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Europe in the '70s

Politics of Art

Sweden

By GERALD PEARY

Johan Bergenstrahle, the subject of this interview, is found at the artistic forefront of a talented generation of young leftist filmmakers in Sweden. In common they have reacted against the one-man dominance of the Swedish cinema at home and abroad by Ingmar Bergman and his neoclassic "island" chamber drama; they have argued through their films that the cinema must be rightfully a forum for the discussion and confrontation of contemporary social issues, not for the subjective psychological torments of the Bergman film world.

While American audiences have been introduced to the works of his contemporaries (Bo Widerberg: *Adalen 31*, Joe Hill, *Elvira Madigan*) and Vilgot Sjöman: *491, I Am Curious Yellow*) Johan Bergenstrahle remains totally unknown here. This is not surprising, for neither of Bergenstrahle's feature length films *Made in Sweden* and *The Baltic Tragedy* have found American distributorship.

It seems unlikely that Bergenstrahle will locate financial backing in the near future. While a distributor can turn into selling points the romanticism of Wilderberg and the sexual preoccupations of Sjöman, he will find nothing at all for commercial exploitation in Bergenstrahle, instead only a serious, unswerving commitment to political ideas. America presumably would not be interested.

Luckily for this writer, Bergenstrahle brought a print of his great 1970 film, *The Baltic Tragedy* to America last summer; it was given perhaps its only showing ever in the United States in an old schoolhouse off the coast of Northern Wisconsin in Lake Michigan, the site of a Scandinavian film symposium sponsored by the University.

Baltic Tragedy, discussed below and in the body of the interview, is a revelation. One showing convinces that Bergenstrahle is developing methods of making successful political film which have eluded not only Godard by almost every society

Q. What was your work prior to film direction?

A. I've been in theatre for fourteen years starting in the university theatres. Gradually I knocked down walls and I entered a subsidized theatre in Upsala. The need to go into the theatre was an ordinary one: feeling myself outside of the community. The need to reach people.

Q. How did your artistic objectives become political ones?

A. At the end of the 1950's and beginning of the 60's, the very narrow Swedish society suddenly opened its eyes to look around, to find itself a little island in the middle of a sea filled with extremely bad social situations. Sweden was part of it, and couldn't deny responsibility.

At this time I started to think politically and seek out a reality of a much higher class than the closed room thinking that I had done before in theatre.

I came to television theatre. I directed plays on television and tried to put them into the reality of outside. I used film.

concerned moviemaker in the world. Bergenstrahle is important.

Much as with Bergman, Bergenstrahle has moved between his work as a filmmaker and as a stage director. In fact it is as a theater director that he is most famous in Sweden. His production of Brecht's *St. Joan of the Stockyards* utilized film clippings of the 1968 Chicago Convention riots shot by the director himself. His *Stockholm Play*, a kind of leftist Forsythe Saga set in Sweden's capital, was one of the major successes of the late 60's Swedish stage.

The reason for Bergenstrahle's constant switch between the stage and screen seems to lie in his ceaseless search beyond any single artistic project for a viable "method": the best, simplest, and most direct way to politicize an audience. Yet Bergenstrahle is not a polemicist. Closer in his openness to Renoir than to Godard, he wants an audience to learn to think critically, not to be mesmerized into accepting political dogma.

Central to Bergenstrahle's conception of creating politically relevant art is to begin with an ambiguous political situation which is so multi-sided and complex that it defies an audience's usual impulse to grab for the good and moral side and root for it. For Bergenstrahle as for Brecht, "thinking critically" means weighing evidence, studying all points of view, unravelling a web. The situation of his film, *Baltic Tragedy*, the deportation to the Soviet Union of Baltic soldiers desiring amnesty after World War II, contains exactly the right ingredients of complexity.

The following interview was conducted in June, 1971, in a stone church on Rock Island, Wisconsin, the location of the earlier mentioned Scandinavian film symposium. Despite a certain formal awkwardness in some of the answers because of Johan Bergenstrahle's discomfort with English, the interview moved rather smoothly, I think, from specific questions about the director's career to a more general discussion of the relationship of politics and the arts.

Q. Are there serious social problems in Sweden? Or do you have to search them out as a film-maker and theatre director?

A. Of course Sweden hasn't the enormous social problems one sees in America. We are somewhat different in that we have had a socialist government since 1934. But what we suddenly realize is that economic differences in our country are increasing as is the difference in the standard of living between the upper and lower classes. There must be something wrong. I don't need to look to find both poverty and bad social situations in Sweden.

Q. Do you think that Sweden is implicated in the Viet Nam situation?

A. The economics of Sweden and the USA are very close. We take on the morals of what America does there. We shouldn't delight in being part of the present economic system.

Q. Both your films and your theatrical work seem clearly indebted to Brecht.

(continued on page 8)

Poland

By MORRIS EDELSON

I was Fulbright Professor of American Literature at the University of Lodz, a Manchester type urban-industrial-textile center for the last thirty months. Most of the people I taught spoke English and I didn't learn Polish until the second year I was there. English is the third language of Poland about on a par with Russian.

Lodz is an ugly city but educationally very interesting. The University has ten thousand students. And the Polish Film school is there, where directors such as Wajda, Polanski, Skolimowski plus many famous cameramen began their studies.

The Polish theatre is among the best in the world yet we know very little about it in America, and see much less. Grotowski's name is known (some of Joel Gersmann's stuff is a cheap imitation) but few people saw him in New York nor have viewed the Wroclow Pantomime Group which performs all over Europe.

THEATRE IS much more a part of everyday life in Poland than it is here. For example Warsaw's Complex of Theatres offer about forty plays a night to choose from in a city of a million people, a city about the size of Milwaukee. Plays that range from Classics (there was a sensational *Hamlet* produced last year) to the latest American works to the classics of the Polish Stage. Also there are Polish avant garde plays such as *Grombowcz*' *The Madman and the Nun* and the strange drama of Wyspianski, the tubercular expressionist.

Television is used much more effectively in Poland than it is here, somewhat like the BBC. It has dramas and foreign movies with subtitles on almost every night and many avant garde plays are televised at the time of performance and shown to people who couldn't get tickets for the live performance. Sometimes plays are filmed in Lodz, which is the Hollywood of Poland.

The English Departments in Polish Universities are very active and do reach the nation with English studies and culture. The Lodz English Department produced a variety show and we had an audience of about 200 nearly every performance. We quit because we were tired, not because we ran out of audience. Our show was called *Robinek Hoodski* a satire on England, America, and Poland.

