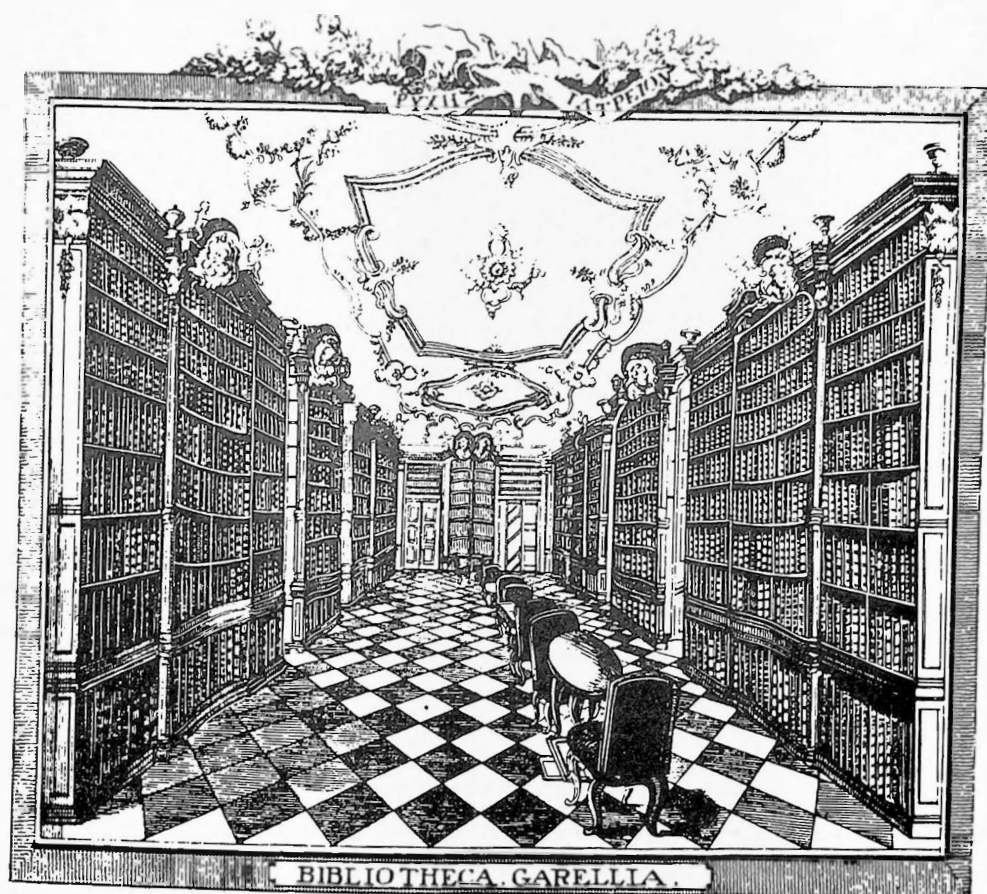


DREAMS AND FALSE ALARMS  
No. 5

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which could also be called THE WORST OF BRUCE, as it is nearly All of Bruce (all 100 kg?) since the time in 1987 when I finished my most recent FAPazine. Published and printed by BRUCE GILLESPIE, GPO Box 5495AA, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia (phone: (03) 419 4797). This issue, typed in November 1988, is destined for the February 1989 mailing of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. Proofread by Elaine Cochrane. Cover printed by Copy Place, Melbourne.

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Kinkon III was held at Easter 1988 in the Victoria Hotel, Melbourne (the site of the fan room and the art show at Aussiecon II, for those who remember them). Nothing much went wrong at Kinkon, except that Merv Binns didn't sell all the books he brought to the convention. I missed one day of the convention, the Sunday, but was sighted at the Non-Banquet, which was a riotous success. The Guests of Honour -- Lee Harding, John Baxter, and Greg Turkich -- were scintillating when required; Baxter, who has been writing film books in England for the last 20 years, told lots of libellous stories about people the rest of us read about only in movie magazines.

I even had somebody to go to lunch with. During the Easter convention of 1987 I kept having to lunch alone. On Good Friday this year, a group of us tried Fast Eddy's, the only restaurant open in town. We won't try it again. On Saturday, Yvonne Rousseau, Mark Linneman, and I dined at the Spaghetti Theatre in Collins Street. A much more enjoyable nosh-up than Fast Eddy's. I didn't stay around for dinner on either the Friday or Saturday. After conventioning from 10.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. I was exhausted.

Conventions make me feel elderly. I found myself gazing in astonished wonder at the delightful young ladies who now crowd the convention floor. Since I am a happily married man, I would never make a pass at any of them -- but I couldn't help feeling that even if an errant impulse overcame me, I would get nowhere. The gorgeous creatures stare past me, seeing me, if they see me at all, as merely a fan so impossibly ancient and venerable that I attended the 1968 Melbourne SF Conference. In those days, the only females at conventions were wives or girlfriends of fans. In 1970 arrived Shayne McCormack and Sabina Heggie, two very young Trekkies -- the first unaccompanied women to attend a Melbourne convention. In the early 1970s arrived Claudia Mangiamale, then Elaine Cochrane, neither of whom were unattached at the time. They certainly brightened the fanscape.

What am I talking about? The truth is that I was always unattractive to young ladies, gorgeous or not, even when I was single. Elaine and I got together only by the most circuitous route, and I wasn't fending off casual offers along the way. If I were twenty-one and single again, I would be just as tongue-tied as I was the first time. But at least there are now a lot more beautiful fans, and maybe today's Bruce Gillespies don't endure lives as lonely as mine was. Maybe they don't produce 150-page fanzines, either.

Lee Harding regretted, in his nostalgic Guest of Honour Speech, that so many of the attendees were people he recognized from years back. Where is the new blood? he asked. Before Lee arrived at the convention, I was part of a panel with four people who said they had never sat on a panel before. This was the Philip K. Dick discussion, and I expected to have to do a fair bit of the talking. Not so. Set these guys off, and I had trouble putting in my usual piquant and brilliant observations. I would have done better heckling from the audience. These four blokes came from the Melbourne Science Fiction Club, which now resides in a church hall in West Brunswick. For some years the Club has seemed separate from the activities of the rest of Melbourne fandom; but this separation disappeared at the convention. Similarly, the divisions between media fans and fannish fans seemed much less obvious than at some earlier conventions. Lee was right in his speech to remind fans of the 1973 Easter convention, the first to be held at the

Victoria. The 1988 convention had similar numbers and much the same easy atmosphere, although hardly the euphoria we felt in 1973 when we realized that perhaps Australian fans could host a world convention in 1975.

Justin Ackroyd moderated the usual Kinkon panel on 'Read Any Good Books Lately?' This was carefully designed to fill all the available time so that I couldn't interject with a list of sf books that might actually be worth reading. Justin seemed to think it important that the books recommended by panel members should be available at Minotaur Books. If the books gushed about on Friday were any indication of the basic stock at Minotaur, it's no wonder I hadn't visited the shop for a year. As the panel members were speaking, I took a list of their recommendations. None of the books fitted my idea of science fiction (or even non-genre science fiction). All were fantasy, except for David McDonnell's selections, which were Robert B. Parker's private eye novels. I found David's mini-speech quite moving. Here was somebody who'd read every book by a serious writer, knew what that writer was up to, and could tell an audience in a quarter of an hour exactly what they would enjoy in his books. Best performance of the convention, David -- and I've already bought two more Parker novels. (John Baxter, fending off his countless admirers on the sidelines, was astonished that any speaker at an sf convention even knew about Robert Parker, let alone recommended him. 'But read James Crumley as well,' said John Baxter.)

At the non-banquet at the Tijuana Taxi on Sunday night, I sat with a congenial group who included John Baxter, Lee Harding, Irene Pagram, Andrew and Ruth Murphy, and Greg Turkich. Andrew is one of those people who do wonders, such as organizing three Kinkons, without any fuss. It was the first conversation I'd had with him. I suppose it was the first real conversation I'd had with John Baxter, who seems to know more about film than I ever knew about science fiction. My mention of Powell and Pressburger's I Know Where I'm Going as my favourite film of 1987 brought cheers from the group. This led to various people giving their lists of Top Ten Films of All Time. I wish I'd taken notes. Andrew's Top Ten was made up entirely of John Ford films. Some of Baxter's list I'd seen and many I hadn't. Walter Hill's name was mentioned frequently. Irene's list came closest to mine, but she didn't want to include an Orson Welles film. My list, made up on the spot, included Donen and Kelly's Singing in the Rain, Capra's It's a Wonderful Life (Baxter didn't agree here; others did), Anderson's This Sporting Life, Hitchcock's The Birds, Visconti's The Leopard, Tati's Mon Oncle, Welles's The Trial and Citizen Kane, Donen and Kelly's It's Always Fair Weather, and Rosi's Smog (which Baxter had seen although multitudes haven't). Afterwards I thought of a few more. (A more complete list appears later in this magazine.) Top award for the night went to a Buller's Beverford 1974 Shiraz that I had brought along because I was attending the banquet alone and Elaine doesn't like it. Baxter was also astonished that I was married to someone who doesn't like films, but I said that music and books were more important in our house.

One of the most disturbing events in the Real World in the weeks before the convention was the cancellation of Film Buffs' Forecast on the subscriber radio station 3RRR. On this program John Flaus and Paul Harris tell jokes, emit puns, repeat gossip, bark at each other, and occasionally talk about films. Their program was out by an hour to one hour's length in February, but Flaus and Harris were promised a return to two hours in March. Instead they were offered one hour or nothing. Both quit. On the Saturday of the convention, Baxter interviewed the two about the cancellation of the show, then out-talked Flaus by telling the story of low politics in higher ABC echelons. Flaus explained that the reasons given for changing the nature of the show were probably quite different from the real reason for cancelling, which was, basically, that the station manager didn't like it or them. What about the rest of us? How were we to pick the really good films on television for the week? Which specialist films would we miss out on because of the cancellation of FBF? How would we find out about directors whose works are rarely shown? (It was Flaus and Harris who put me on to Powell's Peeping Tom, and hence on to the Powell/Pressburger films.) At the end of the session, Flaus and Harris were still whistling in the wind, hoping for a reprieve.

They got their reprieve. Neither could have expected the spectacular vindication

that they gained four months later. Not only did they return to their old time slot on 5RRR but the offending manager quit the station.

1987 and 1988 seemed like a long series of losses, some more serious than others. In September 1987, Elaine lost her mother.

I've known Mrs Lois Cochrane only since 1977, and I'm ashamed to say that initially I misjudged her. My first impressions were of a traditional, and slightly oldfashioned, Australian Mother. Australian Mothers, according to my little category file, have strong and inflexible opinions on everything and are mainly devoted to neat gardens and houses. Elaine was quite shocked when she realized what I thought of her mother. 'You should see the house at Glenroy!' she said. Eventually I did inspect the Cochrane residence. I discovered that Elaine's mother liked jungly gardens, cats (at one stage she had nine), and collecting things. The house was filled with a lifetime's accumulation of things, all of which were going to come in useful sometime.

Mrs Cochrane proved to be untraditional in lots of ways. Elaine was surprised to find, in early 1978, that not only had her parents guessed that she and I might start living together but that they already liked the idea. I've always been grateful for that. (Elaine and I are also grateful for the enormous help we received from the Cochranes when we were buying a house. It's a debt we can never repay.) Elaine's mother was always interested in new ideas, and was a staunch Labor supporter (although I suspect the latter-day antics of Messrs Hawke and Keating tested her loyalty). She tried to investigate the world of science fiction, mainly because I was interested in the subject. Bad luck, George Turner, the science fiction parts of In the Heart or in the Head don't mean an awful lot to a non-sf person. But Mrs Cochrane finished George's book, and said nice things about the last chapter. She said less approving things about the play version of Damon Braderink's Transmitters -- but then, hearing swear words spoken on ABC radio was more than even she could stomach.

One day Elaine and I were wandering through the Botanic Gardens. Since I know nothing about plants, I asked Elaine the names of unusual specimens. Elaine had to confess that she didn't know the common names of most of them. Her mother knew them all -- but only the Latin names.

Elaine's mother died on 5 September 1987, after being in intensive care at the Royal Melbourne Hospital for 2½ weeks. An operation for bowel obstruction had been successful, but she was notable to recover afterwards. For a bit over a week she seemed to improve, but sank rapidly after yet another operation. Although the death certificate does not say so, she actually died of rheumatoid arthritis: the drugs she had been taking to suppress her arthritis had suppressed her immune system so severely that she could not fight off the infections picked up after the operation.

My main reaction was disbelief. Grief sets in later. Mrs Cochrane had become an important part of my life, and suddenly she wasn't there. Mr Cochrane is left in a large house with seven cats and two dogs, and Elaine has been left without her best friend.

The funeral was as doleful as all other funerals, but made memorable because more than 90 people, mainly from the Glenroy area, attended. Particular thanks to John Bangsund and Yvonne Rousseau, who were able to be there. We thought we were being unemotional and brave until the funeral procession left the undertaker's chapel. Mrs Cochrane had been a voluntary worker at the local primary school -- she had listened to children reading. When we passed the school, all the pupils were lined up outside, and they seemed as distressed as we were.

I didn't want to be too doleful, but it's hard to be cheerful when faced with

the deaths of a famous fan editor and good person (Ron Smith), a faithful reader (Terry Carr), and an important Australian literary character (Dr Stephen Murray-Smith) who hardly knew me, but was an important part of my life.

