberty, and although he's probably beloved by many melt-the-guns liberals, he's a gun enthusiast and avid target shooter. And even in the aftermath of highly publicized school shooting sprees, America's gun-control debate, he admits, is a loaded issue.

"Our situation in Canada, with respect to legality and all, is so different," he explains, shrugging off the strangeness of discussing guns at an airport gate. "It's not unlike what you do when you get a car. You pass a test to, say, prove that you're not going to shoot your foot or somebody else's. And, if you're a member of a gun club, which is the only way you can have a handgun, at every turn you're encouraged to play it safe... The idea of having a loaded gun around the house in case a burglar shows up is something that's alien to us.

"Archery, javelin-throwing and hammer-throwing - those are all warlike things that have evolved into what we think of as harmless sports. The whole Olympics is based on warrior prowess. That's a healthy channeling of that stuff that's in our nature. Are you going to tell those biathlon competitors that their firearms are evil? They're shooting at paper and they know they're shooting at paper."

Cockburn has been outspoken in the movement for an international ban on land mines, and a discussion of that issue unexpectedly brings us back around to the buried aspects of America's gun violence:

"Turf is a big factor in the human makeup," he says, by way of explaining Cambodian villagers who use leftover Khmer Rouge land mines to protect their pastures from their neighbor's cows. "But here in our own culture, most of us don't even own the place we live in. So our turf is psychic. And there's a terrible risk that's being created where that psychic space is trod upon or isn't allowed to develop because it's constantly filled with stuff. It's looking to me like that's why high school kids are killing each other. Nobody has ever told them 'You have space. You have this universe that you live in that's yours as much as it is anybody's.'"

Though his songs haven't shied from difficult subjects, Cockburn's universe, it should be noted, is on balance a bright place. One of the thematic undercurrents on "Breakfast in New Orleans . . ." is a new-found sensuality that shines through from the steamy tropical imagery of "Mango" to a duet with the Cowboy Junkies' Margo Timmons on "Blueberry Hill."

"I learned as a child not to trust in my body," Cockburn sings on one song. He was born 54 years ago with spina bifida.

But while his songs now hint at carnal pleasures, they still point toward cosmic ones. Once described (to his bemusement) as a "Christian mystic," Cockburn says his faith "came by a fairly roundabout route" that wound from Buddhism to the occult to Christian philosopher C. S. Lewis. And "the woman I married, who'd been raised in a very free-

thinking household,... for an adolescent rebellion became a Baptist. She left that after awhile, but retained a deep knowledge of the Bible - which I certainly didn't have. We used to read it in high school and look for all the dirty parts, all the stuff about torture and killing people. That was my attitude toward the Bible until she showed me that there were ways of seeing it as a body of profound knowledge.

"Eventually I reached the point where I felt I was a Christian and started calling myself that. And it involved a personal commitment of a sort, because it wasn't a term I was prepared to take loosely."

Cockburn shares a philosophical and artistic inclination with his former producer T-Bone Burnett, and Burnett's wife, pop singer Sam Phillips. All three write about spirituality as something beleaguered by a world of shallowness, greed and hypocrisy ("Even though I know who loves me, I'm not that much less lost," Cockburn once sang.) Yet they present it even more strikingly as something vast and intimate, mysterious and beautiful. To them, faith is poetry, not dogma. "I remember discussing whether or not it was appropriate for Christians who take it seriously to even call themselves Christians at this point," he says. "Sam doesn't. I still do, but I do it knowing that my Christianity wouldn't be recognizable as such by a whole lot of people who also call themselves Christians."

"To me, the important thing in collective terms is to recognize that there is a spiritual dimension to things and that that dimension needs to be paid attention to. After that, how you pay attention to it is going to be part of your journey. And everybody has to discover for themselves what that means. For me it went through a few different things before it entered into a Christian framework. And the search goes on."

As always, Cockburn keeps searching with pen, heart, and open mind. "We're the insect life of paradise," he sings in one of his recent songs. "Glimpse only sometimes the amazing breadth of heaven."

"As long as we're in the tangible nature that we live with, we are walking in the tall grass," he says. "And it's not till you get outside that by one means or another that you're able to see more than the occasional glimpse of that bigger reality that I'm convinced is there. What it is, I don't have any idea. But there's a bigger space to move in than the one we've got now."

Bruce Cockburn's getting prepared for takeoff.