THERE'S ALSO quite a bit of social satire being produced. A hit last year was *Dear Mr. Ionesco* by the Student Satirical Theatre of Warsaw which pointed out absurdities in housing, production, and other areas of Polish life. This was a brilliant and daring performance and was seen on TV by about twenty million Poles.

Every play is subject to censorship. It is usually easy to pass the censor with social satire but political stuff won't pass. Attacks on socialism or the USSR aren't allowed. Sometimes they get through though. The 1968 student riots grew out of an old play by Mickiewicz which had lines in it about Freeing Poland from the oppressor, these were delivered to Russian visitors in the audience.

The Poles take their cultural activities much more seriously than we do. What

theatre event here has ever produced a major upheaval? And speaking of upheavals, what about the change in government? Well, I don't know, but my personal view is that it was a time of shortages, rising prices. The workers facing these things finally rebelled. Those who marched in Gdansk and Gdynia were shot down but the government did change, prices fell, and a move to improve Polish economy seems to have been the result.

MY RECENT letters from Poland tell me that passport restrictions have been eased and the supply of hard currency has increased. People are always asking me about freedom in Poland and all that shit. They think they're free here. I just want to remind people that Poland has free medical care, free university education and full employment.

In Poland being a poet is a recognized occupation. This is true in Europe in general. Writers in Poland are the moral and spiritual leaders of the country. Rozewicz, a leading young poet, was asked by the movie industry to direct films for them. Even James Dickey can't say that.

The Poles are more literate than we and it is common that first editions of books sell out in the first few weeks. The general tone of their modern literature is reflective—looking back on the tragedy of war and cautiously optimistic for the future. I'll be publishing a Polish novel soon and people can judge for themselves.

WELL, IT'S not really a novel, a series of letters from one of the best Polish writers of today, Kasimierz Brandy.

He talks about running barefoot with the Polish army as it fought its way through the ravaged Ukraine, and then stumbling one snowy night into an untouched Cracow which had been spared by the Nazis. Bakeries were still open though hundred miles on either side there is nothing but scorched earth.

Brandys also tells about the national vice of Poles—drinking. (You notice this vice in people who have spent time in Eastern Europe like me). Brandys has another story about a hypnotist who entertained his audience by temporarily curing a drunk—but audience pleasure turned to indignation when the hypnotist tried to make the cure permanent. They felt it was a man's right to drink.

HERE WHERE we tell Pollock jokes, we're not likely to appreciate the fact that Poland is a strong and developing country. It is now the industrial leader of Eastern Europe, it has a high birth rate, and produces far more agricultural products than it can use. Its artists and scientists take a very active part in new developments in Europe.

Poland survived the destruction of World War II in which one out of two Poles were killed, its national treasures were stolen, and its intellectuals were shot down in the streets by the Germans. The young Poles of today are strong and healthy, not too reconciled to Germany but not afraid. It is a unified country in a way we just can't understand and it is optimistic. I think they smell victory in the air.



Two shots from Johan Bergenstrahle's first film, *Made in Sweden*. (Left) The hero and heroine faced by the starvation and disease of India. (Right). Max Von Sydow, famous Bergman repertoire star, as the super-capitalist villain who holds Swedish business interests in Southeast Asia.





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Quixote: Film and Theatre Festival

Quixote, a literary magazine, will sponsor a Madison Film and Theatre Festival from May 10th to May 20th with the purpose of encouraging local creative work. Substantial cash prizes and awards will be given to winners in the two categories of theatre and film. Judges for the events will be from the university and local community. Notification of entry in writing must be received by Quixote no later than May 1, 1972. No entries after this date will be accepted. All questions in writing are to be addressed to Quixote, 922 Spaight St., Madison, or phone 251-7445.

Film makers: Films are to be either eight or sixteen millimetre. Film makers are responsible for delivering their films to the screening where finalists will be chosen. The public is invited to attend the screenings of the finalists films which will be held the 15th and 16th of May. There will be a \$2.00 non-refundable entry fee to cover the expense of the screenings.

Theatre Groups: Entrants in the theatre festival may be official, unofficial, ad hoc, street or any kind of theatre group. The group is responsible for its own production facilities and room. Quixote must be notified in writing by May 1, the date and place of the production so that scheduling can be co-ordinated for the judges to see all entries. The group must also allow ten tickets for the judges.

THE CRITERIA of judging for both theatre and films is technical competence, meaningfulness, audience appeal and originality.

Quixote is making this opportunity possible to encourage creative work in the live arts. If there are not enough entrants the festival will be cancelled, but we hope to make this a success. Quixote has sponsored the Ann Arbor film festival and many theatre productions in the past, including appearances here by the San Francisco Mime Troupe, The Living Theatre and other experimental groups. Quixote arranged for the first showing in Madison of films by Jean-Luc Godard and subsidized local film making ad theatre in the past. Presently it is sponsoring the production of director Mike Wilmington's *The Zoo Story*, Pat Behrendt's *Impromptu*, and Joe Mei's *Play*.

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Bohrod paints on and on

Aaron Bohrod, artist in residence at the University of Wisconsin, is not known as a painter whose style fluctuates with every shifting wind of modern art. Since he started here he has weathered Op and Pop Art, not to mention the older forms of impressionism, expressionism, and abstraction. He says that "the artist—if he will amount to anything—constantly revolts against the going thing in art." Bohrod's style throughout the UW period has been consistently and markedly different from 'the going thing.'

In the last 24 years he has produced multitudes of meticulously detailed, super-realistic still life paintings. The subjects are usually cast-off paraphernalia, "old and new, intrinsically bad and intrinsically good." This style can best be seen in his book *A Decade of Still Life* published by the University Press in 1966.

But the newest trend in painting, if we are to believe the New York shows, very closely resembles the ideal of super-realism which Bohrod has pursued these many years. This interview with Mitchell Breitwieser and Lynda Virks of the Cardinal will try to answer some questions about how Bohrod stands on art today.

Where do you stand in comparison with the 'New Realism' that is being painted now?

A friend of mine, an art critic, credited me with inventing the term 'Sharp Focus Realism.' Now, I don't remember ever saying that. But perhaps, if he says so, I did. I've been painting in this style for many years now. I paint still life works from objects which people give me. For instance today, I'm working on a painting of some Japanese curios. But these others, 90% of them work from photographs. I work from real objects, keeping them in scale to each other. There is no gigantism. I would say that this is a step in advance of photographic realism.

Many people say that realism represents a lull in art, that is something which art falls back on when it gets bogged down. Do you disagree with this?