Ron Smith had been the editor of Inside magazine when he lived in America. After he came to Australia in the early 1960s he became a publisher and, later, the proprietor of several bookshops that were social centres for readers. Ron died of a very long illness.

Terry Carr leaves such an enormous gap in the field that many science fiction people -- friends, editors, and publishers -- must still be wondering what to do without him. Along with Ted White he seemed to be one of the few people who had a finger on the pulse of fandom. In the professional field, he, Dave Hartwell, Robert Silverberg, and a very few others have tried to keep up standards in science fiction, although they've had a hard time in recent years. Until his death at the age of 50, Terry seemed to be winning, as he was maintaining the Ace SF Specials, <sup>and</sup> the Best SF of the Year and the Universe series. People who know Terry much better than I did have already said goodbye in FAPA. I met him once, and kept in contact through letters. I miss him a lot.

John Bangsund, in Philosophical Gas, has given a much more complete picture of Stephen Murray-Smith than I could have. I didn't visit his house at Mt Martha or attend one of the Overland-Meanjin cricket games. But I heard his regular radio broadcasts in the late 1950s and early 1960s, especially on Any Questions? and The Critics. His oracular voice was quite unmistakable, distinguished not so much by its patrician origins as by its commonsense clarity. Stephen didn't bulldust. I heard him give lectures during my Diploma of Education year, 1968, and contributed a few pieces to his magazine, Overland (my The Sea and Summer long review appeared in the last issue edited by Stephen). His greatest kindness to me was in my role as one-third of Norstrilia Press. His speech at the launching of George Turner's In the Heart or in the Head was brilliant. Because of our oversight, it wasn't taped. Stephen Murray-Smith wrote scads of books, five of which are scheduled to appear in 1988, but he is best known as a facilitator -- someone who stood foursquare in the middle of Australia's literary and intellectual life for 40 years, enabling much to happen that would not otherwise have happened. Which is why in TMR 11/12/13 I described Stephen Murray-Smith as the Terry Carr of Australian literature.

Another loss: Yvonne Rousseau, because she moved to Adelaide. As we discovered much later, she'd been planning the move since Easter 1987, when she and John Foyster decided it would be a nice idea to spend their lives together. John had just landed a good job in Adelaide. Vida, Yvonne's daughter, did not want to change schools in the middle of the year. At the beginning of 1988 Yvonne and Vida moved, and I'm told that Vida is rather enjoying Norwood High School. The trouble is that Yvonne has lots of friends in Melbourne, and we're used to hearing her melodious tones on the phone every day or so. At times she seemed to be the only person other than Lichelle Muijsert who had any idea what was going on in Melbourne fandom. When Yvonne travelled to Melbourne for 1988's Easter convention, her friend Maureen O'Shaughnessy put on a party for her and her friends. Farewells said there became rather emotional; Easter showed how far Adelaide is from Melbourne. Fortunately she was able to visit Elaine and me the next afternoon. We hope that she and John can find some way to move back to Melbourne soon. Meanwhile, Yvonne has had her book The Murders at Hanging Rock republished by Macmillan, is working on new projects, and is still very much part of the ASFR Collective.

The following section requires a bit of local geography. Since I'm no good at drawing on stencils, I'll draw a word-map. We are at 59 Keele Street, Collingwood -- facing north, on a street running east-west. Next to us, to our west, is 57 Keele Street, a large office building that until this year was the headquarters of the Technical Teachers Union of Victoria. (It now houses the

offices of a film and TV production company.) On our east was No. 61 Keele Street, the twin of our place. Next east is 275 Wellington Street, on the corner of Keele and Wellington. On the other corner of Keele and Wellington is 273 Wellington Street, a large house with a yard attached.

In February 1988 Sid and Lottie, our neighbours from across the road at 273 Wellington Street, left for Queensland after living most of their lives in Collingwood. In May 1986 the company inhabiting No. 275 moved out, leaving the office space empty. In May 1987 the tenants moved out of No. 61 Keele Street. We always hoped we could buy it, but have never had the money. (A hobby-house for the cats. Wheel) Meanwhile the place was empty. Marvellous — no neighbours! There was no sign of the owner, and the place looked derelict. Mail began to pile up in the letterbox. Elaine fished out the items of mail, and I sent them to Martin, who had lived there. I asked him to renew his redirection order, and told him about the empty house. Two weeks later, somebody moved in. He told me his name was Bruce, and that he had heard about the house from Martin. I was annoyed that we had a new neighbour, but didn't worry much, since he seemed a very quiet person. A girl moved in. She was less quiet, but the two of them seemed easier to get on with than most of our earlier neighbours.

You've guessed the next bit. They were, of course, squatters. Very unlucky squatters. The owner of the house also owns the large office building at 275 Wellington Street. He chose February to begin work on that building after leaving it vacant for 18 months. His builder discovered the squatters, of course, and told them that the house was to be pulled down in the next few days. We found this out by accident, and panicked. If the house next door came down, would our shared side wall collapse? The builder, an amiable Irishman named Eddie, assured us that all steps would be taken to protect our place. We rang up Collingwood Council. No application had been filed to demolish next door. We asked Eddie. Permission had been given by Fitzroy Council, which has no jurisdiction over our area. Something Very Odd was Up. Eddie agreed that perhaps, yes, the owner should put in an application to the Collingwood Council before demolishing. Meanwhile he had already done enough damage to next door (by removing the electricity supply and disconnecting the gas supply) to convince the squatters that the house really was coming down. They moved out quickly, although not before pissing in one of Eddie's boots, which he had left overnight in the front yard. We were without neighbours again. Collingwood Council told Eddie that it opposes the demolition of any houses in the area. Eddie said he was getting new messages every week from the architect — first that 275 Wellington would become a Chinese restaurant; then a clothing factory. We waited. We still wished we could buy next door.

\*   \*

Two blokes turned up in next door's back yard in May. 'We're from the demolishers', one of them told Elaine. 'Yes, we have the permit to wreck the place.' We rang the city council to find out if this were true. It wasn't.

Next morning the same two blokes were in the same back yard. They looked around for two minutes, said 'Aw shit', and went away. I hoped this meant that the job was impossible.

Months had gone by since the squatters moved out. Still there was no demolition. But the house's owner, a Peter Lee from Hong Kong, didn't apply for a permit to demolish.

Why were we anxious about the possibility of losing the house next door? (a) Because we suspected our side wall would collapse when it was no longer supported by that house; (b) we would receive far more noise from nearby Wellington Street than we've had to endure so far; (c) unless the demolishers put up an adequate fence across the front of the property next door, suddenly the eastern side of our property would be far more vulnerable to burglars than it is at the moment; (d) in summer the side wall would receive the hot morning sun and in winter the east side of the house would be colder than it has been.



Of course, if the demolition of the house meant that we would actually receive less noise than now, we would welcome it.

Meanwhile there are burglars and squatters afoot in Collingwood (sixteen burglaries in our Neighbourhood watch district in July, slightly down from twenty-four in May), and we have no one to watch our house. After Sid and Lottie Jago moved from 275 Wellington Street, their house remained vacant.

Recently it went up for auction again. It, plus the two houses beside it in Wellington Street, were sold for \$419,000. At 2 p.m. on the day of the auction, I went to listen to the bids. At the same time I kept looking back at our place because I was expecting a packet to be delivered by courier. As I looked back, I saw Peter Lee pull up and inspect 275 Wellington Street. As I was looking back at our place, while trying to listen to the auction bids, I was astonished to see a man walk up to the door of 61 Keele Street and push his way in. On his head was a wicker basket, and on top of that was a rolled-up mattress. Peter Lee and Eddie the builder came out of the large place. 'I don't believe what I saw', I said, 'but I just saw a squatter push his way into 61 Keele Street'. They went in there, and within five minutes the squatter had been sent on his way. At long last, Eddie put sheet iron across the front of the house next door. (A few days later, somebody ripped away the sheet iron from the front door, went through the house and stole the gas heater from the back yard. Only then did the owner put a lock on the front door.)

Elaine suspected that a squatter had moved into Jago's old place. A day or so after they left, their security door went missing. There was no other sign of life, except that the front gate was sometimes open and sometimes shut. The blinds did not shift, and there was no light inside. When I went over to have a look at the place on auction day, sure enough in the front room were a bed and a television set. A few kitchen things were on the sink. Otherwise the house wasn't affected or damaged in any way. Suddenly squatters in the area seem to have become highly organized, so that any property left vacant is entered immediately.

I'm in two minds about squatting. The practice has only become necessary since all the housing around universities and colleges has been bought and trendified. There is very little affordable rental accommodation left around Melbourne University, for instance. At the same time, houses are left empty for long periods of time while city councils consider applications for redevelopment. Although Collingwood Council says it wants to preserve housing in the area, it has already allowed several demolitions near us during recent years, and at least two of the blocks have been left empty. Even the small amount of cheap housing in Collingwood is disappearing.

Therefore if silent squatters move into a property long left empty, one can hardly object. At least, as Elaine says, they are preserving the property as housing. But I wouldn't much want a mini-commune on the doorstep -- which is what the group of squatters in 61 Keele Street seemed to be establishing.

The small neighbourhood around our house keeps emptying. It has become obvious that Jago's place was bought merely for speculative purposes. That's what's happened again, since there is still no sign of life there. (In recent weeks, a new squatter has moved in. The new owner could hardly object, since he or she hasn't set foot on the property in four months.)

We kept trying to get guarantees about 61 Keele Street -- security, non-damage to our property, etc. -- but we suspected the owner would do his best to get away with cheapskate measures. He wanted to buy our property, freely admitting that he only wanted to pull it down for an extended car park for 275 Wellington Street, but offered nothing that would compensate us for moving. (He did not mention a sum of money. He merely offered to swap a house he already owned for our house. We mentioned a figure of \$250,000, which sent him on his way. To buy the right sort of house in our area -- at least two extra rooms -- the figure would now be at least \$300,000, and seems to rise by \$50,000 every six months.



As I mentioned, we lost our other 'neighbour' when, in May, the Technical Teachers Union of Victoria auctioned its main building (57 Keele Street) for \$530,000, the 'barn' around the corner (a small warehouse at 42 Budd Street) for \$370,000, and the two vacant blocks that form a car park on Easey Street for \$150,000 each. Not bad money in just under three-quarters of an hour. The TTUV moved out in July, to join the other teacher unions at the renovated old Exacta factory in Abbotsford. The new owner has just finished renovations.

When the demolishers eventually arrived to pull down 61 Keele Street, I overheard one of the blokes saying that they had allowed five days for the job. After the first three days the roof had nearly gone. They pulled planks from the back of the house. Some of them were so rotten they peeled off like paper. The process slowed down when they got stuck into the walls. Their working days became erratic. They would make a bit of noise for an hour or two, then disappear. They'd turn up again three days later. As far as I could tell while rubbernecking through the side window, they discovered that the house was more solidly built than they expected. The more difficult they found the job, the slower they went and the cheerier I felt. If, as we believe, our house was built at the same time as next door and by the same builder, it must be almost unreckable.

Our side wall hasn't collapsed -- yet. After putting off the job as long as possible, the two blokes finally brought down the front wall of next door and placed a fence across the property. They even slapped concrete cladding on our side wall to protect it.

We're not sure how the whole process will affect the temperature of our place in summer. Heat waves usually take days to heat the interior of our house, but now the side wall cops the morning sun.

Our back yard is now a lot windier than it was. But the washing dries faster.

We were afraid that the owner of 275 Wellington Street would turn it into a restaurant. If so, cars would have been revving until late at night. Now the owner tells us that he is making the large place into offices. We'll see.

Hitting us just as hard as the death of Elaine's mother has been the death of our favourite cat, Solomon. He was 15 years old, but it did seem as if he would live forever. Solomon had seemed very frail and elderly in October 1987, until we found that he had diabetes. Daily insulin shots gave him new vigour. He began jumping up on the table again, and once allowed himself to be seen playing tag with the other cats. However, he faded again, and became very thin. We took him to the vet in the morning of Tuesday, 10 May 1988; it was found he had a large tumour in his belly, and he was given only a few months to live. That night he died, probably from a heart attack. A great loss, especially as the other cats can only be described as very ordinary moggies compared to Solomon. (We still have Apple Blossom, who's 13 years old; TC, who is nine years old; and the two fluffies, Oscar, who is four-and-a-half years old, and Theodore, who, at two-and-a-half years old, is the kitten, but thinks he's the new boss.)

Recently Theodore, our youngest, most beautiful cat, disappeared for 24 hours. In the end we were going to tour the cat hospitals, letterbox the district, etc., but when I went out to the toilet about 1 a.m., just before going to bed, Theodore sauntered through the back gate. He was very hungry, but undamaged. He must have been shut in somewhere, but that doesn't explain why we couldn't hear him yelling. Oscar, who had spent all day anxiously looking out the back gate for his Theodore, was overjoyed. Since then Oscar has hardly let Theodore out of his sight.