Bruce Cockburn Special

Coming soon on CBC TV. This concert was recorded in May, 2000 in Montreal. From the CBC...

One of Canada's finest singer/songwriters, Bruce Cockburn performs some of his best-loved music at Le Spectrum in Montreal, including If I Had A Rocket Launcher,

Wondering Where The Lions Are, You Don't Have To Play The Horses, The Trouble With Normal and Lovers In A Dangerous Time.

Solo Dates- Fall/Winter 2000

October 7	Sedona, Arizona	Verde Valley Festival*
October 16	Washington, D.C.	Grosvenor Auditorium**
December 2	Stanford, Connecticut	Center For The Arts***
December 3	Ottawa, Ontario	The National Arts Centre***
December 4	Toronto, Ontario	Massey Hall***
December 5	Burlington, Vermont	The Flynn Theatre***
December 6	Providence, Rhode Island	Veterans Memorial Auditorium***

*A benefit concert for the Native American Scholarship Fund

**Performance for the National Geographic Society's Letelier-Moffit Human Rights Award.

***Campaign For A Landmine Free World benefit shows

Creation Dream- The Songs Of Bruce Cockburn

In September 2000 Michael Occhipinti released an 11 track CD on the True North label (TND 216) with jazz interpretations of the following Bruce Cockburn songs. Players include Hugh Marsh, Jonathan Goldsmith, Don Byron, Andrew Downing, Barry Romberg, Jean Martin, Mike Murley, Kevin Turcotte and Bruce on one track.

Lovers In A Dangerous Time, Mistress Of Storms, Live On My Mind, Wondering Where The Lions Are (Giftbearer), Pacing The Cage, Creation Dream, One Of The Best Ones, Rumours Of Glory, Homme Brûlant, If I Had A Rocket Launcher, Lord Of The Starfields. -DK

FROM THE LINER NOTES...

Jazz likes to think of itself as a club with a restricted membership but since the days of the Tin Pan Alley, it has recorded music meant for the general public....such as the Broadway songs of Irving Berlin, George Gershwin and Cole Porter. From Oscar Peterson to Miles Davis, jazz musicians have taken popular song into the world of improvisation and along the way demonstrated the longevity of them as standards. Today a new generation of jazz musician is trying a fresh experiment with a different kind of music; the pop and rock songs they grew up listening to.

There is no doubt American culture has had an enormous impact on Canadians but along the way we've developed our own distinct perspective and cultural icons. One of our

most valuable is Bruce Cockburn. Over thirty years, Bruce has recorded 25 albums and moved artistry, composition and musicianship to new levels.

Bruce's appeal is broad and in the past many have recorded his songs, ranging from the Barenaked Ladies to Maria Muldaur to Jimmy Buffett but never before have his compositions been given the jazz treatment found on this CD by Michael Occhipinti. Michael is best known as the co-leader of the Juno award winning NOJO (Neufeld-Occhipinti Jazz Orchestra). His work as a guitarist is technically dexterous and harmonically astute. He's thrown his arms around music in all its diversity.

Bruce Cockburn's music has been a part of Michael's musical vocabulary for years. "When I was younger, my brother Roberto used to mention Bruce and the musicians in his band for their strong musicianship, and I remember him pointing out the great reggae feel in *Wondering Where The Lions Are*. *Rocket Launcher* and *Lovers In A Dangerous Time* both came out when I was in high school, and those were the songs that made me go see Bruce perform. When it came time to do this album, I liked the fact that no jazz artist had explored a Canadian songwriter's repertoire to any major extent. Bruce has had a long career and there are not many artists with so many CD's who are still growing. Bruce's music covers a lot of ground."

"It is pretty clear when you listen to Bruce's recordings that he's very jazz aware," says Michael. "Just listen to the chords he uses and the lines he plays when he is improvising. Bruce is a musician who's definitely checked out a lot of stuff."

Bruce's sensitivity to jazz can be traced back to the 60's when he studied jazz composition at Boston's Berklee College of Music, (He received an honorary Doctorate of Music there in 1997) and to the many jazz musicians, including Gary Burton, Pat LaBarbara, Freddie Stone and Katherine Moses, he's asked to appear on his albums.