Yes. Realism is not the last resort of an artist. Much of modern art is a search through symbolism, and this is must a form of realism. We don't just check off the various forms and get down to realism as a last resort.

I recently saw a painting of yours, 'The Red Horse', in the State Journal. It was very different from your other works. It looked more abstract. Why did you experiment with this style?

The Red Horse is a painting of a basic design that I have used in my pottery. Many artists today are seduced by the other forms of art. I toyed with abstract design in The Red Horse. Some people say that realistic painters are unimaginative-

that they can't handle the more imaginative styles. These designs of mine were partly an attempt to show that I could handle other styles. The Red Horse shows that the realistic artist is capable of achieving abstract art. Some people say that realistic painters can't handle abstract art. But it more often happens that the abstract painter can't paint realistically.

What do you think of the art put out by the

students here at the University?

I find it very interesting. I recently saw a number of paintings of faucets. This, I suppose, is a very valuable exercise. But I can see where it might get a trifle tiring after a while. Now, they're experimenting with the airbrush. The tendency with all these new tools is to get lost in the materials and forget the meaning.

What about the 'going thing' in art? Are

you in revolt against it?

Looking at this new art you talk about, it looks as if the going thing is catching up with me. A couple surges and I'll be in the mainstream. Maybe then it'll be time to move on. But right now I'm still an exponent of the minority point of view.

You started out in an expressionist vein. Why did you change?

When I chose this style, confusion of the styles was a jungle. It still is. I guess it was a reaction against those who felt that if a painting is done well it will distract from the emotional impact. I disagree strongly with that, I think that the meaning can be very easily lost in abstract painting, for example.

With some forms of art, the average viewer feels that he has no place at all. We can't take a painting on faith. There must be a demonstration of artistic ability. I always try to interject some sort of meaning, perhaps not grand scale, but some kind. Take this for instance, (a canvas which contains a painting of a dish overflowing with peanut shells, one of which still has the nut in it) I call it *The Sole Survivor*.

That's interesting. Much of your art carries meaning that is not designed to have a heavy impact on society. But others, notably the World War II paintings of dead enemy soldiers, are very persuasive. What is the artist's role in respect to social concern?

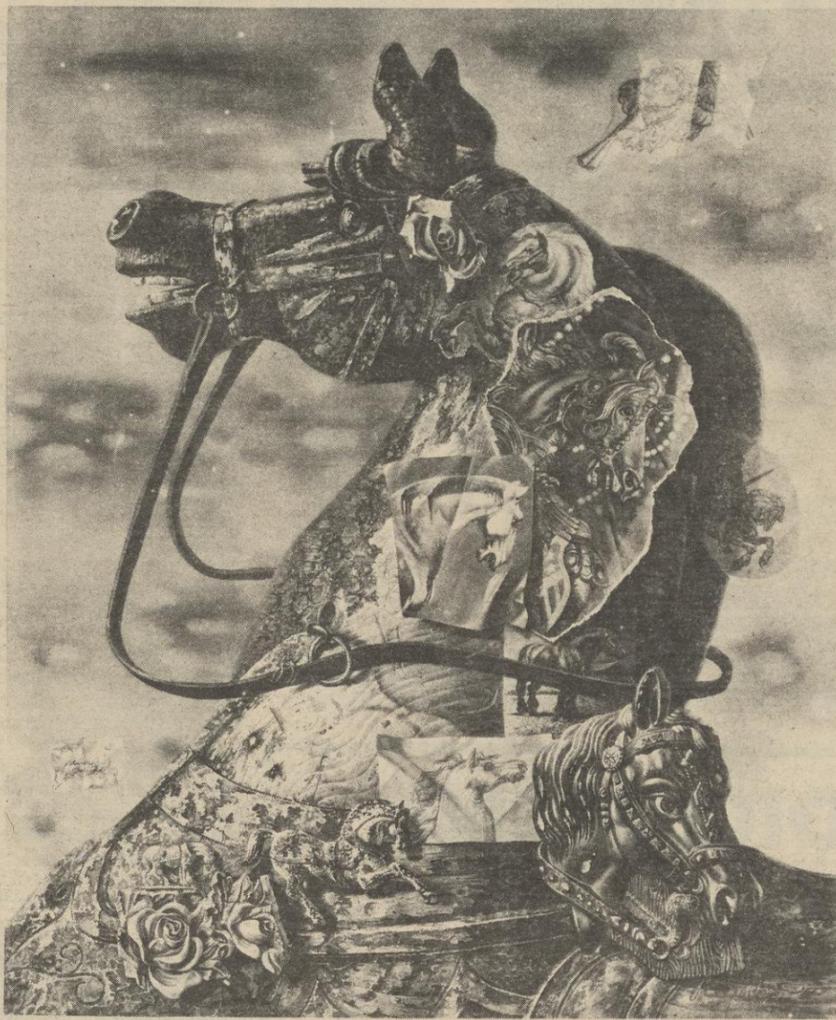
I never felt that I was an evangelist. I don't feel the need to rap to people on the threat and persuade them to this or that cause. I just try to show how things are and let people derive their own meaning. During World War II I saw some very unpleasant things. Other times it's necessary to just relax and show pleasant things.

In your book you discussed the problem of being a realist, and still interesting. How do you achieve this balance?

That's hard to answer. It's not the subject matter. In the days before Sloan (who was Bohrod's teacher for a year) and Aikins it was a radical thought that you could look at a dingy street and find elegance. The process is one of hard work and struggle, much like with a novel. It doesn't always work. Put two realistic paintings next to each other. One is dry, despite meticulous detail, and one sparkles because of it.

One phrase we often hear around here is 'publish or perish' that probably doesn't bother you. But, how do you stand with the media? How much of your work sees publishing these days?

I'm not published so much as I used to be, when I did a lot of commissioned art. I don't do so much anymore. It often happens that an artist is widely published, and then forgotten... But almost as often, they're remembered again.



Bohrod's Carousel Horse: "I never felt that I was an evangelist. I don't feel the need to rap people on the throat and persuade them to this or that cause. I just try to show how things are and let people determine their own meaning."