One night when we had gone out for dinner, Theodore contested the newly cleared block of land next door. The Evil Cat from two doors away wanted the territory. Theodore lost the fight. When we took him to the vet next morning, we found that

he was suffering from a detached cornea, and would have to be treated by a small-animal ophthalmologist in Armadale. Cost: about \$350, plus three trips to the eye doctor (only made possible because Elaine's father drove me and Theodore there and back). Yes, Theodore's eye is all right. Now we try to keep him inside the house after 5 p.m., because the Evil Cat begins skulking about then. Theodore has worked out that evading humans is a wonderful game that he can always win. Lures no longer work. If Theodore wants to come in, he does. Otherwise, we just cross our fingers.

In July I came very close to going broke. I had become a credit junkie, mainly to feed my habit (buying compact discs). Suddenly the State Bank Bankcard Division decided that I could no longer use my Visa card. Oops. And there were all those bills to pay. August's cheque from Macmillan paid a few more bills. Things are slowly improving, but meanwhile I haven't paid back Elaine all the money she lent me to pay my taxes in April. And I've hardly begun to level my Bankcard balance.

I got into this mess in the following way. Each month I would dump my cheque straight into the Bankcard account. For the rest of the month, my only available cash would be Bankcard credit. But it's very hard to keep count of what one is spending in this way. So I spent far too much. My current solution is to rely on only my savings or cheque accounts, and try to level the Bankcard and Visa card accounts during the next two years or so.

\$2500 of the \$5000 I owe various credit card agencies was incurred by publishing and posting The Metaphysical Review 11/12/13. I felt that I had to publish something substantial in 1988, but the risks I took will haunt me for another year or so. For example, my current debt will probably stop TMR in its tracks until about June 1989. Meanwhile I've had the duplicator cleaned (Renee, now called Aloatel, charged \$300!), and I still have 15 reams of American Quarto paper, five tubes of duplicator ink, and 800 stencils (stencils courtesy of John Bangsund). Result? A 60-page Twentieth Anniversary Issue of SF Commentary, if I can raise the money to post it.

Has anything gone right recently?

Elaine had a peaceful Easter hammering together the front flywire door, planing the underside of the front door, re-hanging the front flywire door, and repositioning the lock on the front door. She also did lots of dishes and clothes and umpteen other things. She said she had a quiet, relaxing time while I was at Kinkon. Elaine was thinking of quitting her old job at Oxford University Press anyway, but was relieved when Colin Jevons rang to say that Thomas Nelson needed a science/education editor, and would Elaine like to talk to them? She did, and accepted the job, even asking for and receiving a few thousand more dollars per year from Nelson. She likes the new job a lot.

Other happy news? John Bangsund landed the sort of job he's been looking for all his life: assistant editor of the literary magazine Meanjin. No doubt he'll tell you about that in his mailing. Irene Pagram has landed a job as the curator of the Old Cheese Factory, Berwick. It is an art gallery and educational and art-selling centre. Best wishes.

I've begun to write reviews for sources other than fanzines. I admit that The Victorian Arts Centre Magazine took only three of them. I haven't heard from them since. And I admit that The Melbourne Report does not actually pay for book and record reviews, but the editor gives me a fair number of review copies. Also, I get the chance to review books and records I've bought as well as those

I've received free. The AGE ran one of my reviews (of Broderick's Matilda at the Speed of Light) (but took two months to pay me) and bought another. All these are hints of future success, but not success itself. Things will start looking up if I can find somebody who pays well and gives me a lot of writing work.

In Melbourne, success in writing seems linked to Who You Know, not How Good You Are. Because of Rob Gerrand, I sold three reviews to Michael Kaye, the editor of The Victorian Arts Centre Magazine. Because of John Bangsund, Rod Usher (The Age's Literary Editor) commissioned the Broderick review, and it was because of Damien Broderick that he commissioned a review of Forgotten Life, Brian Aldiss's wonderful new novel. David and Kitty Vigo arranged that I meet Phil Pianta, editor of The Melbourne Report. George Turner asked that I review his The Sea and Summer (Drowning Towers in USA) for Overland. If I have room, I'll reprint these pieces here.

As I described above, some financial finagling enabled me to publish The Metaphysical Review 11/12/13, all 120 pages of it, in June 1988. Sorry if you didn't receive one. There were only 40 copies left from the print run, so I couldn't run it through FAPA. Some copies remain. Write if you want one.

Optimism keeps winning over good sense. I'm thinking of reviving SF Commentary -- not as a vast money-sucker, like TWR, but as a slim volume of reviews of Books Received. It will go only to contributors, publishers who send books, and subscribers. That should keep the copy numbers down, and also give me space for reviewing review copies. Besides, I have to revive SF Commentary by January 1989, its twentieth birthday. I don't guarantee to run it in FAPA, but I'll try. Subscribe (US\$25 for 6 issues airmail) if you want to be sure of your copy.

Early in 1988 Carey Handfield and Joanna Masters got married. Really. It's unlikely that you've been able to escape without hearing a blow-by-blow description of the event, so I won't write another one. Carey's father delivered a brilliant speech showing how difficult it is to extract information from Carey on any subject, let alone marriage. Attendees at the recent Sydon, suffering a similar problem -- extracting a speech from Carey Handfield, the Fan Guest of Honour -- solved it by firing personal questions at him from the audience. Perhaps we should have tried this at the wedding. Thanks to John and Esta Handfield, and many others, for the feasting and jollity.

Joanna Masters comes from Western Australia, and she and Carey met at an sf convention. Carey and Joanna are renting a handsome apartment in Hawthorn, but are house-hunting. Carey has had to mend his ways. We were clearing away Norstrilia Press stuff when Joanna delivered the great line: 'I only married him for his junk.'

#### CAUTION! LIST ALERT

Now that the news is out of the way, let's get on with the Secret Vices. Yes, it's List Time:

#### Favourite Books 1987

1. Independent People: Halldor Laxness (original publication date 1945; 544 pp.)
2. The Complete Stories of Flannery O'Connor (1971; 555 pp.)
3. Lives of Girls and Women: Alice Munro (1971; 250 pp.)
4. Soldiers' Women: Xavier Herbert (1961; 490 pp.)
5. The Novels of Philip K. Dick: Kim Stanley Robinson (1984; 150 pp.)
6. A Woman of Means: Peter Taylor (1950; 115 pp.)
7. Bommarzo: Manuel Mujica-Lainez (1967; 573 pp.)
8. Pieces of Time: Peter Bogdanovich (1973; 271 pp.)

9. The Sea and Summer: George Turner (1987; 378 pp.)
10. The Slaying of the Dragon: ed. Franz Rottensteiner (1984; 303 pp.)
11. Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982: Philip Larkin (1983; 315 pp.)
12. The Nine Tailors: Dorothy L. Sayers (1934; 255 pp.)
13. Stanboul Train: Graham Greene (1932; 221 pp.)
14. The Old Forest: Peter Taylor (1985; 358 pp.)
15. The Papers of Samuel Marchbanks: Robertson Davies (1986; 540 pp.)
16. Radio Free Albemuth: Philip K. Dick (1984; 214 pp.)
17. Azadi: Chaman Nahal (1976; 371 pp.)
18. Russian Hide and Seek: Kingsley Amis (1980; 251 pp.)
19. The Planet on the Table: Kim Stanley Robinson (1986; 241 pp.)
20. The Accidental Tourist: Anne Tyler (1985; 355 pp.)

It's hard to make any generalizations about a list like this. Four women; the rest men. Oh well. 1 Icelandic; 1 Argentinian; 1 Austrian; 2 Canadians; 1 Indian; 2 Australians (Herbert and Turner); 4 English writers; 5 Americans. That's one type of generalization.

1987 seemed a poor year for novels until I began concocting the list. Some books, such as The Sea and Summer, already loom larger in my memory than other books placed higher on the list. If I were doing the list again, I would move it up to No. 5. There are quite a few critical books here. Elaine cannot see why I read books of criticism and reviews for pleasure. Usually it's because they are better written than fiction or other types of non-fiction. For instance, Edmund Wilson is the best American writer this century, but he wrote little fiction. Robinson's book about Phil Dick is a masterpiece, a book-length essay that adds immeasurably to one's appreciation of Dick's work. The reading of literature depends on people like Kim Stanley Robinson. Similarly, Bogdanovich's immense love and appreciation of films informs every sentence of his book; one needs to read prose of this quality before coming back to the classic films. Peter Taylor's fiction was the discovery of the year. You Americans have so many magnificent writers lurking on your bookshelves, but don't know about them. Flannery O'Connor is the greatest of them, of course, but people like Taylor and even good old Phil Dick aren't too bad. The world's greatest living writer (at least, I presume he's still living; he was dragged out to meet Reagan in Reykjavik) is Halldor Laxness from Iceland, but it's only because of a series of accidents, mainly involving John Bangsund, that I have any of his books. Anybody know of a good source of Laxness editions in English? Gerald Murnane and I will pay \*money\* for any such volumes.

#### Favourite Films 1987

1. I Know Where I'm Going: directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (1946)
2. The Last Laugh: F. R. Murnau (1924)
3. The Sweet Spell of Success: Alexander Mackendrick (1957)
4. Pete Kelly's Blues: Jack Webb (1955)
5. The Big Heat: Fritz Lang (1953)
6. The Man With the Golden Arm: Otto Preminger (1955)
7. The Young Savages: John Frankenheimer (1961)
8. T-Men: Anthony Mann (1947)
9. How Green Was My Valley: John Ford (1941)
10. Sabrina: Billy Wilder (1954)
11. On Dangerous Ground: Nicholas Ray (1950)
12. The Night of the Hunter: Charles Laughton (1955)
13. Colonel Blimp: Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (1946)
14. Sorry Wrong Number: Anatole Litvak (1948)
15. Fanny By Gaslight: Anthony Asquith (1944)
16. Black Narcissus: Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (1946)
17. Here Comes Mr Jordan: Alexander Hall (1941)
18. Sinful Davy: John Huston (1969)
19. I Remember Mama: George Stevens (1948)
20. Lady on a Train: Charles David (1945)
21. All About Eve: Joseph L. Mankiewicz (1950)
22. Sitting Pretty: Walter Lang (1948)
23. I Was a Male War Bride: Howard Hawks (1949)
24. The Mind Benders: Basil Dearden (1963)
25. Who Is Killing the Great Chefs of Europe?: Ted Kotcheff (1978)

This list shows the influence of Messrs Flaus and Harris, who were mentioned near the beginning of this fanzine. Since most of these films were buried away at midday or midnight on TV, I might have missed them without the benefit of friendly hints from Film Buffs' Forecast. Nos. 11 to 25 are pretty much equal in my mind, which might explain the sometimes bizarre rank order. I saw three movies at cinemas during the entire year, and only one (the disappointing No Way Out) was made in 1987.

When I printed the above list in the August 1988 mailing of my ANZAPA magazine, Cath Ortlieb misread the introduction and thought I had listed my favourite movies of all time. No wonder she was surprised at the omissions. It would strain your credulity if I admitted that until a few days ago I had never attempted a 'Favourite Films of All Time' list. Okay, so you don't believe it. The trouble is that many of my favourites were first seen in 1965, the year that I discovered MUFFS (Melbourne University Film Society) screenings. And I have no list of the films I saw that year.

Here's an entirely tentative list of my  
Favourite Films of All Time:

1. This Sporting Life (Lindsay Anderson)
2. It's a Wonderful Life (Frank Capra)
3. 2001: A Space Odyssey (Stanley Kubrick)
4. The Birds (Alfred Hitchcock)
5. Mon Oncle (Jacques Tati)
6. Singing in the Rain (Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly)
7. The Trial (Orson Welles)
8. The Leopard (Luchino Visconti)
9. Othello (Orson Welles)
10. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (Walt Disney)
11. Seconds (John Frankenheimer)
12. Solaris (Andrei Tarkovsky)
13. Citizen Kane (Orson Welles)
14. Charley Varriock (Don Siegel)
15. Casablanca (Michael Curtiz)
16. Les Enfants du Paradis (Marcel Carne)
17. Kwaidan (Masaki Kobayashi)
18. Lunch on the Grass (Jean Renoir)
19. Andrei Rublev (Andrei Tarkovsky)
20. Vertigo (Alfred Hitchcock)
21. Peeping Tom (Michael Powell)
22. The Long Goodbye (Robert Altman)
23. Dark Passage (Delmer Daves)
24. The Third Man (Carol Reed)
25. Five Million Years to Earth (Roy Ward Baker)
26. General Della Rovere (Roberto Rossellini)
27. The Man Who Would Be King (John Huston)
28. The Little Shop of Horrors (Roger Corman)
29. Kind Hearts and Coronets (Robert Hamer)
30. The Magic Flute (Ingmar Bergman)
31. I Know Where I'm Going (Michael Powell and Emrio Pressburger)
32. Smog (Francesco Rosi)
33. Keeper of the Flame (George Cukor)
34. My Favorite Year (Richard Benjamin)
35. North By Northwest (Alfred Hitchcock)
36. The Reckoning (Jack Gold)
37. Notorious (Alfred Hitchcock)
38. Three Strangers (Jean Negulesco)
39. Death in Venice (Luchino Visconti)
40. Belle de Jour (Luis Bunuel)
41. The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (Luis Bunuel)
42. L'eclisse (Michelangelo Antonioni)
43. Zabriskie Point (Michelangelo Antonioni)
44. The Last Picture Show (Peter Bogdanovich)
45. Cabaret (Beb Fosse)
46. The Arrangement (Elia Kazan)

Not bad for a Top Ten list. I could add hundreds more.