The players on *Creation Dream* are a fully stocked ensemble willing and able to dig deep into the Bruce Cockburn repertoire with passion and not a drop of self-consciousness. First and foremost is the impassioned and imaginative guitar playing of Michael Occhipinti. His eleven arrangements are beautifully constructed and leave one with the impression he's delicately taken Bruce's songs apart and put them back together. Sonically they range from gritty to elegant. Michael is modest when it comes to assessing his contribution to the overall sound. "As much as the arrangements are mine," he explains, "they are definitely shaped by the people who play them".

Clarinetist Don Byron's quest for experimentation is as pronounced as ever. The superb rhythm team of bassist Andrew Downing and drummer Barry Romberg, with additional help from Jean Martin, provide a strong foundation. Trumpeter Kevin Turcotte, violinist Hugh Marsh, and saxophonist Mike Murley, are three of the most formidable musicians and can scare the pants off most players. Finally there is the unobtrusive guitar playing of Bruce Cockburn on *Pacing the Cage* and the subtle piano work of the producer of this project, Jonathan Goldsmith on *One of the Best Ones*.

Recording Creation Dream was also an opportunity for Michael Occhipinti to fulfill many of his beliefs about contemporary music in today's jazz world. "Over the years I've enjoyed finding pop music I loved as a teenager and incorporating it into my jazz group," states Michael. "Think about it. Miles and Bird performed the pop music of their day, and they knew those songs simply from hearing and absorbing them as the sound around them. As much as I love the jazz standards songbook, I often have to buy recordings of tunes I've never heard before so I can memorize and perform them, because they aren't part of my own cultural and musical experience. Nobody has to learn the music they've grown up with, and not surprisingly, performing that music feels somehow more instinctive and satisfying. Ever since rock 'n roll, there has been a strong anti pop sentiment amongst many jazz musicians, but there is a lot of music worth exploring that was written in my own lifetime. Paying tribute to the music you grew up with is certainly overdue."

RAINIER UPDATE

I have finished my summer season at Mt. Rainier National Park, and a good one it was. I will return there later in the winter to ranger part time in a part of the park called Paradise. Yup, Paradise. Stop in and say hello should your travels bring you in this direction. -Daniel

Issue Number 42

December 2000

Bruce Cockburn To Be Inducted Into Canadian Music Hall Of Fame

TORONTO, October 17, 2000- One of this country's most celebrated and respected artists will be inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame during the 30th Anniversary Juno Awards Show next March.

Bruce Cockburn will take his rightful place in the Hall of Fame alongside such icons as Gordon Lightfoot, Anne Murray, The Guess Who, Leonard Cohen, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Hank Snow and Paul Anka, to name just a few. Bruce said "To be included in the Hall of fame is a great honor. Somehow it feels like it's too soon... but I'm deeply touched that CARAS (Canadian Academy Of Recording Arts And Sciences) has seen fit to accord me this award. I look forward with great anticipation to the event in March."

Bruce Cockburn's awards and achievements are many and include 11 Juno Awards, and 20 gold and platinum albums. He also had the distinction back in 1970 of being the very first artist to release an album on the then-fledgling Canadian label, True North Records. Bruce has received three Honorary Doctorates which include Doctor of Letters from York University and 1997's Doctor of Music Degree from Boston's Berklee College of Music where he once studied jazz composition.

“My songwriting is an attempt to take what I’ve experienced and what I think is true and distill it into something that is entertaining, then throw it out to people and say ‘maybe you can use this too.’ In some ways it makes me the focal point for like-minded people...they hear the songs...and all of a sudden there’s a kind of community.” Bruce Cockburn’s modest summation perhaps best defines his artistry. Where this fails however is in doing justice to his huge and enduring body of work which has made Bruce one of the most revered singer/songwriters of any generation—anywhere. Bruce Cockburn’s presence at the forefront of human rights activism and role as spokesman for environmental issues are key elements of this man’s distinguished 30 year career.

Said CARAS President Daisy Falle “Bruce Cockburn has made his mark here in Canada and also far beyond our borders, not only as an outstanding musician and songwriter but as a generous and caring person. His humanity is an example to us all. The Academy is proud to welcome him into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame.”

The 30th Anniversary Juno Awards will be aired on CBC Television on Sunday, March 4, 2001 from Copps Coliseum in Hamilton, Ontario.

Watch for additional information on Bruce’s induction into the Music Hall of Fame in the February issue.

