middle of nowhere. Here she meets the hero (played by Michael Douglas), who lives a hermit-like existence and scours the rain forest for rare tropical birds he sells in an effort to save enough money to buy a yacht. Their first meeting on the road is, conventionally, less than auspicious. He blames her for the loss of an entire carload of full cages, but as soon as the shooting starts they join forces and flee the bandits. Unlike *The Temple of Doom*, here the heroine occasionally outwits her male protector – often at the most crucial moments. Nonetheless, she ultimately loses him to his yacht dream (after he has rescued her from an alligator and other antagonists).

She returns to New York and submits the entire story in book form (complete with happy-ever-after ending) to her publisher, who extols it as her best work to date. Plain-Jane who now stands transformed before us, with her curled hair loose and cascading down her shoulders, beautifully made-up and dressed. She replies languidly, "I was inspired." Her make-believe world of unfulfilled dreams has been lifted off the page and transferred to her reality – with the exception of a real-life unhappy ending. She then looks wistfully out the window and sadly makes her way home. In the street in front of her home she finds an enormous sailboat, high as a skyscraper. The hero raises one foot onto the side of the boat to show her his alligator-skin boots. Like the Neanderthal with his bear-skin, or the warrior with his eagle feathers, he must bring back from his quest a symbol of victory. She hands him her grocery bag and he helps her aboard their boat. Reality has improved upon art. The woman's previous existence – alone in her apartment with her hair tied back, in comfortable old clothes, in the company of her cat and her typewriter – has been vindicated as a *temporary* phase. Her lonely dreaming was only the trial period prior to her salvation by a hero who was previously only imaginatively alive. Long before the story begins she creates the man of her dreams; when she finally meets him, she fashions herself into the counterpart she so often has put into her novels. She only has to wait for her fiction to come true. He, on the other hand, must actively pursue his dream and cannot think of returning to claim her until his battle has been won.

The common denominator in all these films is comedy. Precisely *because* the central challenge is couched in comic terms are the means often mistaken for the end. Marcia Pally warned us against being influenced by the "gritty truth" of some movies; we must also be on our guard concerning the subject matter of comedies, and not let ourselves be fooled into believing that everything within the comic structure is allotted equal criticism. In typical comic fashion the films end with a couple as a symbol of balance, if not of equality. All problems are forgotten; everyone, on the screen and in the theatre, is in high spirits. And no one can argue with a happy ending.

[1]*The Globe and Mail* (6 September 1984).
[2]Marcia Pally, "Fool's Gold," *Film Comment* (May-June 1984), p. 28.

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CHRONIQUE:

MUSIC

"OUR TIME IS NOW" – THE CANADIAN WOMEN'S MUSIC AND CULTURAL FESTIVAL

through the eyes and ears of Heather Menzies

The man beside me was affable. A senior bureaucrat with CMHC en route to Winnipeg on business, he exercised the easy assumption that attends anyone flying at full fare on a weekday: he treated me as an equal – that is, to borrow from Virginia Woolf's brilliant observation, as an honorary male.

"Let's face it," he began expansively. We were discussing women's advancement, or lack thereof, into senior managerial ranks – whether in government or industry mattered little, for the plain truth in his view was that "most women still aren't prepared to make the sacrifices required to make it in the business world. Most women really want to be housewives," he said.

I asked why it should be an either/or affair for women when, as his boast of two children attested, it isn't for men. He said that business demands sacrifice, in the form of twelve to fourteen-hour days. I suggested it was time for a shorter work week. He said that international competition forbids this self-indulgence. I pointed out that less than 40 per cent of Canada's GNP is sensitive to foreign competition. He ignored me. I turned away, my spirits drooping, and knew once more why I was on my way to the first women's folk festival in Canada.

The women's movement is not a single-issue crusade, nor is it short-term. Its agenda is long: not only equal access for women to all opportunities in our society, but also the transformation of that society by bringing into all our institutions the feminist values and heritage which have been excluded so much in the past. This will take many lifetimes and, in each, will tax every one of us to the point of burnout. So we need events like the women's literary conference ("Women and Words/Les femmes et les mots," held in Vancouver in July, 1983, and reviewed in this issue of CWS/*cf*) and the women's folk festival ("Our Time is Now," held in Winnipeg over the Labour Day weekend, 1984) to restore our souls. They also stretch our minds and hearts to a larger

vision of the transformation we're trying to bring about.

The Women's Music and Cultural Festival, as it was officially named, did both those things. From Friday night through Sunday midnight over fifty performers filled a large park in North End Winnipeg with music of exquisite relevance to the lives of women in Canada today.