Joseph Nicholas would have wanted me to write half a page about each title. No, I say. But I will say that each title lives in the memory and represents some point of perfection in cinema art. 2001 and The Birds derive drama from abstract ideas in a way unequalled in cinema. This Sporting Life shows the most powerful acting I've seen on the screen -- that is, the encounters between Rachel Roberts and Richard Harris. Their only equal is Nicol Williamson's performance in The Reckoning. How does one count the ways in which It's a Wonderful Life is perfect? Black-and-white photography. Script. Acting. Concept. As myth, as realism.

Oh well. I'm worst at my most lyrical, and most of these films twitch the lyrical nerve in me. Curiously enough, the most important movie in my life (as I realized when I saw it a few years ago, after not having seen it since I was four years old) is Charles Vidor's Mans Christian Andersen. But to tell you why it is important I would have to tell you the story of my life yet again.

#### Favourite Short Stories 1987

1. 'Aura': Carlos Fuentes (from The Slaying of the Dragon)
2. 'Stone Quarry': Gerald Murnane (Meanjin, December 1986)
3. 'With the Gypsy Girls': Miroslav Eliade (The Slaying of the Dragon)
4. 'Baptizing': Alice Munro (Lives of Girls and Women)
5. 'The Gift of the Prodigal': Peter Taylor (The Old Forest)
6. 'Lives of Girls and Women': Alice Munro (Lives of Girls and Women)
7. 'A Gift from the Graylanders': Michael Bishop (Best SF of the Year 15)
8. 'Heirs of the Living Body': Alice Munro (Lives of Girls and Women)
9. 'The Flats Road': Alice Munro (Lives of Girls and Women)
10. 'A Really Good Jazz Piano': Richard Yates (Eleven Kinds of Loneliness)
11. 'The Death of a Kinsman': Peter Taylor (The Old Forest)
12. 'The BAR Man': Richard Yates (Eleven Kinds of Loneliness)

There are no Flannery O'Connor stories here (although her Complete Short Stories appeared at No. 2 on the 'Favourite Books' list) because I had read almost all her stories before. It's odd, though, that when I read the stories for the first time in 1971 I failed to see that 'The Artificial N-----' is O'Connor's best story, and hence one of the great American short stories. So it was actually the best story read in 1987. Or should that honour go to Stanislaw Lem's 'The Mask', which appears in Franz Rottensteiner's stimulating The Slaying of the Dragon collection? But that was my favourite story for 1982. Fuentes' and Eliade's stories, read for the first time in 1987, are spectacular ghost stories. Even more than the rest of Murnane's fiction, 'Stone Quarry' is a disturbing blend of fable, meditation, and speculative ghost story. I hope Murnane's work breaks out of Australia soon; we shouldn't keep him to ourselves. Alice Munro remains North America's best living writer, although her recent collections are not as fertile as such early books as Lives of Girls and Women. This intense and delectable work is both a novel and a collection of interrelated long stories. Bishop's 'A Gift from the Graylanders' is the only sf entry from 1987.

#### Favourite Popular Records First Bought in 1987

(\* = Records or CDs first released in 1987)

- \* 1. Edge of Darkness: Eric Clapton and Michael Kamen (BBC)
- \* 2. The Killer Inside Me: Green on Red (Mercury)
- \* 3. Primitive Cool: Mick Jagger (CBS)
- \* 4. Get Rhythm: Ry Cooder (Warner Bros.)
- \* 5. Live at Fulham Town Hall: Charlie Watts (CBS)
- \* 6. Let Me Up (I've Had Enough): Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers (MCA)
- \* 7. Lord of the Highway: Joe Ely (Hightone)
- \* 8. First Step: Faces (Edsel)
- \* 9. Under the Sun: Paul Kelly and the Coloured Girls (Mushroom)
- 10. Georgia Satellites (Elektra)
- 11. Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band (Parlophone)
- \* 12. Bring the Family: John Hiatt (A&M)
- \* 13. Life: Neil Young (Geffen)
- 14. With the Beatles: Beatles (Parlophone)

- \* 15. 2400 Fulton Street: Jefferson Airplane (RCA) (2 CDs)
- \* 16. Tunnel of Love: Bruce Springsteen (CBS)
- \* 17. Famous Blue Raincoat: Jennifer Warnes (RCA)
- \* 18. Strange Weather: Marianne Faithful (Island)
- \* 19. The Conway Brothers Hiccup Orchestra (Larrikin)
- \* 20. Deer Children: Black Sorrows (CBS)

Numbers 9, 19, and 20 are by Australian performers. :: Yes, it is true that I had never owned a copy of Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band or With the Beatles before the CD releases. :: But no, I'll never be sure whether I would have liked the Edge of Darkness incidental music so well if I hadn't seen the TV series. :: Georgia Satellites was released overseas in 1986, but received no Australian release or airplay until the early months of 1987. :: After several years of making movie soundtracks, Ry Coder is back (Get Rhythm) with an exciting big sound that should have given him the \*hit record\* he needs. It didn't. Back to the movie soundtracks, Ry. :: First Step is, as the name suggests, the Faces' first album. I didn't know it had ever existed until Edsel, the English revival company, rereleased it (but not on CD). Not as good as A Mod Is as Good as a Wink to a Blind Horse, but better than Long Player and Ooh La La. They're not yet on CD, either. :: Green on Red is the best group in the world. Discover them, somebody, please.

#### Favourite Classical Records First Bought in 1987

(I won't try to guess at original release dates on these; most appeared in Australia long after they first appeared overseas.)

1. Berlioz: La Damnation de Faust:  
Sir Georg Solti (conductor)/Chicago Symphony Orchestra (Decca) (2 CDs)
2. Mahler: Symphony No. 5:  
Guiseppe Sinopoli (cond.)/Philharmonia Orch. (Deutsche Grammophon) (1 CD)
3. Beethoven: 'Eroica' Variations/Fur Elise/6 Bagatelles, Op. 126/6 Ecossaises:  
Alfred Brendel (piano) (Philips) (1 CD)
4. Schubert: Impromptus, D. 899 and D. 935:  
Alfred Brendel (p.) (Philips) (1 CD)
5. Schubert: Piano Sonata in A, D. 664/Piano Sonata in A Minor, D. 537:  
Alfred Brendel (p.) (Philips) (1 CD)
6. Brahms: Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 77:  
Boris Belkin (violin)/Ivan Fischer (cond.)/London Symphony Orchestra (Decca) (1 musicassette)
7. Schubert: Die Winterreise:  
Hans Hotter (baritone)/Gerald Moore (p.) (EMI References) (1 CD)
8. Orlande de Lassus: Luxuria de San Pietro:  
Istvan Parkai (cond.)/Chamber Choir of Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music (Hungaroton) (1 CD)
9. Joseph Haydn: Saint Nicholas Mass, Hob. XXII, 6/Missa Brevis in B Major ('Little Organ Mass'), Hob. XXII, 7/Missa Brevis in F Major ('Youth Mass'), Hob. XXII, 1:  
Reinhard Kammler (cond.)/Resident Chamber Orchestra of Munich/Choir of Augsburgers Domsingknaben (EMI Harmonia Mundi) (1 CD)
10. Joseph Haydn: Cello Concerto in D Major, Hob. VIIB, 2:  
Luigi Boccherini: Cello Concerto in B Flat Major:  
Mari Fujiwara (cello)/Lichi Inoue (cond.)/Netherlands Chamber Orchestra (Denon) (1 CD).

I've been rediscovering piano music during recent years through exploring Alfred Brendel's performances of solo works. I'm still far behind -- don't even have his records of Haydn sonatas yet. :: In 1987 and 1988 I've been collecting the entire Colin Davis/London Symphony Orchestra cycle of Berlioz's works as they have been appearing on CD. Therefore it was a surprise to find that Solti can do just as well as Davis, at least on La Damnation de Faust. Not only is this a first-class opera, but the performance has that passionate power that lifts it above other first-class operas. (The Davis/LSO version is also wonderful; I have it on LPs.) :: It's annoying that the Belkin/Fischer recording of Brahms' Violin Concerto is unavailable on CD, but it sounds crisp and immediate on tape. I haven't heard a better version of the work. :: Sinopoli's version of Mahler's 5th is



the first that has made sense to me. Sinopoli and the Philharmonia play with passion, but also analyse the music so you can see inside it.

#### NO SOONER DO I WRITE SOMETHING THAN IT'S OUT OF DATE

It's now two weeks later than Page 11. Information goes out of date quickly. No longer do we have four cats. Now we have five cats again. (I'm not making this up, you know.)

Elaine took Apple Blossom to the vet because one of her eyes was watering. While there, she was told about a cat that had been brought in three weeks before with a broken pelvis. The people who had brought him in had not been seen since. The cat, Elaine was told, was very friendly and very hungry -- in other words, normally tabby. If no one took him soon, he would be 'put down'. (Vets tend to use this phrase, although both they and their clients know what it really means.)

After Elaine met the new cat, there was no chance that anything I could say would stop the inevitable process of adoption. I gave in gracefully (or gracelessly; it doesn't matter). The new cat is one year old, tabby, clever, hungry, and doesn't seem to like the other cats much, although he's started playing with Theodore in recent days. We assume his pelvis was broken by a travelling car, so we hope he doesn't make a habit of wandering across roads. He is now named Montgomery, already shortened to Monty.

#### YET LATER

Now it's several weeks later than the paragraph above: first week of December.

First the good news. Monty has settled down well. He plays double back flips with Theodore and tag with TC, and puzzles Oscar greatly. And eats lots.

Next the bad news. I was going to include a long article about Roy Orbison in this issue of Dreams and False Alarms. I wrote it about a year ago, and have had to update it regularly. I've put it in the next issue of The Metaphysical Review, but now I must change it into an obituary. Roy Orbison, the hero of my teenage years, died on 7 December 1988, at the age of 52, after suffering a heart attack. There ain't no justice. If he had died three years ago, I would have lamented, but not felt anger. But... Three years ago Orbison recorded the Class of '55 album with Johnny Cash, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Carl Perkins. At about the same time, David Lynch used his song 'In Dreams' in Blue Velvet. Orbison re-recorded his greatest hits for Virgin Records, and there was constant talk of an album of new songs. Two years ago Orbison was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In his induction speech, Bruce Springsteen named him as the singer he always wanted to be. There followed a re-recording of 'In Dreams' with k. d. lang. Orbison starred in a video on which famous people jostled to play rhythm guitar. Orbison, the shyest singer in the business, inspired much good feeling merely by hinting at a comeback. That comeback was just happening when he died. As part of the Travelin' Wilburys, he has just returned to the Top 10. His long-planned solo album was set for release.

And now the man's dead. It's just not fair, dammit! All the survivors will gather, and grow rich, as they did on the corpse of Elvis Presley. I suppose the new album will do well. Maybe CBS will pull out its corporate finger, and re-release the Monument hits. Perhaps Polygram will dig into its archives for Orbison's material recorded for MCA. This should be Orbison's comeback year. Now where is he? Nowhere.

One last bit of news: it might be good, might be bad. After telling us he would be our new neighbour, the owner of the place on the corner and the (now) empty block next door will sell them at auction on 20 December. I'm tempted to put off this page until I can tell you the price. What will the new owner get up to?

The following article first appeared in Sikander 14, edited by Irwin Hirsh. I've tried to sell it to several literary magazines, so far without success. I suspect that it could only appear in a fanzine. Thanks, Irwin, for making me write it.

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#### TRAINS IN THE DISTANCE

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'Everybody loves the sound of a train in the distance', sings Paul Simon, 'Everybody thinks it's true... The thought that life could be better/Is woven indelibly/Into our hearts/And our brains.'

And it is true, about trains, and life, and hearts, but I didn't know that when I was four years old. In 1952 a train -- the one with the electric thingie on top -- was our way of getting to the centre of Melbourne. Other trains -- the exciting ones that chuffed smoke and snorted steam -- played shuttle on the line that was over the road from the front of our house. For hours each night they butted goods wagons at each other along the shunting rails.

And there were other trains -- mighty black engines belching smoke and steam -- that hurled themselves past our house, roaring at me to stay in my safe garden on our side of the road. These workhorses of the Victorian Railways were headed for a mysterious region called 'Gippsland'. Such an engine would drag behind it a long line of goods wagons that sometimes took five to ten minutes to pass our house.

No wonder I wanted to be an engine driver when I grew up. Trains were all-powerful. They went very fast on long journeys. They played mysterious Brobdiagnagian games just over the road and beyond a slight fence. From the parapet of the verandah at the front of our house I could watch their endless antics. And one day I might even have my own set to play with.

\* \*

In every childhood there is a day that is so magical or terrifying or ambiguous that forever after you wonder whether or not you lived it; perhaps it was your first very vivid childhood dream. For years I had such a memory, a dream-feeling. I remembered that my father opened the door of the front lounge-room, a door that was almost never opened to anyone, let alone to children, and let me glimpse an entire model-railway set laid out on the floor, lines made a circle on the carpet. A bridge crossed it; a railway station was there beside it. My father picked up the railway engine, wound a key, and let the little green object scort around the circle until it jumped the rails and clattered towards the wall. My father attached carriages to the engine. This slowed it, and the whole regalia trundled off demurely around the circle.

This went on for some time. It seemed that the set had two engines, a little green one and a black one, both driven by clockwork, and lots of carriages. We tried out all the possibilities. Various combinations of carriages circled the track. I wound up the engines until the clockwork broke on one of them.