The Road To Timbouctou And Beyond

In February 1998, Bruce Cockburn set out to observe the issue of desertification in Mali. As part of the trip to Mali a video titled **River Of Sand** was filmed to give others a look at this problem. The following was written by **Friederike Knabe**, Director of Canadian Programs for USC. She accompanied Bruce on this trip and gave this report about what the journey was like to just get to Timbouctou. I spoke with Friederike in March of 1998, shortly after her return from Mali (Refer to the April 1998 issue of Gavin’s Woodpile for details). The River Of Sand Video is available for purchase by visiting the website at <http://www.kensingtontv.com/go/riverofsand>, for more information. -Daniel

February 6 - Members of the team leave Montreal and Toronto respectively for a four-week trip to Mali. In Montreal Diane, Martin and I had to switch airlines at the last minute - the Air France plane had engine trouble. What a start to the trip! Although they are over-booked, Air Canada lets us fly with them to ensure that we make the connection in Paris to Bamako the following morning. Unfortunately they charge us for excess baggage.

February 7 - Hotel Al Mounia, Bamako: The full film team meets at the airport in Paris; Bob Lang from Toronto and Bruce Cockburn after a week of travelling in Europe. The arrival in Bamako six hours later is smooth and Mamby and Mathieu are in the arrival hall. What a difference from my last visit three years ago! All the luggage seems to be there and in good shape: two video cameras, tripod, a big cooler case with twenty

something hours of film, and a satellite phone. During the drive to the hotel I cannot help but compare what I see to my previous trip. The vista has changed: more buildings, better streets... more cars and more people. After settling in at the hotel, we go into town to start exploring Bamako's music scene. Bruce had found out that Toumani Diabate, one of West Africa's foremost kora players might play at the Hogon Bar - but no luck. In another bar we find a group of local musicians who play the sort of West African Music we were looking for. The balafon player impresses us. The balafon is a type of xylophone and a very traditional instrument in West Africa. The kora is also very traditional and resembles a harp and lute. It is after midnight by the time we get a rest. A taste of things to come.

February 8 - Hotel Al Mounia: During a briefing session with USC Mali staff at the office we map out our travel and filming plans. What to film, where to film, how to link the first film shoot together with this trip and Bruce, as the host of the show. Finalizing the travel to Tombouctou is another challenge. We have to go by desert track, but which one? None of the USC staff has ever driven to Tombouctou. We need an experienced driver and/or expert of the north to travel with us. Where can we spend the night? A day of questions and few answers.

In the afternoon, with the help of a local Quebecker, Gaétan, Bob and Bruce arrange a meeting at a local restaurant that evening with Toumani Diabate, the kora player. They are thrilled with the prospect that he might play with Bruce and we might film them together. As evening falls, we have our first test of the satellite phone. We have to start our regular contact to Toronto. Al Booth, the webmaster is waiting to get the information for the interactive web site. Bob decides that these phone calls should be filmed. We go out onto the terrasse in front of Bruce's room at the hotel. The lighting is moved around a few times until Martin is happy. On film the sequence has to look like evening and moonlight, still there has to be enough light to see the faces. Next...where is the satellite? We use the compass and search device and hit a signal. No, that's the wrong satellite; we need the western one not the eastern one. Search again. Success! We've found the right satellite somewhere among the thousands of stars that we can see. A night in Africa. We have established contact that will accompany us throughout this trip.

After 10:00pm: We are the first visitors at the restaurant. The balafon player from the night before greets us like old friends. Keletigui Diabate, it turns out, is one of the best-known balafon players in Mali and Toumani's regular team partner. Toumani arrives with the rest of the group. They play traditional Malian music, improvising as they go along. The Pizzeria fills with fans, Malian and a few white faces. After a while Toumani asks Bruce to join in, "jamming along," as Bruce refers to it. Everybody is totally absorbed by the music that is being created. It is like a dialogue, exploring harmony and friendship. A free round on the house! The owner of the pizzeria is almost moved to tears. Nobody has ever listened to anything like it. By the time we leave at 1:30 am, friendships have formed.

February 9 - Hotel Al Mounia: We meet at Toumani's house to film another jamming session with Toumani and Bruce. The courtyard is cleaned and set up. Family members

add to the audience. Cameras are set up, the sound system checked for stereo recording. “Du silence, s’il-vous plait,” Diane gives the appropriate sign to everybody. Bruce and Toumani, the metal, silver shining guitar and the traditional kora made from gourd and wood, meet. A meeting of minds, of music, of harmonies. The sound is special and magic happens. The audience is enthralled. The musicians feel that this is special - we feel it too. To have this on film! The excitement grows. Back at the hotel, we have a lot to talk about to Al in Toronto. Music will be important in a video with Bruce. Bob and he are scouting for a griot, or a griotte (a very traditional aspect of Mali society, they sing the stories of the family or community and are a regular feature in local festivals) to add to the film story. Two options emerge with women who are established singers and come from griot families.