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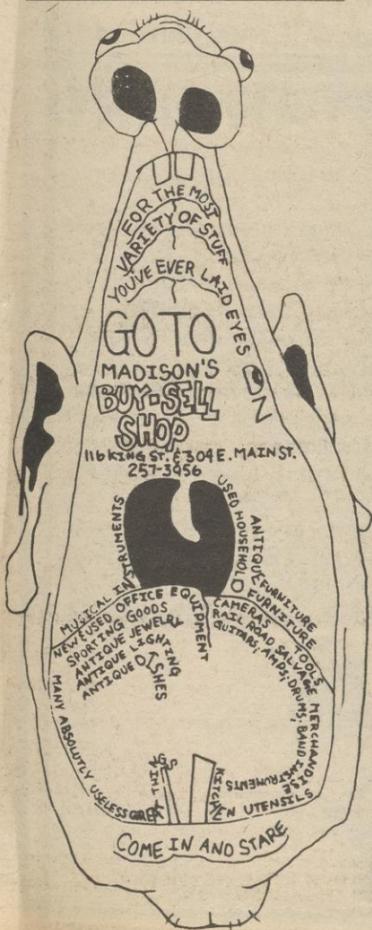
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Bill Johnston



trite, silly late 1950's rock love song type hadn't existed. Because it makes something as good as "I Found a Reason" possible, after "I Found a Reason", you can never sneer and feel superior in the easy way you once did to that form again.

By making songs in which the nature of the speaker becomes an issue the Velvets manage to enforce a distance between their creation and its audience, which enables them to avoid the banality and self-indulgence of stars like Jimmyboy Taylor, everybody's suffering doctor's son, and Johnny, his heart is bleeding all over the vinyl and I think I'm gonna puke, Lennon.

Like the Beatles the Velvets regularly manipulate their music and lyrics so they comment on each other. There are simple examples. In "I'm Waiting for My Man" the regularity and even monotony of the driving beat teaches you what the addict already knows: "First thing you learn is that you always gotta wait." There are more complex examples. Do you remember the song "I Will" from the white double album, The Beatles? It follows "Why Don't We Do It In the Road" and is an answer to that tune's animalistic demand for a fuck. The response of the young girl in "I Will" is to sentimentalize the drive that creates the demand and scale it down to saccharine size:

For if I ever saw you
I didn't catch your name
But it never really
mattered
I will always feel the same.
But it never really mattered
I will always feel the same.

The music is a trite little cha-cha number, precisely right because its as soulless as the young girl. Its exactly the music one imagines is usually designed for audiences of young girls.

In the Velvet Underground's "Candy Says" there's a much more complex young girl filled with hate and angst: "I hate the quite places/That cause the smallest taste/Of what will be."

For Candy, flying bluebirds, conventional symbols of innocence, compete with and triumph over her:

I'm gonna watch
bluebirds fly
Over my shoulder.
I'm gonna watch them
pass me by.

Maybe when I'm older
What do you think I'd see
If I could walk away from me?
As is "I Will" the music of "Candy Says" is trite, pretty, and sentimental, precisely the sort of music again that young girls could be expected to listen to. The Velvets drive the banality of their musical form home with the final stanza of familiar nonsense syllables (Do do do wah) that leaves the music free to assert itself unencumbered by verbal meaning. The tension between the music's mindlessness as well as the mindlessness of the verbal conventions (Do do do wah) usually associated with it and the depth and intelligence with which the suffering of the young girl is perceived is as intense and as profound as anything done in a song since the Renaissance. In effect, the song becomes a satire of the Beatles satire in "I Will" by suggesting how shallow the makers' understanding of young women was in "I will."

THERE'S AN axiom: When you do the best you can and there's no reward, you stop. The Velvet Underground stopped. At least, they just as good as stopped. Lou Reed, the one who wrote all the songs, then sang them and played lead guitar as well, is gone. A pity?

I thought so but one can never be sure. Larry phoned me last week, gurgling and spilling his guts with joy. "Lou Reed's got a contract with RCA," he said. Incredulously I demanded his source, thinking all the time it was a cruel hoax. "Rolling Stone," he yelped, holding the periodical up to me with the tone of his voice.

Lo and befuckinghold the very next day we called RCA and made sure it was all true. "Absolutely,"

the lady from RCA confirmed. She continued by telling us that he (so much to the little pronoun) was in England recording his first venture on the new label, a venture that would be released in March. She ended by accepting our request for an interview "just as soon as he returns." I'll believe it when I see it, hear it? Discography:

The Velvet Underground and Nico. The most famous of their albums (also the first), has the



Lou Reed of the Velvet Underground plays his guitar.

banana on the cover which you can peel back to reveal a smaller banana that looks like a penis. The album was produced by Andy Warhol when the Velvets were his houseband. Themes are what you'd expect from anyone under Walhol's influence. Contains some great cuts, "Heroin", "I'm Waitin' for My Man," "I'll Be Your Mirror," "Femme Fatale," "Sunday Morning", but is marred on some cuts, at least for me, by too much self-indulgent dissonance especially from John Cale's viola.

White Heat, White Light: Some fans like the driving self-indulgent, excessive dissonant sort of off center driving, killer rock that abounds on this album. But, for me, it's shitty with some fine things. There is, however, a very interesting short story about Waldo from New York who mails himself to Marcia in Wisconsin called "The Gift," that's charming, experimental, and more or less successful.

The Velvet Underground: The most underrated album ever released. No excess here, everything is balanced and restrained. So understated, so restrained and so intelligent that it's taken me years to know its riches.

The album is one of the reasons I know I'll never outgrow rock and roll. Contains "Candy Says" and "Some Kinda Love", among others, almost all of which are strong.

(The first three albums are on MGM or a subsidiary thereof. That company has recently put out a greatest hits album. Avoid as a general principle all greatest hits albums.)

Loaded, their most recent album, is on Cotillion (a subsidiary of ATCO), and is I think, the best rock album since Blonde on Blonde. Critics loved it, but nobody pushed it. Every cut sounds as though I could be a hit sing

be for our culture if the Velvet Underground was on the top forty. It would be like those times when "Like a Rolling Stone" was number one.

The only place in town that regularly stocks The Velvets is NMC. Even more, wonder of wonders, they have a section of their bin, label and all, devoted to the group. No shit, farthest fucking out thing I've ever seen. I recommend them and not because they replaced a record, for this review, I'd more or less worn out but because the people that work there are charming and friendly. They don't even try to be cool. It's hard to believe you're in Madison when you're in that store.

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Blues for the Folks

By ELLIOT PINSLEY



The Mississippi Sheiks: Left to right—Carl Martin, Walter Vinson, Ted Bogan, Sam Chatmon. Photos by Arthur Pollock

Folk festivals depress me. More and more they are becoming exhibits of living anachronisms with barely enough strength to display some vestige of the artistry that was once so alive.