That was that. I wasn't old enough for the train set yet. I was bundled off to bed, and in the morning there was no sign of the miraculous layout. Nor did it show itself again for about four years, which is so long a time in a child's life that I really thought I had dreamed the whole episode.

It's still not clear to me how parents decide that a child is 'old enough' for something. In their endless attempt to get me to do something in life beside reading books, Mum and Dad revealed one day during the particularly long and hot school holidays at the end of 1956 that the model train set really existed. It had been my father's when he was a boy. Dad showed me the Hornby catalogue for the year, sometime in the late 1920s, when he had started the collection. The

catalogue was more exciting than the set of model trains. All the engines and carriages shown were based on famous English trains of the early twentieth century, and each of them bore mysterious initials, such as LNER, LMS, and GW. My father explained that these letters showed which English railway company each belonged to. The idea of private ownership of railway lines was new to me, and somehow indecent. No matter. English railway engines and carriages, as shown in the catalogue, looked much prettier than the humble black chuffers and red rattlers that passed our house every day.

I have always been bored by games of any sort. Once you know the rules of any game, there is no more interest in it; you give up such a useless activity and go back to reading books. So what do you do with a model-railway layout? It was very exciting to get everything out of the tin trunk in which the set had been stored for thirty years. It was rather nice putting together the first circular track and running trains around it. But watching things go around in circles was boring after the first half hour.

To beat the boredom, I connected the straight rails, and put aside the circular rails for when the line went around corners. Off we went, and soon had a track that stretched from the kitchen, through the living room, and into the front passage. This was fun for a while. We could invent place names for destinations, and use blocks and toys as part of the layout. There was one snag: my mother wanted to use the house as well. After she had tripped over unsuspected rails and carriages a few times, she decided that maybe I could go back to reading books.

Not so, for I had glimpsed a new idea: that of 'destination'. Where could we take the railway lines so that they stretched out into the distance, like a real railway line? How could I make their destinations mysterious and variable?

One night I had a dream, one that excites me still. Somehow the Oakleigh railway line curved over Haughton Road, came up the side of our house, made itself small, climbed up through some passage in the floor, went through the living room, out the other side, and eventually rejoined the main railway line. (Years later I discovered that someone had written a song along similar lines: 'The Railroad Goes Through the Middle of the House'.) It was during the hot days of the January annual school holidays, in that long-gone era when summer began in December and ended in February. The lawn was dry, and there was no danger of sudden showers. Why not set up the whole layout in the back lawn?

The back lawn was a large oblong, with a grassed gutter down the middle. A chunk at one end of the oblong had been turned back into garden. It looked to me like a map of the United States of America, with the gutter as the Mississippi River, and the chunk as the Gulf of Mexico. My obsession the previous year had been the films, comic books, and stories about Davy Crockett, so by the end of Grade Four I was sure I knew everything there was to know about American history and geography. In 1954, during the visit to Australia of Queen Elizabeth II and the Duke of Edinburgh, my parents had bought an atlas. It was, naturally enough, called The New Elizabethan World Atlas. One double-page spread in it showed the USA. I spread out the atlas in front of me. The double-page map was filled with possible destinations, including many that I had never heard mentioned in films or comic books or on the radio. 'Natchez' — what a wonderful name. There was no name in Australia with that kind of sound. Yaco, Texas. You could journey towards a place with a name like that. Tampa, Florida; let's head for there.

There was one difficulty: the line could go to Florida, or over to St Louis. Seattle or Los Angeles were quite out of the question unless, of course, you started from there. Nope. New York was always the starting place. We needed new railway lines so that the layout, with the help of points and a bridge across the Mississippi, could cover the continent. From then on my parents and relatives were faced with expensive requests at each birthday and Christmas time: more railway lines! extra carriages! Even at the age of nine I was afflicted with the collecting disease, which merely got worse with age.

The model-railway idyll lasted only three summers. The weather was too damp during the May and September holidays for us to set up the railway layout, and we didn't get many ideal days even during the summer holidays. By the beginning

of the summer of 1958-9 the crunch had already come. My parents had decided to move from Houghton Road, ironically because they were increasingly irritated by the noise from the Melbourne-to-Gippsland railway line across the road. We moved to Syndal on 17 February 1959, and I took the lines and engines and carriages out of their tin trunk only once again in my life. Yet, somehow, by summer 1958 -- that last, regretful period of six weeks at Oakleigh -- I had collected enough lines to cross the American continent, via Saint Louis, and send a branch line to Florida as well. We had extra accessories and lots of extra carriages, but never a bridge that crossed the Mississippi safely. (The carriages always fell off the bridge my father had built to cross the gutter.) The clockwork mechanism had failed in both engines. The rails had already begun to rust.

The whole layout is still with my parents. In its tin trunk it was dragged up to Boochus Marsh and back to East Preston, up to South Belgrave and down to Rosebud, but it's never been played with again. Maybe it's valuable -- perhaps very valuable -- to someone. Whatever happens to those model railways, they already have given their special pleasure, not because of what they are, but because of the way they attached themselves to my imagination.

Why did I choose America as the basis of that model railway layout? Why didn't I choose Australia, which has roughly the same shape and size as the USA?

Because there's nothing in the middle of Australia except desert. Only one line, the Transcontinental, crosses the continent. In the middle of Australia there is no Des Moines, Iowa, no Grand Rapids, Michigan, no Wichita, Kansas, where a tired railway passenger can alight for a good night's rest before going on with the journey. When I was nine or ten, Australia did not seem to hold out possibilities; it seemed empty in the middle. I felt the same about Melbourne and its suburbs. You rode through Murrumbeena or Caulfield or Toorak in real and very suburban carriages; they were built merely to carry people; they left nothing to the imagination. The suburbs, your own home turf, were home, parents, relatives, houses and gardens, everyday practicalities, boredom. Could anything ever be better, except over there somewhere in New York or the middle of America?

It was only much later that I found out that Victoria's railway system was not built wholly according to boring ironbound practicalities. The people in charge of Melbourne's most important growth period, from 1870 to 1890, used the suburban rail system as a way of letting their imaginations go. Also, of course, they wanted to line their pockets. They bought undeveloped land way off the edge of the suburban perimeter and then bribed somebody in parliament to run a railway line through it. This procedure often worked. The Melbourne suburb of Hawthorn, for instance, was built around its railway station.

Victoria's rail system radiates out from Melbourne. During the 1880s country towns, no matter how small, were able to persuade politicians that one railway station could buy lots of votes. Lines spread across wide plains and previously unheard-of rivers and climbed into desolate mountain forests. Most of these lines were never profitable.

Therefore during the 1880s Victoria's rail system became a model-railway set that used real engines and carriages. Its imaginative purpose, as opposed to its practical purpose, was to give Victorians the feeling that they could travel safely from anywhere in the colony to anywhere else. And this remained true until the late 1960s, when suddenly the railway system began to make huge losses and politicians began planning ways of shutting it down.

Railway trains are symbols of power, especially when carried along by steam engines. All that prancing and chuffing and speed and prevailing against relentless gravity and distance! But railways are also a symbol of domesticity. If you get on a passenger train, it carries you to the place shown on the destination board. It doesn't crash, except in the most exceptional circumstances. A land filled with railways, like the USA of my atlas, is a settled land. People can move as they like. No wonder Paul Simon feels that a

the sound of a train in the distance reassures you that life could be better. All you have to do is travel far enough and you reach that better life.

Something like this thought must have occurred to the people who built Melbourne. Suburban houses fill up the spaces between railways. Why not, then, build a railway that did not stretch out directly from the city, but instead made a great loop that would link all the radiating railways?

Such a plan was made in the 1880s. It was called the Outer Circle Line, and was the most gloriously silly episode in Melbourne's long history of absurdly disastrous public projects. It would go north from near Hughesdale station (now on the Oakleigh line), and cross three other lines until it arched in from the north at Clifton Hill station (very near where I live now). It would provide jobs and guarantee the growth of suburbia. And it would, although nobody said so at the time, symbolize Melbourne's maternal quality, its desire to give total security to its citizens, enclosed as they would be by railways.

The Outer Circle Line was actually built during the 1880s, but as the last sections were opened, the first sections were about to be closed down. Graeme Davison, in his *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* (Melbourne University Press, 1979), writes that 'The new line was built to the most generous engineering standards with wide double-track cuttings and embankments and closely spaced stations.' However, 'in its first nine months of operation (the Outer Circle Line) attracted only 5153 passengers (most of them jay-riders?)'.

The Outer Circle Line was Melbourne's great model-railway line. Hour after hour, trains would trundle across deserted paddocks and past empty stations. I see on each of these stations a lonely station master standing forlornly while waiting for the passenger-of-the-week to turn up.

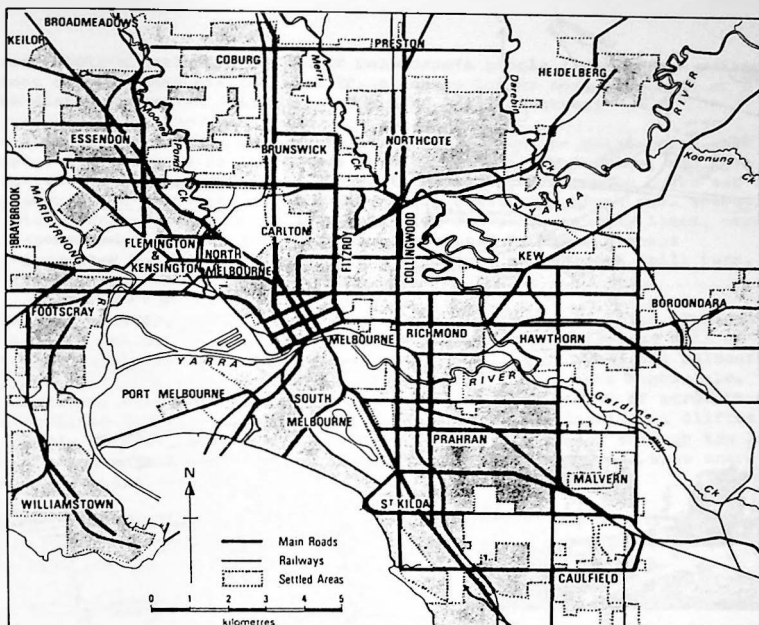
The Outer Circle Line might have succeeded if it had been opened ten years earlier, in 1881 instead of 1891. 1891 was the beginning of Australia's worst depression, an event that stopped Melbourne's growth for nearly thirty years and ensured Sydney's win in the battle between the cities. Davison records that entire new suburbs, built during the boom of the 1880s, lay empty, their home-owners forced to give up their houses because nobody had the money to take over their mortgages.

Many of the paddocks beside the Outer Circle Line were filled with houses only during the late 1950s. By that time most of the line had been demolished. It left only odd patterns of streets through the 'garden-suburbs' -- patterns so irregular and striking that you can still use a street map (see page 22) to trace the old path of the line. I'm told that there are also plenty of remnants of the line -- sleepers, rusty steel bits -- hidden behind suburban fences or in unexplained little parks.

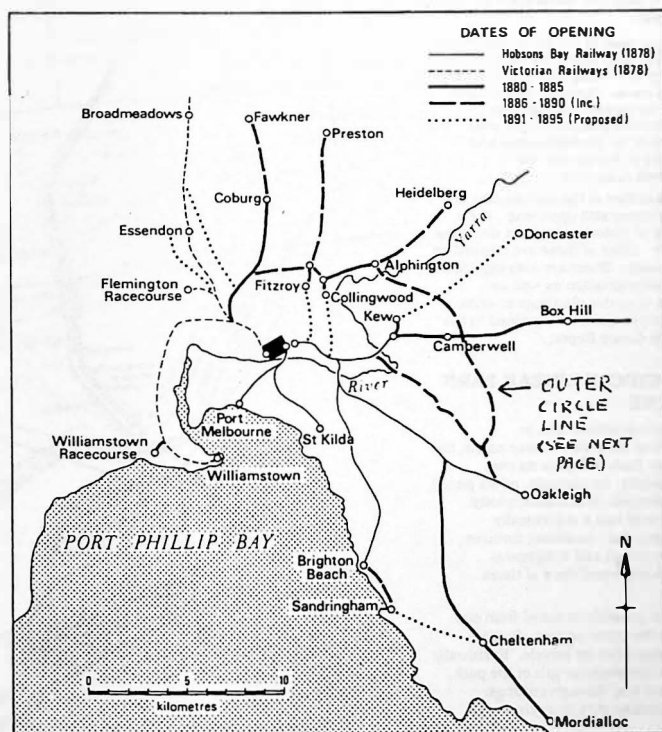
There will never be another Outer Circle Line, not even among those grandiose schemes that governments announce every few years. At one stage there was going to be a line from Huntingdale Station to Monash University (demolishing how many billions of dollars' worth of factories and houses?), and even four years ago the Cain Government still talked of a line from Frankston to Dandenong. This did not happen. Instead the government built a freeway covering the same distance.

Cars have made railways very unprofitable in Victoria, and now politicians and bureaucrats seem to spend their nights tossing and turning, trying to think of acceptable ways to kill the railway system. Most people are still as emotionally attached to the suburban railway system as I am, so the government cannot destroy the system at one go. But only 7 per cent of Melbourne's people still travel on the system. Most Melbournites live in one outer suburb and travel by car to work in another outer suburb. The railways might still radiate from the centre of Melbourne, but Melbournites' lives do not.