Ferron sang her near-signature piece, "Testimony," inspired by a request that she write the theme song for a film about rape: ". . . And by my heart be I woman/ And by my eyes be I open . . ." Moon Joyce sang "I got the North of 60 Blues . . . ," about being moved to Yellowknife because someone you're married to got transferred there. And another song called "The Infinite Edge: "I don't want to hear the wind die . . ." Debbie Romeyn sang that "I want to celebrate the differences that make us all the same . . ." Barb Spence sang "I'm a woman of potential . . . ," and another song dedicated to a friend (one of the festival organizers) Chris Lane: "There's country lane that takes me where I want to go/Where the laughter flows from a trickle to a raging waterfall . . ."

Poet, seer Maara Haas intoned: "I know God is a woman, but is she ethnic?" Alanis Obomsawin sang "Bush Lady:" "Hey Bush Lady, so beautiful; some with me . . . /You hear? Bush Lady got a big belly now . . ." Arlene Mantle sang about working women: "Well, if it's women's work/It's time we had the say." Poet Lillian Allen spoke about Black women and about all oppressed people: "There will be no peace, peace, peace, peace, peace/Until there is equality and justice." Nancy White did some of her political epigrams: Papal Pampers, and Johnny T. (the bum patter). But then, more soulfully, she sang about "The Children of War:" "They see things they should never have to see/The children of war are children who hate." Marie-Lynn Hammond sang about growing up on an armed forces base: "You spend your whole life cocked and ready/Oh Papa can't you see we're not the enemy?," and another song about her free-spirited Grandmother called "Elsie Won't You Dance."

Marie-Claire Séguin took some old Québecois folk songs that trivialize and even glorify violence against women (one about rape, another about wife beating) and put new words to the familiar old tunes – words of peace and harmony for, as she explained, "if we sing another song, maybe we will make another life." Lucy Kownak and Emily Alerk from Bakers Lake, N.W.T. went back to preliterate times to do some traditional throat singing: strange, gutteral sounds rising fom deep in their throats, unearthly sounds that seemed to reach into the shadows of the unconscious to call forth something of the Great Spirit, sounds that as suddenly dissolved into gales of giggles – a signal that this was just a harmless old game of nerves, the object of which is to make one's opponent laugh. It was also a nice reminder of one of women's oldest strengths: not taking themselves too seriously.

There were performers from every part of the country and from every category of citizenship: white Anglo-Saxons like Rita MacNeil, Heather Bishop and Connie Kaldor; French-Canadians like Marie-Claire Séguin from Quebec and Suzanne Campagne from St. Boniface; native Indian women like Alanis Obomsawin, Metis women like Beatrice Culleton and the two Inuit women throat singers; black immigrant women such as Lillian Allen, and native-born women such as the *a capella* group, Four the Moment, from Halifax; ethnic women such as Llena Zaremba; and, finally, women from rural areas – Kris Purdy from Thunder Bay – as well as urban centres.

Some of the performers could be identified as belonging to the mainstream, at least of folk music. But most could not; instead they have enjoyed small, almost cultishly loyal followings among lesbians, trade unionists, and ethnic or other minority groups. This festival represented the first opportunity for them all to come together *as women*. By their addressing an audience which, in its diversity, represented the full 52 per cent of the population that is female and, equally, by that audience's identification with the themes of the artists, almost totally self-authored songs – what it is to be a victim of rape, incest or sexual slavery; what it is to be native, black, an immigrant or a lesbian – they sealed something significant in women's culture and set in motion what has to be a whole new meaning of the word "mainstream."

The festival grew out of a sense of frustration at the longstanding under-representation of women's music at the well-known mainstream Winnipeg folk festival, particularly as this manifested itself in the hearts and minds of a handful of women who not only happened to have long been involved in the Winnipeg Folk Festival, lobbying for more female artists on the program, but who also chanced to be part of a mad-cap group of Manitoba feminists. Calling themselves the SDBs (meaning the "same damn bunch," after the tendency in practically every city, town, and village since time began for the same bunch of women to pitch in to do whatever it is that needs to be done: raise money, organize an event, get up a petition, and so on), these feminists firmly believe in having fun in between rounds of, and even in the midst of, trying to transform the world. Accordingly, they organize such things as SDB retreats where they sit around talking, drinking a little wine, playing guitars, singing songs, having a few laughs. During such a retreat these women impulsively decided to organize a women's music and cutural festival, any proceeds from which could go into their scholarship fund to aid women who want to study in a "non-traditional" subject area.

A core group of six SDBs (Joan Miller, Chris Lane, Shirley Walker, Terri Gray, Bev Suek and Eileen Johnson) began organizing the festival in a display of seeming anarchy (madly making SDB calendars and handbooks for fund raising) that's quite in keeping with women's historical capacity for top-notch organization. In the end, a staff of five (Kris Anderson, Dorothy Codville, Joan Miller, Sheryl Peltz and Rachel Rocco) and a large coterie of volunteers had the financial support of both the Federal and Manitoba Governments, at least two unions, and four corporations.