More tragic however, is the almost dehumanizing objectification implicit in being called a "folk artist." The talent in evidence at most of these festivals was, in its day, immediate and indigenous popular culture. The old bluesmen who once packed the juke joints of Mississippi and the blues clubs of West and South Side Chicago, now stare out from the stages of University auditoriums, on a sea of white faces.

Virginia swing fiddlers and banjo pickers from Texas to the Great Smoky Mountains perform before audiences of catatonic academics more concerned with musicology than a good time.—I dearly love this music—and it is oh so strange now to feel alienated from it.

Two week-ends ago, the University of Chicago's Folk Arts Society offered an ambitious and commendable program of blues and bluegrass music at their South Side campus. The Saturday afternoon blues show, dominated by classic old-timers, bore sad testimony to the shame of a culture, displaced.

Peculiarly, the program began spontaneously (and anonymously) with some fine acoustic guitar work in the tradition of John Fahey. Juke Boy Bonner on guitar and harp followed next, though his few numbers failed to ignite the now filled auditorium. As Little Brother Montgomery's piano was rolled onstage for the next set, music drifted upstairs from the basement.

The Mississippi Sheiks, a four man rural blues string band, were doing some front stoop jamming, while hordes of people filed into their dressing room to catch the action. It was strange watching these four old guys, all in their 60's, running through their repertoire, rehashing old stories, trying to remember songs they hadn't sung in 30 years.

The joy in their music seemed to stem more in their playing and being together, than in performing before a crowd. It was as if they were as oblivious to the time that has passed them by, as they were to the mob surrounding them there, in that small, hot, cubicle.

Sam Chatmon, 65, sang a spirited version of Jimmy

Rodgers' "Waiting For A Train," offerin' proof that the Blue Yodeler's roots are firmly planted in black earth. Carl Martin on fiddle, struggled to remember an old tune, "Travellin' Man," about a guy who always seems to know when it's time to go—"He jumped off the Titanic and they called him a fool—Next day he's shootin' craps in Liverpool."

The Sheiks were to be the last act on that afternoon, and Walter Vinson the steel guitar player was worried that ole Sam might run out of gas before they got upstairs. I probably would have stayed down there all day but Roosevelt Sykes, one of the truly great barrelhouse blues pianists, was coming on, and he never fails to perk up an audience.

Sykes has been around for quite some time, and despite the U. of C.'s proximity to many of the blues clubs he's doubtlessly played, he was a long way from home.—Still, the man can play, and he is an entertaining and exuberant performer. He was up, and he got the crowd up as he boogied through "It May Be A Scandal But It Ain't No Shame," (for a young teen-age girl to wear an old man's name).

After several numbers including "Sweet Home Chicago" (there's irony there somewhere) Roosevelt changed the mood "slightly and quietly" as he drifted into his showstopper—"Dirty Mother Fo' Ya." "There ain't usually no one around when I get through with this song. It's not suggestive or smutty—but I ain't got no control of your thoughts." Sykes' preface was unneeded, for just as in Ann Arbor two years ago, (and probably everywhere else on the white circuit) the audience went wild—"I got a hot dog and it ain't cold—It's je' right to fit your roll—I got a tight mother fo' ya—I got a foot long mother fo' ya."

There's no question that Sykes electrified an audience greatly in danger of being lulled to sleep by music they couldn't relate to. The important point though is "how" he has to reach this white audience. The accent is less on his playing and more on hype like facial mugging and jive talk. The "specialty material" he chooses is geared for laughs, and reflects his consciousness that people don't want to hear "just the blues." Sykes is a master—but the role he has been reduced to is sad and tragic.

Johnny Lewis, an Alabama slide guitarist followed Sykes, and though his bottleneck style was impressive, it would be cruel to dwell on the deterioration of his talent through age. When the Sheiks took the stage to close the show, they were drained and tired. Both they and the audience were uncomfortable, and this only served to heighten the pathos of the entire program.

I myself must share that feeling of discomfort and pathos, knowing that such once fine talent is now relegated to the sterile status of "ethnic folk objects". For our cruel culture there is simply nowhere else to put these people.





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Off-Broadway book: Papp at its Best

The Off Broadway Experience
by Howard Greenberger

Prentice-Hall, Inc.
Englewood, N.J., hardcover
\$6.95

By ARLENE LEVINSON

There is no business like show business for harboring a narrow-minded impression that the tiny, pulsating island is the center and virtual sum of the theatrical universe, if not on-Broadway certainly off-Broadway.

Broadway has fallen into universal disrepute in recent years, catering to TV-bred tastes and flesh hungry credit-cards. But according to the voices in Howard Greenberger's *The Off Broadway Experience*, all that's needed to take a cure is a ride on a downtown subway. In the glorified shabbiness of The Village exists the restored mecca for properly devoted theatre practitioners.

The *Off Broadway Experience* amounts to a shoddy collection of brief, fatuous articles by seventeen critics, actors, writers, and designers, among them Walter Kerr, Jason Robards, Ming Cho Lee, Edward Albee, and Jerry Herman. For the most part, they are content to be busily proclaiming how great it is that they must prostitute themselves in order to subsidize Off-Broadway where they got their first "breaks." The pieces sound like letter sent to the director of a summer camp to be put in the brochure/newsletter.

Greenberger's own comments cover the factual history of Off-

Broadway theatre in New York from the Washington Square Players circa 1915 to an extensive "thank you" note to Cafe La Mama for letting him produce there a musical (about a Jewish astronaut) that flopped.

ONLY A FEW of the writers escape redundancy and propound their own ideas. Joseph Papp, for one; founder and producer of The Public Theater, he believes strongly in nurturing young American playwrights who have something intelligent to say. Another is the lucid Raphael Dennox, author and producer of the ill-fatedly suppressed *CHE!*.

Meanwhile, another "Off-Broadway" is flourishing up and down the West Coast, thriving in the Tyrone Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, nesting in Chicago's experimental groups like Stuart Gordon's Organic Theatre, as in Boston, and propogating in out of the way places like Iowa City, Houston and Madison, Wisconsin.

This argument may be merely semantical, founded on the gross assumption that sincerely aesthetic and ener

This argument may be merely semantical, founded on the gross assumption that sincerely aesthetic and energetic drama makers could hail from sources beyond the boundaries of John Lindsay's kingdom.

Artistic salvation for Manhattan is certainly wonderful for Manhattan, and even for the intellectuals in Kansas City who read the New York Times Sunday Theatre Section.

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Bergenstrahle

(continued from page 1)

What have you learned from him? Where do you part ways?