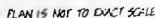
If the railways go, the Melbourne I grew up in will have gone. Maybe it has already. When I was a boy, Oakleigh was on the edge of the suburbs. Now Oakleigh feels like an inner suburb, and the sprawl stretches another forty kilometres to



Melbourne Metropolitan Area, c. 1890



Construction of Melbourne's Railway System



74. 1-200X:5 STATION

## THE OUTER CIRCLE RESERVATION - AS IT IS NOW

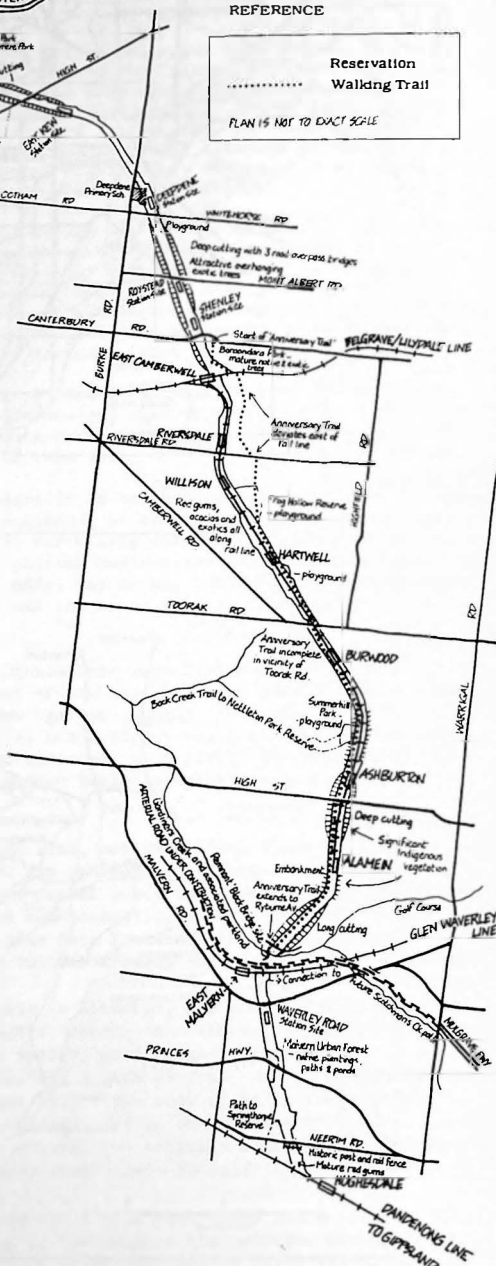
Since the closure of most of the Outer Circle line, local residents have been using the vacant land as parkland, much of it being maintained at the expense of the Councils. Some small sections have been leased for various commercial, residential, government and municipal uses. The land is mostly owned by the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works and the Metropolitan Transit Authority.

The Alamein railway line is the only section of the Outer Circle railway still operating. There are many features of historical interest along the Outer Circle route - some of these are marked on the sketch map inside. There are also significant areas of indigenous vegetation as well as attractive exotic and native plantings in various locations. More information is contained in the Outer Circle Study Group Report.

## THE OUTER CIRCLE LINEAR PARK - AS IT WILL BE

As well as being an important link in Melbourne's growing network of linear parks, the Outer Circle Linear Park will have its own attractions. Its history, for example, offers plenty of material for development and community information - not only was it a politically controversial project, but remaining features such as bridges, cuttings and indigenous vegetation are valuable reminders of times gone by.

At the moment it is possible to travel from one end of the park to the other on foot. Some sections can be negotiated by bicycle. Eventually pathways will run the whole length of the park, along embankments and through cuttings, making it one of Melbourne's more unusual linear parks.





the east. Only a small proportion of Melbourne's people live within walking distance of a railway station. And if we can no longer hear the sound of a train in the distance, can we still hope that life will be better?

There is only one remedy. One day in the future, when the Melbourne I know has disappeared because it no longer has its suburban railway system, and when we've won Tattsлото and can afford to retire to a large, comfortable house set on wide lawns surrounded by hedges, I will take out a rusted tin trunk from where it has been hidden for many years. In it I will find all those railway lines, carriages, engines, and accessories. They will be very rusted by then, perhaps unrecognizable. But if the wheels of the carriages and engines still turn, I will lay out the lines across the lawn.

I will not, however, return to the map of America in my old atlas. Instead I will turn to the map on page 156 of Graeme Davison's The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne. I will call the central station of my system Melbourne. Straight lines will stretch out to a station that I will name Hughesdale. Circular lines will veer off to the north. With a combination of straight and circular lines I will bring the trains back to their destination at Clifton Hill, and finally to Melbourne. Hour after hour trains will travel through the long grass. No passengers will step on or off that train. But I will know where those carriages are and keep them all moving.

At last I will recreate the Outer Circle Line. In this way I will create the real Melbourne -- the marvellous Melbourne that never quite came into existence -- on that lawn in the future.

- Bruce Gillespie, July 1987

Earlier in this magazine I told the story of how I began reviewing records for The Melbourne Report late in 1987. The release labels are Australian, and might differ from the equivalent labels for America. Quite a few of these records are by Australian performers and are not yet available overseas. If any of them seem worth buying, send me money (\$A17 for LP or cassette, A25 for CD, plus \$A5 for postage) and I'll try to find a copy for you.

So far the editor of The Melbourne Report has given me only pop, jazz, or folk records to review.

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THE 'MELBOURNE REPORT'  
RECORD REVIEWS

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Reservations for Two: Dionne Warwick (Arista VPL1-7573)

Dionne Warwick started at the top, with 'Anyone Who Had a Heart', an inspired dramatic ballad from 1962. No record she made afterwards had quite the sparkle of that one. Her career faltered during the 1970s. During the 1980s she suddenly regained attention, singing ballads in duet with various other famous people. What worked once should work again -- or so said some record executive. The result is Reservations for Two. Here are ten torchy ballads, five of them duets (with, in order of appearance, Jeffrey Osborne, Smokey Robinson, Howard Hewett, Kashif, and June Pointer). They are mindnumbingly boring. Production values are wonderful -- Dionne's magnificent voice, tons of percussion and synthesizers. But each song sounds like the one before: background music for people who relish monotony. We remember the excitement of great Dionne Warwick performances. Reservations for Two is not one of them.

Go On...: Mr Mister (RCA Victor SFL1-0161)

Conformity is a bulldozer that runs amok in pop music every decade or so, but never more crushingly than during the late 1980s. Mr Mister is a worthy group of competent pop musicians who sing okay songs with worthy and uplifting lyrics. (One song is even dedicated to the 'Pearl S. Buck Foundation' of Perkasie, PA.) The trouble is that they sound much like any other group of competent pop musicians who sing okay lyrics, etc. The beat sounds metronomic and programmed, although Mr Mister actually claims to have a drummer (Pat Mastelotto) instead of a drum machine. Lead vocalist Richard Page is no slouch, but he tends to sound like Sting on one track, David Bowie on another, and Paul Young on another. I didn't hate Go On... Some songs, like 'Healing Waters' and 'Watching the World', are quite good. But I couldn't help being bored by the overall sound of this computer-assembled package. There is no excitement on this record, because there are no surprises. And I'd blame cautious company executives, who are afraid to take risks, for the boredom. Left to themselves, Mr Mister might become a great band.

A Momentary Lapse of Reason: Pink Floyd (CBS)

Pink Floyd seemed to disappear after the appropriately named Final Cut album. Since Roger Waters claimed the credit for that album, and then made two more under his own name, it seemed likely that Pink-Floyd-as-we-knew-it had gone forever. Surprising revivals are now in fashion -- first the Easybeats, then the Loved Ones, and now Pink Floyd. Roger Waters is not here, of course, but Gilmour, Mason, and Wright are still a team, along with Producer Bob Ezrin. I wish I could say that A Momentary Lapse of Reason is as interesting as The Wall, the last real Pink Floyd album. It isn't. There is the same exhilarating sense of doom, gloom, and apocalypse. There's the same ability to let loose every known musical force. Pink Floyd can still startle, but now they use force

instead of subtlety. The Wall was all surprising shifts of rhythm and sound texture. A Momentary Lapse of Reason is too relentless to be surprising. Earlier Pink Floyd albums had odd effects and peculiar musical aberrations; they were funny and sardonic as well as otherworldly. Pink Floyd has got rid of the oddities; only the grandeur is left. A pity.

Never Let Me Down: David Bowie (EMI America ST-240746)

For nearly twenty years David Bowie has led the rock field. No matter which direction the others take, they find David Bowie has been there first. Glam rock, synth rock, even rock-'n'-roll rock -- Bowie prepares the sketch map that others fill in. Suddenly, with Bowie's latest two albums, Tonight and now Never Let Me Down, the progress has stopped. Why?

A few years ago Bowie has his first American Top Ten album for years. Let's Dance was his first record for EMI America, and restarted Bowie's career. Sure, he had been experimenting and leading the way while still with RCA, but he had not been selling large amounts of records. Let's Dance sounded fresh and new, with its flashy brass playing, powerful drumwork, and Stevie Ray Vaughan's brilliant glints of guitar playing. Bowie was back.

With Never Let Me Down, Bowie is still back... where he was five years ago. The overall sound is flashier, the brass brassier, and the guitar playing by Peter Frampton and Sid McGinnis even better than Vaughan's on Let's Dance. But we've heard it before. Where's the hint of something new? Why the relentless, obsessional dance rhythms, a few decibels louder than on all the other dance records? Why the crazy, world-hating lyrics? Doesn't Bowie have anything new to say?

If you like first-class, entertaining pop music, you'll like Never Let Me Down. If you are a Bowie fan, you'll put up with it. But if you're a watcher of popular music as an entity, you'll be worried. If Bowie's stopped experimenting, has everyone else stopped as well?

Part of Fortune: Liz Story (Novus APL1-6023)

How do you describe an exciting new performer without pinning a category on her? And what if Liz Story fits none of the categories? She's just Liz Story: pianist. If you're not satisfied by that description, I can tell you what Liz Story is not. Her compositions don't sound like those by Chopin or Debussy; not quite. But neither do they sound quite like pieces by Bill Evans. On most tracks, she plays solo piano. No clues to category there. On the two tracks with orchestral backing, 'Duende' and 'Ana', the backings sound ethereal -- again not quite classical, not quite jazz. The advertisements for Liz Story's recent concert tour (with Leo Kottke) describe her music as 'New Age'. Shudder! She's not soggy at all. Liz Story is a brilliant pianist who writes and performs her own pieces. If you wait for firmer categorization than that, you'll miss out on a wonderful record.

Altiplano: Alex de Grassi (Novus APL1-6022)

Jazz has taken as many twists and turns during recent years as any other form of popular music. The synthesizers and digital recorders are in the record studios; what do you do with them? Pop music has disappeared under a tide of frenzied but cold electronics. Jazz performers have been more careful. Alex de Grassi, for example, has learned to use the new technology. He doesn't let it use him. He puts it behind the music, not replacing it. On top of it he places a wonderful array of percussion instruments. On the title track, you forget about the synthesizers altogether. Instead you hear a lively conversation between acoustic guitar (de Grassi), piano (Clifford Carter), fretless bass (Marg Egan), and drums (Chris Parker). On five tracks, de Grassi dispenses with synthesizers, although the performances retain a clean, perhaps too antiseptic sound. Passion

breaks through on some of Altiplano's performances. In 'Doubbek', my favourite track, Zakir Hassan plays tabla and Vince Delgado plays doubbek in an exhilarating free-for-all trio with de Grassi. Try Alex de Grassi if you like jazz cold, dry, and tingling.

#### Characters: Stevie Wonder (Motown SFL1-0160)

Characters is one of those records I shouldn't like, but I do. On most tracks, the only performers other than Stevie Wonder's voice are a variety of synclaviers, Fairlights, Moogs, and other synthesizers, all (I read in the press) programmed by Stevie at home. It's a wonder Stevie could raise the energy to drop a human voice into the synthesizer soup. The record should have been a disaster. What happens to Stevie Wonder? He rises above it all. Not only is his voice flexible and interesting enough to keep you listening, but he still knows how to write good songs. Not that he isn't above using bland filler material ('In Your Corner' and 'Galaxy Paradise'). But for each nicely forgettable performance, he can nail your ears to the speakers, despite all those tick-tock drums and washy synth chords. 'Dark 'n' Lovely' is a piece of urgent rock and roll, coloured by that dark and lustrous tone you look for in vain in most contemporary American music. 'Skeletons' is an urgent chant against perpetual white racism. 'Free' is one of the richest, most melodic ballads I've heard for awhile. Stevie Wonder isn't doing anything new here, but he still does it better than the others (who are not doing anything new, either).