The atmosphere over the three-day event went well beyond what is in fact a fairly superficial intimacy at most folk festivals. Of course the weather played its part, blowing in damp and cool on the unsuspecting out-of-towners dressed in t-shirts and sandals. Whereupon the Winnipeg women emptied their winter closets and drawers, producing the quilted, layered look of multi-colored borrowings, and much hilarity while tucking blankets and sleeping bags under chilly cheeks. Clearly, though, it was the music itself that made the festival. Song after song after song spoke to every one of us, tenderly, angrily, passionately, touching us and drawing us all together.

By Sunday the audience wasn't just clapping and singing along: we were whooping and hollering and, at the end, hugging each other with misty eyes and new entries in address books. The performers were moved as well, moved right out of character. They stopped delivering

a polished, pre-designed product and began improvising freely from the intense creativity generated within the festival itself. They called out to the sound mixer Nancy Poole: "Hey Nancy, could you give me a little more on the guitar" or whatever. And they grinned – beamed – with total self-abandon.

"Aren't we havin' a good time?" Moon Joyce asked as she skipped onto the stage to do her stint as volunteer mistress of ceremonies. She went over to the gleaming black piano and tentatively reached out to stroke it. "You know what? I've never been this close to a grand piano before," she said mischievously. As she introduced Nancy White, who'd just returned from a concert in Nicaragua, Connie Kaldor, herself just returned from a concert in Scotland, couldn't resist whispering a joke into her ear. As Nancy convulsed with laughter, Connie repeated the joke to the audience. "What do you wear to the revolution? Oppressed pants."

As Heather Bishop was introduced by Winnipeg alderperson Leslie Hughes during the closing concert, her face shone and her smile couldn't have been broader. "I don't know that I've ever felt this proud before," she said. After a slight pause to allow the whistles and cheers of fellow feeling to die away, she continued in her normal, low-key, gentle way: "So here we are, and what we're doing is changing the world."

Heather Menzies is the author of three books: The Railroad's Not Enough: Canada Now *(1978);* Women and the Chip *(1981); and* Computers on the Job *(1982).*

CHRONIQUE:

WORDS

WOMEN AND WORDS/ LES FEMMES ET LES MOTS

Ellen Creighton

> *(Man) has monopolized nearly all profitable employments, and from those (woman) is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all avenues to wealth and distinction which he considers most honourable to himself... He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education . . . He has endeavored, in every way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.*
>
> (quoted in Tillie Olsen, *Silences)*

One hundred and thirty-six years have elapsed since these words were issued in the Declaration of the first women's rights convention in the world. In what was billed as another historical event, "Women and Words/Les femmes et les mots," more than 750 women gathered almost two years ago in the University of British Columbia's stately "Old Auditorium" to reflect upon how far we have come. The four-day, bilingual conference was organized by the West Coast Women and Words Society. It was a cross-country, multicultural conference formed as a "conspiracy united in a purpose" – to create a network of support for women of all backgrounds, in all facets of writing and communication. The recent publication of *Women & Words: The Anthology/Les femmes et les mots: une anthologie,*[1] selected from material collected by an anthology committee formed while the conference was being organized, struck me as an appropriate occasion for offering some retrospective comments on the 1983 conference.

The all-women event was bound to elicit charges of "preaching to the converted," both by its gender exclusiveness and by the restriction of female-only press members to arranged interviews. Happily a last-minute change of heart permitted the press access to all the proceedings.

As befits a conference concerned with language and communication, seminars and workshops involved the gamut of issues from criticism and the literary tradition, through feminist publications, ethnicity and women's writing, entrance into publishing, funding searches, translation, networking, lesbian writing, the subversiveness of feminist art, and many related topics. To round out the programme, short theatre pieces were presented, and poetry readings, held in the evenings, were open to the general public.

Some of the seminars were formal and pedagogic, while others were casual. All were informative, entertaining and provided a good introduction to many of the major female literary figures in Canada: Margaret Atwood, Louky Bersianik, Nicole Brossard, Marian Engel, Joy Kogawa, Dorothy Livesay, Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska, Jane Rule, Phyllis Webb and (the list went on and on). The visibility of lesser-known writers such as Betsy Warland, poet and conference organizer, and Erin Mouré, will no doubt have increased their followings.

Throughout the conference, indisputable truths about the state of the female presence in the literary world rose up like a chant inciting more questions and more affirmative action. Women described the lack of female representation in the world of letters, the lack of women editors, publishers, and journalists. P.E.I. publisher Libby Oughton quoted publishing statistics which substantiate this contention: while women make up 52% of the population, only 18-20% of books published are written by women. Oughton claimed that if women spend 700 million dollars on books, they should be more fully represented. She and her colleagues are redressing this situation by publishing fiction and poetry exclusively by women.

That women are not heard from often enough is symptomatic of the phallocentricity of our modern Western languages, languages which are barometers of patriarchal cultures. "Men and women pretend to speak the same language," said B.C. poet Sharon Thesen, yet "male subjectivity is the operating