A. What I think is so remarkable about Brecht is the way he looks upon an audience. He wants a critical audience able to look upon a scene and analyze it precisely. What is different about his plays are bound to a bourgeois public. The Good Woman of Setzuan attracts only a public which is highly educated and has a special relation to the philosophical and moral values of the play, which go over the heads of the ordinary public.

I think you need much cheaper tricks than Brecht ever used and more simple language too. And simple effects to start, such as "violence."

Q. Have you seen the works the Swedish Communist film-maker, Hampe Faustman, made in the 1940's?

A. I know his films well. I like Faustman's works very much because of their will. But if you look at the films now, they are a bit naive. And yet they are very moving.

Q. What do you think of Eisenstein? Of Godard?

A. I saw Eisenstein's films a couple of years ago and I was enormously impressed. Godard was one of those whose early works I liked. If I should see them again I am not very sure that I would like them, for they are a bit too coquettish.

Q. Is the title of your film Made in Sweden, inspired by Godard's Made in the USA?

A. A little bit, of course.

Q. Godard has declared himself a member of the Dziga-Vertov collective and, in the name of non-bourgeois art, returned to 8 mm film-making. Does this strike you as absurd?

A. I think it's very romantic. But what we have now in Sweden is the Film Centrum, which takes care of short films and distributes them to different places all over Sweden where you don't have real cinema. You can have programs in a library, a hospital, a schoolroom, everywhere where you have 16 mm projectors. And the filmmaker often goes along with his film so he can discuss it with the public. That's a very good forum to show social and political stuff.

Q. Your career in the last few years has involved a constant shifting between film and stage direction. What keeps you in the theatre?

A. People are always very

attracted to see living people and to meet others in theatre. The cinema is about the same situation as at home. It's in the dark. You don't meet anybody.

The problem of the appeal of television is difficult, even in Sweden. But in the last few years the Swedish theatre has loosened up and has become a free movement. We have started to become interested in our social problems and situations. I really believe we are reaching a far greater audience. People in Sweden leave TV at home and go to the theatre.

Q. You directed Brecht's St. Joan of the Stockyards on the stage in Stockholm, followed by your extremely successful Stockholm Play, which dramatized the life of a representative Swedish family within the social context of early 20th century industrialism. What methods did you use to involve audiences in the decision-making processes in your plays? Or did you just hope that they will ask questions on their own?

A. I tried discussions after St. Joan of the Stockyards. The experience was very interesting, good in some ways. But there is only a very special kind of person that will speak out, that dares to speak.

Sweden is quite a small country and Stockholm is quite a small city. After trying discussions after theatre performances and after going from theatre to theatre, you see that it is the same people talking. There is no meaning in it.

The ordinary public is too afraid, they don't think they can formulate. They will, however, discuss works in much more intimate situations. Although I held no discussions after this Stockholm play, I know that there have been lots of discussions with families, with friends, in very small circles. I think that is much more essential really.

Q. Why do you use non-actors in most of the film roles in Baltic Tragedy and Made in Sweden?

A. Because I like the way they act, with a kind of reality which to me is very special. In theatre I think you need trained actors who can lift the message out to the public. In film you have quite different possibilities because your camera is so close to the people.

Q. Could you describe your first film, Made in Sweden (1969)?

A. It concerns a Swedish businessman who leaves business because of political events abroad and because he feels that he should not support a political system that he has grown to dislike more and more. Also he has become a kind of journalist specializing in writing on economics.

The story is about him and a girl and their discussions and how they come upon something to help them attack the biggest financier in Sweden, represented by actor Max Von Sydow. It's kind of James Bond story, in a way.

The journalist goes down to Bangkok, Thailand, and discovers smuggling which can be connected with the big finance house. Mixed in with this ironical story is documentary footage I shot in India, which is in some way at the root of this limited, artificial life.

Q. Did you discover in India filmmakers working with social issues?

A. I met Satajat Ray in Berlin last summer and spoke to him about it. I got the feeling that they don't do that kind of film in India.

Q. How did the people of Sweden react to your film, The Baltic Tragedy?

A. There was a very strong reaction from the right wing, from the Baltic nationalists, who viewed it as propagandistic for the Soviet Union, and it isn't, of course. Those in the left wing said it was right to send the Balts back to the Soviet, for they were fascists. And that shows the trouble in making a film of this sort. Instead of clear thinking, everything the people see they analyze in their own way without seeing the film really.

Q. To call the film in English The Baltic Tragedy seems a mistake.

A. Yes, it's very sad. The reason why it's called Baltic Tragedy is because the novel by Per Olof Enquist has been translated into English with that title. We thought we would keep it the same. But I think it's sad because you mean a value by the title that shouldn't be.

Q. Do you think that your film has less of a direct political message than Enquist's novel, which seems a defense of Sweden's Socialist government in the Baltic incident?

A. I can't answer that. I don't know really. I hope that it will have much more direct political interest because its language is more direct. But it has no political message. The issues of the film are enormously complicated. Because it's a documentary situation, you must look upon all the facts. It's a responsibility. You can't put out a straight meaning. I hoped that the Baltic question could give people the feeling that every situation is that complicated and rich.

Q. Would you ever make a film with a clear-cut, "black-and-white" moral? What about a film on the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention, where you shot documentary footage?

If you had made a movie there in Chicago in 1968 and had to release it at once, then you would have the right to be very

(continued on page 10)

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'Old Mississippi gutbucket blues'

By STEVE MERTZ

There aren't many bluesmen around today like Hound Dog Taylor.

People say the blues is a dying art form, but it isn't. Like any folk art, it is merely changing and adapting to the tastes of its immediate audience: in this case, the urban black.

Hound Dog plays the old, downhome, Mississippi gutbucket blues. There isn't much of a market anymore for that type of music in the ghetto clubs and taverns where the urban bluesman has always sought employment.

THE ESTABLISHMENT artists of this older, basic form have mostly had to seek out new audiences, in rock concert halls or on university campuses. Others have just faded from the scene, returning South or continuing to play only as a hobby, while supporting themselves by day labor.

It is simply evolution, with a whole new school of young, contemporary artists appearing, such as Buddy Guy, Otis Rush, Junior Wells and Jimmy Dawkins, whose music draws from and reflects the entire spectrum of their audiences' more sophisticated tastes, from blues and modern jazz to pop tunes and soul music.

And yet, the sound of Hound Dog Taylor and his band, The Houserockers, is as constant and everpresent today in these Chicago clubs as it has been for the past fifteen years.