#### Emotion: Juice Newton (RCA Victor APL1-6017)

Juice Newton had the bad luck to be born 25 years too late. If she had released this album in 1963, and 'First Time Caller' as a single then, she would have scored hits for both the single and the album. Not so in 1988. Emotion is an enjoyable collection of unpretentious, tuneful, well-sung ballads. That's not good enough for the demigods who concoct the playlists for pop radio stations. Not enough disco-floor gloss; no sign of high-teach frenzy. Put Juice Newton in a category somewhere. Call her a 'country artist'. That should get rid of her. And so Juice Newton's records have been put in the 'country-and-western' slot, radio listeners have been denied some satisfying listening, and she has missed out on the success she deserves. Don't join the majority who will never hear this album. Buy it and enjoy such ballads as 'First Time Caller', 'Someone Believed', and 'Til You Cry'. Her version of Brenda Lee's 1961 hit 'Emotions' is a highlight of the album.

#### Never Underestimate the Power of a Song: various artists (Larrikin LRF-203)

Larrikin is an independent Sydney record company that has stayed afloat for more than ten years despite all the difficulties of making records in Australia. The company has just released Never Underestimate the Power of a Song, which provides not only a fine selection of political songs but also a sampler of Larrikin's best performers. This could also be called Larrikin's Greatest Hits.

For most of its life, Redgum was an offbeat pop-folk group whose trenchant left-wing lyrics were more interesting than its music. With 'I Was Only Nineteen', however, Redgum had a Number One hit throughout Australia. This bitter story about young soldiers in the Vietnam War sounds just as punchy and bitter as when it was released, and it begins Never Underestimate the Power of a Song.

Do political songs make a difference? That's what I asked myself when I saw the title of the album. They don't cut much ice in America, because they are not played. In Australia songs like 'I Was Only Nineteen' and Midnight Oil's 'Beds Are Burning' are played; they do become hits and influence people. For this reason, I hope Larrikin releases 'No More Boomerang' as a single. Written by Kath Walker, recited by Maronchy Baramba, and brilliantly arranged for keyboards and percussion by Steve Cooney, it shows Aboriginal disillusionment with white culture more effectively than a dozen political speeches. The lyrics are funny and bitter.

Most of the other Larrikin performers are well known already. The success of Scottish-born Eric Bogle on the Australian folk scene is legendary. His two songs are 'All the Fine Young Men' and 'When the Wind Blows'. Other performers include Judy Small (a lyrical ballad called 'Walls and Windows'), Tony Miles, Pat Drummond, Doug Aschdown, Roger Corbett, Allan Caswell, and Nigel Foote.

#### Sky Trails: Sky (Arista SFL1-0164)

Sky is one of those big ideas in pop that should have crashed on take off but instead keeps flying after nearly ten years in the air. Some pop musicians wanted to form a group; nothing came of it until they were united by one of the world's top classical musicians -- John Williams, the guitarist. And lo and behold! John Williams did not 'sell out' but instead imposed a surface of classical complexity on a group of people who were basically pop musos out to have a bit of fun.

Sky Trails is really Sky's Greatest Hits -- minus all the hits that were too long to fit. Even so, Sky Trails is more than an hour long -- superb value for a vinyl disc, and a lot better value than most pop CDs. Listening to Sky Trails is a treat. Individual Sky albums always had a few too many boring bits -- extended ineffective pieces designed to show off the talents of one or other member of the group. With all the boring bits left out, Sky Trails becomes a dazzling collection of instrumental jewels, each setting off the other.

You probably know these hits already: 'Son of Hotta' (the only dud on the album), 'Vivaldi', 'El Cielo', 'Toccata', 'Andante', and nine others. Most of them are pop music versions of classical themes, yet the group rethinks the original material and adds sparkle to it.

In a pop field that was moving rapidly away from instrumental music at the time the group began, why did Sky succeed? The group's stage show is reported to be funny and entertaining. That helps. The sound technology is impressive. That's even better. But the Sky that we hear here depends very much on two talents: John Williams on electric guitar and Francis Monkman on keyboards. Both have now left the group, so Sky Trails may be a fitting tribute to a departed group.

#### Calenture: The Triffids (White Hot Records L38824)

Born in back rooms, trained in pubs, the best of Australian pop groups develop raunchy stage acts that recall the great rock 'n' roll acts of twenty years ago. Get them into a recording studio and even the bravest group thinks: 'America! Britain! Europe!' The engineer pours on gallons of aural glass. The result often sounds nothing like great Australian rock 'n' roll, but neither does it sound quite like American or English super-technological pop. The best Australian groups (Cold Chisel, Midnight Oil, Angels, Black Sorrows) fail to gain a wide audience overseas, while some odd second-raters (you add your own names to the list) go straight to the top in America.

Which is all a way of saying that the Triffids are entertaining enough on Calenture, even brilliant on some tracks, but they sound as if they don't quite know what they are doing here in Technology Ocean. This wrap-around, wall-to-wall sonic sheen won't convince anybody. Take it away and you have an album of fine lyrics, with some ('Vagabond Holes' and 'Jerdacuttup Man') verging on the inspired, and tunes that range from the banal ('Vagabond Holes') to the lyrical ('Bury Me Deep in Love', 'Open for You', 'Holy Water', 'Jerdacuttup Man', and 'Calenture').

This is a highly entertaining album designed for the wrong market. Unless the Triffids are really lucky, it will get lost in the gunk in America or Britain. But by adding so much sound technology, they might be seen as deserting their loyal Australian audience. Maybe the Aussies will forgive them this time and wait in hope for the next Triffids release.

Australian Accent: Home Rule (Larrikin LRF-214)

It's a brave record company that releases a new album of Australian bush music, but Larrikin was never noted for its cowardice. The bush band boom belongs to the mid-1970s. Then band after band 'went electric' or, worse still, bought synth drums. What is a nice group like Home Rule doing here with a new record at the end of the 1980s?

Home Rule has a familiar enough sound — Bob Campbell's impeccably Australian-Irish voice and the trio's first-class playing of concertinas, fiddles, harmonicas, and all the other bush instruments. One of the songs, 'The Woolloomooloo Lair', is familiar as well, but most of the others are new discoveries. In particular I liked 'Sergeant Small', a story-song from the Depression.

Let's face it — Home Rule has a familiar sound because there's nothing particularly new here. It's just that Bob Campbell, Sharon Frost, and Bob Burns are better than most, and they sound as if they are enjoying themselves. I hope this record does well, but I think it would have done better if it had been recorded on stage. Let's hope their next record is a live one.

Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm: Joni Mitchell (Geffen 24172-1)  
The Walking: Jane Siberry (Duke Street/Reprise 25678-1)

Jane Siberry and Joni Mitchell both come from Canada. Both are singer-songwriters with high, wavery voices. Both write the sort of songs you need to read on the record sleeve before listening to the record — poetry, not pop. Both can be brilliant.

There are two major differences between Jane Siberry and Joni Mitchell.

You've heard of Joni Mitchell, and probably have all her records. You've probably never heard of Jane Siberry. Until now, her records have been available only in import shops.

The other difference? When you hear Joni Mitchell's new record, Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm, you'll be disappointed. When you hear Jane Siberry's The Walking, you'll scour the import shops for her earlier records.

Joni Mitchell has lost her way. She started out as a folk-style singer-songwriter, then a jazzy singer-songwriter, and then couldn't work out what to do next. Drowning her voice under a tidal wave of electronic instrumentation has hardly solved the problem. On Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm, Joni sounds as cool, elegant, and uninvolved as the photo on the cover. Read the lyrics on the record sleeve and you wonder if this was the person who wrote 'Both Sides Now' and 'Amelia'. Her new record is good for playing at parties, and it's a lot better than Dog Eat Dog, but it shows she hasn't found a new music path yet.

Jane Siberry's voice is not too different from Joni Mitchell's, but Jane uses hers as a finely tuned instrument (as Joni did ten years ago). Jane has written eight extraordinary flights through ecstasy, contemplation, and madness — and she uses all her musical resources to make the most of them. Most importantly, Jane Siberry does not allow herself to be controlled by the synthesizers. She modulates every note, phrase, and beat to illuminate each phrase of her songs. The Walking is one of those rare records that show what can be done with synthesized instruments when somebody of genius is at the control board.

Welcome, Jane Siberry. Now could WEA release your other records here in Australia?

Australian Rhythm and Blues: Chain (RCA Victor VPL-1-0709)

Chain's Australian Rhythm and Blues might not be the best record of the year, but it's certainly the most refreshing.

I expected the worst when I heard that Chain, a top Australian band of the early 1970s, had got together again. They sounded rough in the old days, and I thought they could only have got older and rougher. Older, maybe. Gutsier, not rougher. The name of this album does not lie. Here is a heady mixture of fast and slow blues, some owing much to older styles of American blues, and others steeped in the Australian bar-band tradition.

The American and English blues giants have either died or traded in their drum kits for synthesizers. Even Eric Clapton has abdicated as God. In years to come we nostalgic types will look back at the revived Chain as the last exciting guitar-drums-and-harmonica band. The best studio-recorded songs include 'Second Wind' and 'Harmonica'. On the stage-recorded tracks, Chain sound as if they had never disbanded. 'Grab a Snatch' has a ferocious urgency you won't hear on many other records this year. 'Slow 2.30 in the Morning Type Blues' is an affectionate song of the road, combining the best of the Australian and American blues styles. The only second-rate songs are the revived Chain hits, 'Judgement' and 'Black and Blue'. But even this 'Black and Blue', recorded on stage, sounds a lot better than the original single.

I hope Australian Rhythm and Blues comes out on CD before I've worn out the vinyl disc.

((brg\* (Nov. 1988): It did. Larrikin now releases all its records on CD as well as on vinyl.))

Seen One Earth: Pete Bardens (Capitol ST-240786)

The Interstellar Suite: Amin Bhatia (Capitol ST-746869)

Morning Light: Stewart Dudley (Possum VPL4-6768)

The Symphony Sessions: David Foster (Atlantic 84799-1)

Xcept One: Michael Hoenig (Capitol ST-746919)

Human Interface: Patrick Moraz (Capitol ST-240806)

How does a reviewer deal with an entirely repellent category of music? Why do people listen to 'New Age' music? That's all I could ask myself as I faced this pile of six records.

The record companies certainly believe in 'New Age' music. Four of these discs are being promoted by EMI/Capitol's new 'Cinema' series. 'New Progressive Rock' is what they call it, perhaps because three of these performers began with 1970s progressive rock bands (Hoenig with Tangerine Dream, Moraz with Yes, and Bardens with Camel).

But where is the progressiveness? Where is the rock and roll? Where is any trace of the excitement in the early records of Pink Floyd or Yes?

These records are designed for insomniacs and autohypnotic subjects ('You are getting sleepy... I am getting sleepy...'). If you tried to get down and boogie while listening here, you'd crash to the floor in a trance. Most of the record sleeves feature outer-space images. The only way to travel long distances in space is in a deep sleep. 'New Age' music is what sends you there.

But a record reviewer should try to be fair to individuals. Here goes.

Bardens, Bhatia, Hoenig, and Moraz are computer experts who have the freedom to compose and perform musical suites entirely on computer. ('Look! All hands, mum!') What a pity that people like Amin Bhatia show no composing ability whatever. Even a New Age fan will hurl The Interstellar Suite out the window.

The other computer whizzes — Bardens, Hoenig, and Moraz — are competent enough. But why do they compose background music? Why do their records sound the same? This has to be a deliberate policy of the record companies. As some politician said a few years ago, where's the beef?

Pete Bardens struts his best stuff on a track called 'In Dreams', which has



enough liveliness to be played on FM pop radio. Patrick Moraz shows that he has some musical enterprise on a track called 'Kyushu'. Quirky Japanese rhythms and melodies are juxtaposed against standard New Age tepoketa-tepoketa rhythms. Michael Hoenig, who should be ashamed of himself for most of the tracks on *Except One*, still manages to produce a few haunting tunes ('Spectral Gong' and 'Bones on the Beach').

Two of these records are by pianists — Stewart Dudley and David Foster. A piano sounds refreshing after squadrillions of computers.

Foster hires what sounds like the entire musical population of Vancouver to back up a performance recorded in that city's Orpheum Theatre. Most of Foster's music is as dull and bombastic as all those rock piano concertos you find in 1940s Hollywood movies. Give the devil his due, however: 'Time Passing', 'Water Fountain', and 'We were So Close' are inoffensive, likable tunes, but I suggest buying the CD so you can skip all the whomp-whomp music in between.

In musical terms (if such can be applied to New Age music) Stewart Dudley from Sydney is the performer to watch out for. His standard fare is not much better than the offerings from Hoenig and Moraz, but it's certainly no worse. His best tunes, 'Vanessa's Theme' and 'Tears for Jenny', are memorable little oases in the desert of monstrous pretension.

Is all New Age music as lifeless, dull, and anonymous as Bhatia, Hoenig, Moraz, and the rest? Or have I got it all wrong? Is the world really thirsting for a better type of background music?

Spillane: John Zorn (Elektra/Honesuch 9-79172-1)

Nothing could be further from New Age music than John Zorn's Spillane, but at first glance the marketing is the same. New Age records are sold as the background music to spaced-out, trance-like, and very dull movies. Zorn has composed the 'background music' for three movies that nobody has made yet -- 'Spillane', 'Two-Lane Highway', and 'Forbidden Fruit'. The difference is that you would want to see Zorn's movies. Action, spills, murder, pain, heartache, wild trips — they're all here.

The other difference between Zorn and the New Age composers is that Zorn has real musical ideas — thousands of them, all bubbling out in an endless torrent of surprising rhythms and unexpected sound-hooks. This is music to wake you up, not put you to sleep. If the classical buffs designed to listen, they would find one of the best new composers of the 1980s.