February 10 - Hotel Al Mounia: We receive our first lesson in ‘desertification.’ We visit a new USC-supported project in a nearby forest area - a patch, the size of a about hectare is seriously degraded and turning into desert if no action is taken. The local school children have gotten involved and started planting trees that are particularly drought tolerant. This is the first step in regenerating the area. In the next fiscal year, Mamby hopes that a well will add the necessary water resource so that the students can water the trees regularly. Already today, one can see the new growth. It is important to fight desertification in all cases like this. Desertification starts usually at one point and the area can quickly expand and multiply in size if one doesn’t intervene early, Mamby explains.

February 11 – Bamako: Final preparations for the trip north - 18 cases of water, three bottles per person per day, and other essentials are purchased. Bob and Bruce make contact with the ‘griotte,’ a woman singer and story teller of the old tradition. She will sing for us and the film upon our return to Bamako. Bruce is slowly relaxing. The music component of the video has taken off well.

February 12 - Léré - L’Équilibre: En route to Tombouctou, finally. Packing the two land cruisers is the first challenge. We decide to store the water bottles on the roof of the USC vehicle. Only 14 boxes fit and travel with us - by the end of the day we will have lost at least two cases as the rough desert travel makes the plastic bottles leak and break. We need the water to last until Douentza. Leaving the paved road at Niono, we have to find ‘exit 9’ - anybody’s guess where that is. Baba, the driver of the second vehicle supplied by the Canadian Embassy is a find. He has lots of experience travelling the north and keeps calm in all situations. One dirt track looks the same as the next but he decides that we have found our turn off. On we go on the dirt road that soon is reduced to desert tracks. Colours change from pale cream to orange-ochre. Scattered shrubs and trees bring a touch of green to the picture. The landscape changes quite regularly: more trees, fewer trees, rocky ground, sand. The first sand dunes need to be negotiated - it is a bit like driving in snow. We plan to reach Niafunké but as the afternoon moves on, it is clear that we won’t make it. Yes, we need to film Bruce in the desert, so arrangements are made that one vehicle goes ahead and waits for the second with Bruce in the back seat to prove that he was there. He is in desert gear...he wears black always and we have to admire his cap with its sun visor and back flap to protect his neck. How did he get that cap in black

too? He tells us that his daughter dyed it for him. More water bottles break. There is little we can do.

The sun seems to move faster as it goes down. We have to reach a village before it gets too dark. Travelling in the dark through the desert is out of the question. We press on to Léré, the next small town which we have to reach before the sun sets. The only 'maison de passage' does not look too inviting. We decide to pay a visit to a local French NGO post and enquire whether we could stay there in the compound or at least leave the vehicles safe for the night. We are invited in by Alain and are offered not only places to sleep in the yard but also dinner. We eat as if we had not eaten for days: the best 'Salade Nicoise' ever. Alain and Dominique run this small NGO office but the house is comparatively luxurious, with its own clean water supply and generator. The discussions go on into the night, comparing experiences and development programming approaches. We have to phone Toronto. We use both vehicle batteries, one for the light the other for the phone. Alain is impressed how easily we can communicate with the world...

February 13 (Friday) - Hotel in Tombouctou: The last leg to Tombouctou. We get an early start at 6:00am. The bets are on whether we will make it by 6pm. Although only about 200 km, we have to negotiate a lot more sand and dunes. We are in real desert zone now, although the Niger is not far away and we are close to two big lakes that provide essential resources for the local people. We see more market garden areas; still the villages, the people and the cattle look very poor. We agree to have the vehicles wait for each other at regular intervals to make sure that we don't drive too far apart. The sand obscures the vision so the distance between the vehicles grows again. Niafunké is the next stop. It is incredibly hot here - we reach Ali Farka Touré's guest house for a bite of lunch. He is known to support his local community well. The man himself is not there, we expect him to turn up in Tombouctou. Niafunke was close to being abandoned a few years back during the disturbance with Tuareg groups. Now people have come back and they are slowly rebuilding their town. A number of international agencies are here to help.