THERE'S a reason for that. The reason is Communication. Communication is what Hound Dog's music is all about: the ability to transcend jive and whatever else doesn't belong, and to get simply and effectively back to the gut level truth.

Most bluesmen say they sing the blues to get rid of the blues. That's the essence of Hound Dog's music, too. It's blues, but it's good time blues; blues to make you want to get up and dance, to make you laugh, to make you do any damn thing you want to do, except feel down.

It's this good time feeling, even



HOUND DOG TAYLOR

in his sadder songs, that accounts for Hound Dog's great, continued popularity in the small clubs on the South and West sides of Chicago, while all about him is changing and evolving.

THE TRUTH never changes. Hound Dog Taylor was born in Natchez, Mississippi in 1915 and grew up around Tchule and Greenwood, in the heart of the Delta.

By the late '30s he had started playing guitar, and soon met and became heavily influenced by a neighbor, Elmore James, who was himself to become a widely

influential, popular post-WWII urban bluesman.

James taught Hound Dog the essentials of slide (or "bottleneck") guitar, the predominant style of the Delta Blues idiom, and by 1940 Dog was a regular attraction at the plantation parties and juke joints in the area.

DURING THESE early years he often worked in a band consisting of Sonny Boy Williamson on harp, guitarist Robert Jr. Lockwood (stepson of Delta Blues innovator Robert Johnson) and Peck Curtis on drums.

Taylor also appeared frequently on Sonny Boy's King Biscuit Flour Show, a popular live blues radio program which Williamson did daily over station KFFA in West Helene, Arkansas during the 40's and '50s.

In 1942, Hound Dog followed the mass black wartime migration north. Settling in Chicago, he supported himself at first by a series of daytime jobs, but has been a fulltime, working bluesman since 1957.

HOUND DOG Taylor and his powerful, driving boogie music became an immediately popular club attraction, and "the Dog" has since played virtually every blues bar in the city.

Taylor's tunes have been borrowed by many other blues artists, and a version of one of his instrumentals was recorded by Freddy King. The tune, "Hideaway," made Freddy a star, but Hound Dog never received composer's credit or royalties.

Dog's own recording career has (continued on page 11)

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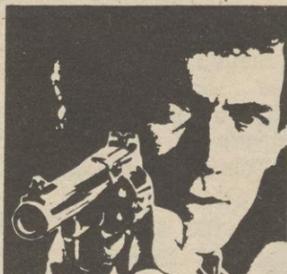


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WILL PAY exorbitant price for tickets to Segovia concerts Feb. 15 & 16 231-1452 evenings. —11x15

HOCKEY TICKETS wanted Sat. Feb. 12 call Al Davis 251-4179 or 2-4389. —2x10

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SEGOVIA I have 2 front row tickets for Tues. night. I would like to trade with someone for good main floor seats on Wed. night 257-7151. —2x14

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LOST BLACK CAT "Luther" male left 2/6/72 W. Wilson St. area. If found call Bev 262-5854 6-11 p.m.

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Bergenstrahle

(continued from page 8)

propagandistic, black and white. But if you should attack the problem now, three years later, you would have to put in quite a lot of other things, of course.

Q. Would you like to make a movie in the United States?

A. American culture is very interesting in many ways. It could be very rich to make a film here, but not in the way most directors have worked. They have a lot of money they must respond for, and

thus they are forced to make a special kind of movie.

Q. Critic John Simon has stated of your work that you overestimate the intelligence of the average person, that later on you will become disillusioned and either quit directing or retreat into making exotic chamber films.

A. I hope I will not. Rather than overestimate the public, sometimes I have given them the wrong things in my films. They aren't trained. It's a question of my better understanding their upbringing, where they have lived, the values they have known.

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Contemplating Death in Venice

By MICHAEL WILMINGTON

In its original form, *Death in Venice* is one of the classic statements on erotic obsession. Thomas Mann's novella shows us Gustav von Aschenbach, a famous novelist and essayist (with a literary position slightly paralleling Mann's) who becomes afflicted in late middle age with wanderlust. Travelling to Venice, which unknown to him, is in the throes of Asiatic cholera, he becomes obsessed with the angelic beauty of a young Polish boy named Tadzio.

This homosexual fixation so distresses him that he first attempts to flee, and then doggedly begins pursuing the boy around the city, never establishing contact, always remote and idolatrous. A man whose literary persona is one of chastity, moderation and quiet heroism, Aschenbach's actions become progressively absurd and grotesque, and he dies on the beach, his greying hair dyed and his face painted in a foolish attempt to make himself attractive.

THE NARRATIVE action of Mann's story is cut to the bone; it is more an analysis than a demonstration. Aschenbach pursues Tadzio with little hope of attainment, and almost regar-

dless of danger or embarrassment. But these fatalistic actions at the end of his life which, like Hemingway's suicide, seemingly, negate all his principles, are, in fact the logical extreme of those principles.

Mann describes Aschenbach's recurring literary theme as "the heroism born of weakness." He is "the poet-spokesman of all those who labor at the edge of exhaustion, who are already worn out but still hold themselves upright... who yet contrive by prodigious spasms of will to produce, at least for a while, the effect of greatness." It is this inherent frailty—the weakness held precariously in check by Aschenbach's stoic discipline—that his love for the boy inexorably reveals. *Death in Venice* does not portray a fall from greatness; instead, it reveals the secret and diseased sources of that "greatness."

Now, what director Luchino Visconti has done is to compose an elaborate opera around Mann's spare, analytic story. In the hands of this cynical Roman aristocrat, this Cesare Borgia of theatre, opera, and film, Mann's psychoanalytic approach has been subverted by an amoral aestheticism. First of all, Visconti has changed Aschenbach from a reclusive man of letters to a symphonic composer and conductor modelled after Gustav Mahler. Dirk Bogarde, who plays Aschenbach, is made up to resemble Mahler; he conducts one of Mahler's symphonies as his own (receiving the same disastrous reception Mahler usually did); and his personal life in the film is altered to coincide with Mahler's at about the time *Das Lied von der Erde* was composed.

Mann, probably to get an ironic distance from his intense subject, put qualifications on Aschenbach's stature as a writer; no such qualifications exist for Visconti's tormented composer. The sonorous, vaguely sinister melodies of Mahler's Third and Fifth Symphonies, form the backdrop for Aschenbach's ballet of desire, frustration and death, investing the victim, even at his most pitiable, with a superhuman control and overview. We are invited to pit him, not only because of his unconsummated lust for Tadzio, but because, like Mahler, his genius as a composer went unrecognized in his own time.