More sand, more dunes, more slipping and sliding. We absorb this desert atmosphere. Bruce is contemplative. This is his first desert experience. "You know," he says "this trip for me is a realization of a dream I've had for 30 years." "What?" I ask. "Driving through the desert seeing Tombouctou?" "No," he responds with a smile, "playing with a good kora player. This has been wonderful. I've been studying this music for 30 years." The day passes quickly and again we see the sun setting too fast. Baba speeds as much as he can to reach Tombouctou before sundown. We stop, as agreed, after negotiating one big sand dune area and wait. No second vehicle. This time, there is no other track to pass us. They have to come this way. After what seems like a very long wait, we decide to drive back and look for our vehicle and its passengers. Nervousness starts building. We drive for at least 15 minutes without seeing their tracks. We pass over more sand dunes before we finally see them. Yes, they are ok. They got stuck twice, once they had to dig themselves out of a sand dune. Another half hour of driving and we reach the paved road. The road to Tombouctou! We make it to the hotel just after six pm. We are too tired to think of the bet.

February 14 – Tombouctou: Filming of sand dunes, different vistas around Tombouctou. Mohamed Ali, our interesting guide, explains the history of Tombouctou and the few historical sites left in town. It is the road to Tombouctou that overwhelms. The town is nothing out of the ordinary. Tuaregs hang around the hotel, follow us closely, sales people par excellence. Tourist business seems to be the main occupation for young and older men. The light is too bright to film, we have to wait for the afternoon when the setting sun wraps the dunes and the houses in a golden glow. Bruce is fascinated by the Tuareg knives and leather boxes. He ends up with a beautiful example of their work. Bargaining is not his strength, nor mine, but we're learning fast.

At the port in Koumoni, huge barges with grain sacks - WorldFood Program and USAID. The yearly supply of food aid is brought in on these ships as long as the Niger water is high enough for transport. We get permission to film the unloading and also to board the container ship. We also need to negotiate the ferry for the next day to get on the track for Douentza, due south. The Niger is not very wide here, but the crossing will take between two and a half and three hours. You wonder why? Handshakes seal the deal.

Ali Farka Touré is easily recognized. He is Mali's best known musician in North America. A brief, unplanned meeting outside the hotel is friendly. The possibility of filming is raised with him and he agrees that Bruce and he will play some pieces together. The concert is outside in the hotel courtyard, the audience a select crowd. When Ali Farka takes centre stage, he is quite the entertainer. Bruce joins after a few pieces and they play several together. Ali Farka is used to the spotlight and Bruce has less than an equal share. He is good humoured about it. The audience enjoys the concert. We are not so sure whether we like what we see. It's been another long day.

February 15 - USC guesthouse in Douentza: Early departure from the hotel to catch 'our ferry' - we need to be there before eight to ensure that we catch it. We are the only passengers. Within five minutes of departure, we hit a sandbar. The ferry is nothing but a floating shell. It is 'powered' by a small outside motor on a pirogue, the long narrow boats that are a familiar sight along the Niger. The pirogue is tied to the ferry but at such an angle that the ferryman cannot see where he is going. Several young men jump into the shallow water and try to loosen the ferry out of the sandbar. It takes several minutes before they manage. Finally we can move on, along the coastline until we drift properly with the current into the middle of the Niger. No wonder the crossing takes so long! We film and also make use of the satellite phone to call Douentza to let people there know that we are arriving that evening. Villages and sand dunes drift by. Finally on the other side, we see two vehicles, the return customers. No port or dock at this side, not even a sign to identify the landing spot. Getting off the ferry is not as easy as getting on, but after a second try both vehicles make it through the water to dry land. The track takes us to Douentza - we can see the rock formation of the hills around Douentza from some distance. We have made it by 6 pm. The welcome at the USC guest house is enthusiastic...very special. All the Douentza staff are there, as well as Mamby and several local partners from Bamako. They are here for a major program review and planning session. Back to work, we discuss the schedule and places to visit in the next couple of

days to familiarize the team with the program area. Filming will start in earnest after that. The Bamako questions are still to be answered: where will we film, whom will we meet, how will the story evolve?