AND THIS self-pity is increased by several flashback scenes which show a friend of Aschenbach-Mahler's running around frenziedly, exclaiming things like "You magnificent cheat! You swindler! What purity of form!" and "Evil is the food of genius!" Apparently, we are to take this pompous jackass as a spokesman for the film's theme... that genius is inextricable from perversity, "normality" being a curse of the mediocre masses, and that this perversity, if unrecognized and unappeased, will overwhelm the genius it feeds.

Mann's point is that Aschenbach cannot possess Tadzio, possibly because Tadzio, as Aschenbach sees him, does not really exist. But Visconti, faithful to the story in externals, proposes instead that Aschenbach should possess him but, through inhibition and false moralism, won't. The boy is seen less as an internal ideal, and more as a mocking reminder of missed sensual opportunities.

To shore up this approach, Visconti has turned Tadzio—played by Bjorn Andresen, a lovely little boy with the face of a Botticelli Venus—into a vamp, posing, strutting, kissing and erotically wrestling with his friend Jaschiu, and smiling flirtatiously at Aschenbach. We get the impression, which Mann avoided of Aschenbach being led along, seduced, of a perversity in Tadzio which corresponds with his own and is consciously drawing him forward.

I dislike the self-pity and aesthetic elitism of Visconti's attitudes as much as I dislike the super-aestheticism of his style—the omnipresent symphonic underlining, the classical pictorial compositions modeled after Turner and Manet, the nudging "inside" references to Mahler's personal life and his famous "Holy Mary" complex—and yet, at times, *Death in Venice* is as powerful a portrayal of obsessional self-destructive love as Sternberg's *The Blue Angel* (with which it has a distant family connection; Thomas Mann's older brother wrote the novel on which Sternberg based his scenario.)

AUDIENCES ARE sometimes annoyed by the singlemindedness of such a portrayal. They want to armor themselves against ridicule. But obsessions of this kind are as tragic as they are ridiculous. Pushed to its extreme, what other kind of love is so totally dependant on belief and faith, so little concerned with action or fulfillment, so mystical and quasi-religious, as the one which is never returned?

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Hound Dog

(continued from page 9)

been sporadic. Two singles made in the early '60s did well locally but were never released beyond Chicago, and in 1967, while on tour in Europe, he recorded an LP in Germany, appearing both as a lead performer, as well as supporting Little Walter and Koko Taylor. Unfortunately, this album has never been released in America. He has also recorded an unissued album for Chess.

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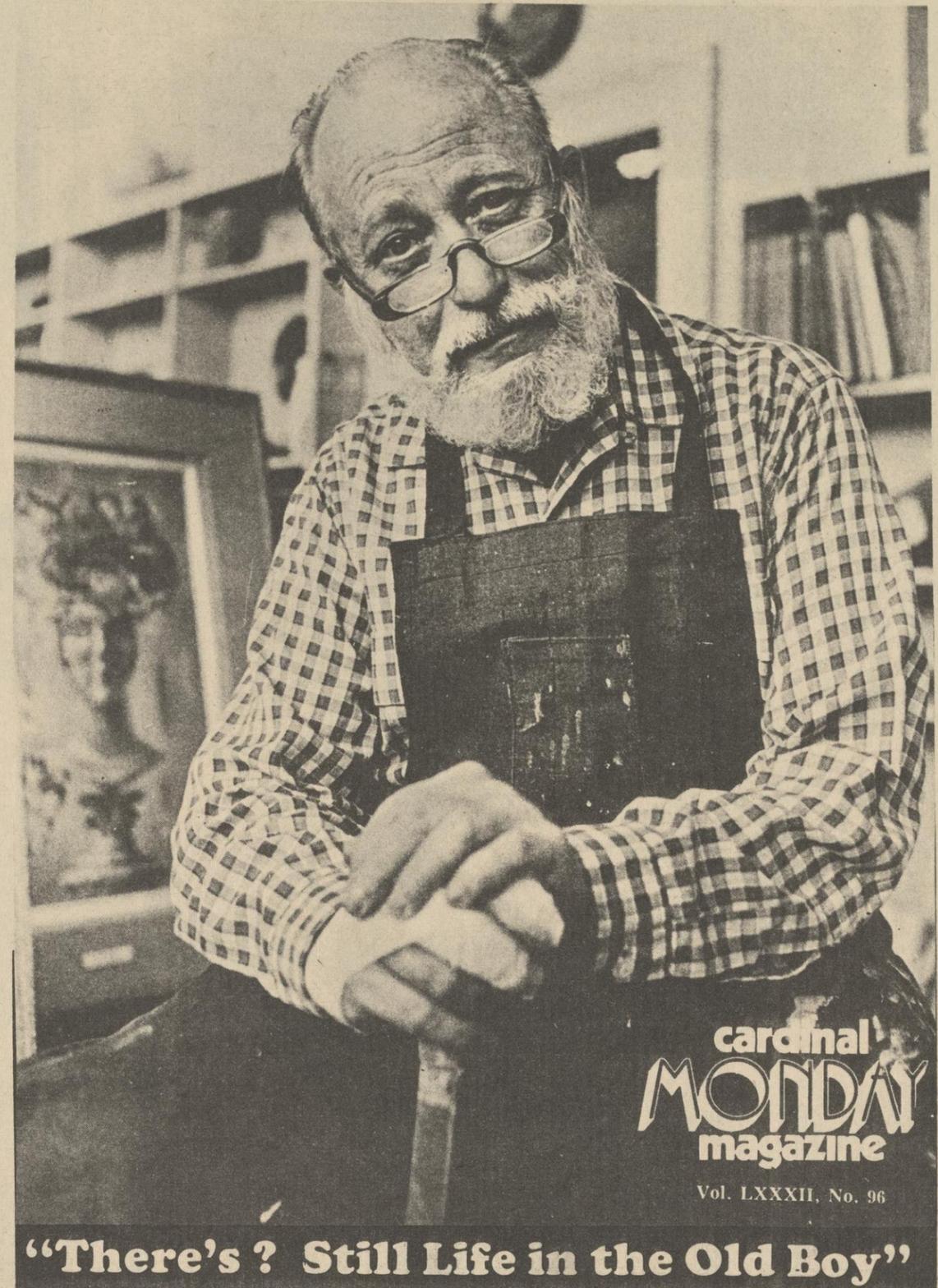
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"There's ? Still Life in the Old Boy"

Cardinal photo by Jeff Jayson