Find out as Bruce hosts this hour-long documentary:

River of Sand Video
Kensington Communications Inc.
20 Maud Street, Suite 402
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M5V 2M5

END

Bruce Attends SOA Protest Rally

Bruce attended a protest rally in Columbus, Georgia on November 18 and 19. The event was sponsored by the School Of The Americas Watch. On Saturday he performed a song with Pete Seeger plus he performed Call It Democracy and If I had A Rocket Launcher on his own. On Sunday he performed The Whole Night Sky and Strange Waters.

Protesters allege that the School Of The Americas teaches Latin American military personnel tactics to use against their own people (including killings and assassinations). It is scheduled to shut down and reopen under a new name, the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Protection, in January 2000.

More detailed information about the School Of The Americas can be found in an article in the February 1998 issue of Gavin's Woodpile. You can also learn gobs more at the SOA Watch website at www.soaw.org.

The Word

RECORDINGS

Columbia Audio Buyways (CAT 4991), released in 1993. A various artist's cassette tape that includes Joy To The World and I Saw Three Ships. Both tracks are from the 1993 studio release, Christmas.

Happy Xmas (COL 475620 2), released in 1993. This thirteen track variable artists CD contains Oh Little Town Of Bethlehem and Silent Night, from the 1993 studio release, Christmas.

Hear Music, Volume 2 (Hear Music/EMI-Capitol, 72435-29429-2-3). Released in 2000, this fifteen track variable artists CD contains Last Night Of The World from the studio

release, *Breakfast In New Orleans Dinner In Timbuktu*. This CD is available at Starbucks's Coffee shops. More information at www.hearmusic.com.

We Are Each Other's Angels (Prime CD). This variable artists CD was released in 2000 and contains the live version of *Lord Of The Starfields* from *Circles In The Stream*. Twenty percent of the profits of this CD go to Habitat for Humanity.

Six Strings North Of The Border (CD BCD128 The Borealis Recording Co.). Released in 2000, this variable artists CD contains the studio release of *Foxglove*. On the web at www.borealisrecords.com.

PRINT

On A Cold Road— Tales of Adventure in Canadian Rock, by Dave Bidini, guitarist for the Rheostatics. The book makes a few short mentions of Bruce. Published by McClelland & Stewart in 1998.

Listen! Songs and Poems of Canada, by Homer Hogan. Likely out of print these days, this book was published in 1972 by Methuen Publications. It features the work of Bruce Cockburn, Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, Gordon Lightfoot, Murray McLauchlan, Leonard Cohen, The Band, Beverly Glenn-Copeland, Guess Who and Perth County Conspiracy. The four works by Bruce are *Happy Good Morning Blues*, *You Point to the Sky*, *Let Us Go Laughing* and *Shining Mountain*.

Three moments of Love in Leonard Cohen and Bruce Cockburn
by Paul Nonnekes.

Three Moments is a series of reflections on the work of Leonard Cohen and Bruce Cockburn, two popular singer-songwriter poets.

These two artists, so different in style and temperament, are brought together in one work in order to compare and examine the way in which they approach the question of love and desire—in art and in their life. *Three Moments* looks at how masculine desire, in its search for love, expresses itself in song and poetry; at how the poetics relate to the ideal; at the obstacles faced and the struggle endured. These issues are examined from the points of view of the psychoanalytic, the symbolic and the universal.

Paul Nonnekes, Ph.D., teaches Cultural Studies at Red Deer College, Alberta.

More information at www.cbsd.com.

OTHER

The concert that was filmed by CBC TV in Montreal earlier this year will now most likely air in the Spring of 2001, to coincide more closely with the Juno awards in March. I will publish more detailed information as it is available.

Bruce received the Native Heart award this November at the **Native American Music Awards** held in New Mexico. He received the award for the soundtrack *Wolves*, which contained *The Whole Night Sky*. More details can be found on *Wolves* on page 5 of the August 1999 issue of Gavin's Woodpile.

The December 6 Landmines Benefit show is now being held at the Flynn Theatre in Burlington, Vermont. It was originally scheduled for Providence, Rhode Island.

Goodbye & Hello

Doug Flavelle leaves True North after almost six years of serving as their Director of Artist & Media Relations. I would like to thank Doug largely for helping to keep me informed of matters regarding Bruce's work. His interest in what I have been doing with the newsletter is greatly appreciated. Thank you for trusting me, Doug. I will miss you.

Welcome to **Brenda Biseau**, who steps into the position as Director of Artist & Media Relations on the heels of Doug's departure. All the best in your adventures at True North. May it be a good experience for you.