'Spillane' derives its atmosphere from the 1940s police action thrillers, but it has no whimpy nostalgia. The track is 25 minutes of progressive jazz combined with exciting keyboard music, roaring along on its own roller-coaster track.

'Two Lane Highway' is basically a 22-minute guitar solo by Albert Collins, the great blues performer who toured Australia recently. Collins fans would have to buy this record. An obscure voice-under suggests that this track has its own story. Don't worry about the story line; just listen to the guitar.

Zorn's great coup on 'Spillane' is attracting the Kronos Quartet to play the final track. 'Forbidden Fruit' is inspired by the Japanese film Kurutta Kajitsu, but Zorn is so masterful a lateral thinker that he uses no clichés from Japanese music in his composition. Instead, 'Forbidden Fruit' is a fine example of late twentieth-century string-quartet playing — wild glissandi rushing over and under each other, bumping into each other, with the turntable occasionally spun backwards and forwards to add punctuation.

WEA must be tearing its hair out over this record. How do you market a disc that combines jazz, blues guitar, and a modern classical string quartet? The answer: trust the audience. People who love music, not just musical categories, will relish Spillane.

Something of Value: Eric Bogle (Larrikin LRF-220)

A new record from Eric Bogle is one of those annual events you look forward to. You know what you will get -- humane lyrics, sweet tunes, and a bit of humour thrown in when it's least expected. Australia's most accomplished folk musicians, such as Louis McManus, John Munro, and John Schumann, gravitate towards an Eric Bogle album. The best people work with the best.

Yet with the faintest sigh of disappointment I must report that Something of Value is a bit too much of Bogle-the-Australian-folk-prophet and not enough of Bogle-the-sad-prophet.

Not that I could fault Bogle's musicianship and vocal style. They remain as impeccable as ever. The lyrics are ideologically sound, and sometimes quite moving. 'Poor Bugger Charlie' is an acid comment on -- you guessed it -- Aboriginal deaths in custody. 'Rosie' is a tribute to a little girl who has cerebral palsy. 'Harry's Wife' sums up the situation of the middle-aged deserted wife in our society better than three mountains of government reports ever could do.

But what about Mr Bogle? What is the state of the poet? What I remember most clearly from his first few albums are his heartrending songs about his own position as a solitary man in an indifferent society. Maybe Eric Bogle is now a happier man, and has less to tell us about himself. A pity for the listener. The sources of his greatest inspiration were personal, not national or international. Two songs, 'A Change in the Weather' and 'Across the Hills of Home', remind us of the majestic Eric Bogle, but even these sound somehow official, written for the occasion.

If Something of Value is not one of Eric Bogle's greatest albums, it doesn't matter. There is always the next one to look forward to. After you've worn out this one, of course.

Starfish: The Church (Mushroom RML-53266)

By now you've probably heard that Starfish succeeded on the American pop album charts, and has been equally successful in Australia. After ten years of constant hard work, the Church have Arrived.

But why with this album, which is perhaps the dullest they have recorded? Why not with 'The Unguarded Moment', that great Australian song from their first album? Why didn't America acclaim the Church for their intense second album, The Blurred Crusade?

It's all a matter of logistics, salesmanship, and waiting and touring long enough. Rewards for endurance. The trouble is that on Starfish Steve Kilbey and the crew sound as if they have been on the road every minute of those ten years. There is hardly a good tune to be heard. Lots of noise is applied to tired old pop ideas. And reverberation and amplification drown the lot. Where's the excitement?

Perhaps the world audience doesn't want excitement. Perhaps they want a wash of sound instead of a torrent of music. Perhaps. My guess is that the audience for the Church has been building up inexorably since their first two albums. Now the word gets around that Starfish is the record to buy. But lots of people who buy it will no longer be Church fans after they've heard it. A pity.

Romeo at Juilliard: Don Dixon (Liberation LIB-5134)

Don Dixon has been called 'America's answer to Nick Lowe' by at least one reviewer. Nonsense. Nick Lowe has an airy, off-the-cuff style, while Dixon's voice is much darker and more lugubrious. Dixon doesn't bear comparison with any current pop performers. He fits no categories.

The other maverick singers of the 1980s seem to be refugees from the 1960s. Don Dixon seems to be the very first refugee from the late 1970s. His style owes much to Boz Scaggs and the other grunt-and-yell blue-eyed soul people from 1977 and 1978.

His singing style, that is. On the few tracks where you can understand the lyrics, you get the impression that Dixon is making fun of himself and pop music. This might be why he has been compared with the iconoclastic Nick Lowe. Or perhaps it's because on one song on Romen at Juilliard, 'February Ingenue', he actually sounds like Nick Lowe.

This album has some wonderful surprises, particularly the brilliant jazz arrangement of 'Cool' (from West Side Story) and a song called 'Jean Harlow's Return'. But there are not enough surprises. Don Dixon hasn't found his true style yet. When he does, he could have a very successful career.

#### Rising: Janette Geri (Art and Graft AAG-003)

Please forgive the naivety, but I find it just a bit awe-inspiring to listen to a record that was made in the heart of suburban Glenhurst but which can only be compared with the best efforts of Kate Wolff, Joni Mitchell, Judith Collins, and Bruce Cookburn.

Yes, I know Australian recording techniques have been of world quality since the early 1970s. Yes, I know one shouldn't praise a local artist just because she might possibly live in the same suburb as the reviewer. But when I remember the 1960s' recording techniques of W&G and Festival, and shudder, and the endless efforts by Australian singers in the 1970s to catch the tail of trends that have just finished overseas, and shudder, I'm more and more impressed by Janette Geri's Rising.

Janette Geri has a clear, penetrating voice that sails right over the difficulties in any song. Her musicians (Ricke Cooke, Adrian Drake, Ron Peers, Carl Holroyd, David Carlos, Rob Judd, Sue Post, and Glen Dunkling) know how to do a star turn, then get out of the way of the flow of a song. Delicious strands of individual sound are woven together into long skeins of melody. Geri's lyrics tend towards the ethereal and uplifting ('El Cielo', 'Song for the Singer', and suchlike), but are brought down to earth by solid solos from such people as Carlos or Peers.

And, to my great satisfaction, there are no bloody synthesizers!

Not that Rising is entirely free from that dreaded Australian disease, she'll-be-rightism. Art and Graft Records, which I presume is a small outfit, has scrimped on the cover. It's in shades of grey on poor paper stock. It's no good getting the sound right if the shops don't display the record.

#### The Innocents: Erasure (Mute VPL-1-6775)

Much as I keep hoping that the collected pop groups of the world will take out their synthesizers and burn them in the middle of Hyde Park, I know it won't happen until record-buyers become sick of computer-generated sounds. When the backing sound for each group is just like the sound for every other group, all the reviewer can do is cringe and go back to his Chuck Berry collection.

What's new, what's different, about Erasure? What can possibly distinguish them from umpteen thousand other groups that litter the play lists of MTV and the FOX? In the case of Erasure, it's the voices of Vince Clarke and Andy Bell. They can actually carry a tune without apologizing for it. On a few songs, such as 'A Little Respect', they sound rousing, refreshing, even, especially as their voices are trying to beat off what sound like the combined battalions of three million synthesizers.

If Clarke and Bell have a weakness, it's for recording songs that are not as

tuneful as 'A Little Respect'. No song on The Innocents is outright bad, but only 'Heart of Stone' and 'Witch in the Ditch' have the same excitement. Another piece, 'Sixty-Five Thousand', is a computerized instrumental. Big dance sounds, quite witty. And I liked it. What's happening to me? Have I been listening to Erasure too long?

Up from Down Under: Tommy Emmanuel (Artful Balance ABC-1009)  
5-4-3-2-1: Rob E.G. (The Festival File, Volume 3) (Festival L-19003)  
Teenage Love: Warren Williams (The Festival File, Volume 4) (Festival L-19004)

For years Tommy Emmanuel has been Australia's most successful session musician. He has worked on many of the most famous Australian pop and country albums, and in 1987 he was voted Australia's Best Guitarist by the readers of Juke magazine.

Yet until Up from Down Under was released, I hadn't heard of Tommy Emmanuel. That shows a lot about the current devaluation of guitarists in the pop music industry. Now the balance is restored. Tommy Emmanuel is one of the world's most skilled and satisfying guitarists. Up from Down Under shows this clearly. Will this record make him a household word? I doubt it.

By releasing Tommy Emmanuel on Artful Balance label, EMI is marketing him as a New Age musician. It's true that Tommy Emmanuel can concoct as smoothly delectable a sound as any of the more famous New Age people, such as Kitaro. However, this record hints that he can deliver much more. Tommy Emmanuel's playing has a precise strength that you don't associate with New Age music. You find this in his breezy version of 'Lady Madonna' -- a toe-tapping track that would have been a Top Ten hit in more enlightened times. You find it in the slower 'Initiation', in which the guitar line blends with rhythms based on Aboriginal percussion instruments.

Only when you have played the record several times do you realize that it features almost no synthesizers or extra instruments. Tommy Emmanuel uses multi-tracking to create his effects, most magically on his version of the Beatles' 'Michelle'.

Up from Down Under escapes its New Age category. Buy it if you like fine guitar music.

Robie Porter is the producer of Up from Down Under. Robie who? In 1962 he had the No. 2 single in Australia with 'Si Senor'. At that time his performing name was Rob E.G. All he did was play slide Hawaiian guitar. With the aid of a few voice-over gimmicks and a small rhythm section, Rob E.G. created one hit after another in the early 1960s. They included '55 Days at Peking' (a film theme that became a No. 1 hit in 1963), '5-4-3-2-1-Zero' (silly alien voices accompanied by some dextrous guitar playing), and 'Jezebel'. When the hits stopped coming, he became Robie Porter, a successful singer and record producer.

Why should I remind you of all this? Because, for the first time ever, all of Rob E.G.'s hits are on one album. It's called 5-4-3-2-1, and it's the third volume of 'The Festival File' -- Festival's admirable attempt to put back on vinyl the great Australian hits of the early 1960s. Why should the racks be stacked with records by Gene Pitney, Little Richard, and Chuck Berry, when we can't find records of our own past?

I bought Volume 4 of 'The Festival File' -- Warren Williams' Teenage Love -- as soon as I saw it for sale. None of this waiting around for a review copy! But am I the only person in Australia who remembers Warren Williams? His was probably the most freakish success story in rock 'n' roll history. His three greatest hits, 'A Star Fell from Heaven', 'Girls Were Made to Love and Kiss', and 'Speak to Me of Love', were revivals of tenor favourites from the 1930s. Williams never pretended to be anything but a choirboy tenor. With a rock and roll band as backing, he sounded a bit like Roy Orbison or Gene Pitney, and that's probably why he succeeded. Today he wouldn't succeed. He wouldn't fit any of the categories that radio programmers use. But in 1962 the disc jockeys

played his records, and they sold very well, and the rest is history.

The first batch of 'The Festival File' also includes 'best of' albums by Noeleen Batley, Dig Richards, the DeKroo Brothers, Ray Hoff and the Offbeats, Ray Brown and the Whispers, Johnny Young and Kompany, Marty Rhone and the Soul Agents, and Ross D. Wylie.

Umpteen congratulations to Festival Records for releasing these records. But where is the second greatest of them all (after Johnny O'Keefe) -- Lonnie Lee?

#### Green Thoughts: Smithereens (Liberation LIB-5436)

Although pop music based on the English model seems to have settled down into one orthodoxy -- tortured voices plus tortured synthesizers -- American pop music seems to have divided into two orthodoxies. One is the English model. The other is the West Coast model, as exemplified by the Smithereens -- tortured voices plus tortured guitars and drums. This is an old-fashioned rock and roll band that sounds like an English New Wave band. In Australia REM is currently the best-known band of this type. The Smithereens don't seem to be famous here yet.

Overseas reviews of Green Thoughts have emphasized the Smithereens' doleful lyrics; lines like 'I think that I'd rather be dead than to be this lonely'. There must be something missing in my ear cavities, for I couldn't understand a single line of the lyrics. If you also have this advantage, you will find that the Smithereens play upbeat, smash-your-head-against-the-wall music, and that most of the songs sound the same. The playing of drums and guitars is quite good, but the songs are not. 'Especially for You' is the only outstanding track. Maybe if I could understand the lyrics, I would like the album.

#### Shake Some Action: Flamin' Groovies (Aim 1017)

The Flamin' Groovies have remained famous and well respected for nearly twenty years, although they have never had a hit and most of their albums are out of print. In 1976 they recorded Shake Some Action, which has just been re-released in Australia. This album faithfully reproduces the best and the worst of what was, even in 1976, a lost golden age -- the 1960s' Merseybeat era of pop music.

The oddness of this album is that it hasn't dated in twelve years because it was accurately outdated even when it was recorded. Shake Some Action ranges from the painfully awful Mersey sound of 'Yes It's True' to the awesome recreation of the early Rolling Stones sound in 'She Said Yeah' to 'St. Louis Blues' the way the Byrds might have played it.

It might have sounded like a good idea at the time for the Flamin' Groovies to make themselves into a living museum, but they disappear in the process. Their producer is Dave Edmunds, and the most 1970s-sounding tracks on the album, such as 'Don't You Lie to Me', sound like offcuts from a Dave Edmunds album.

Shake Some Action is an odd and interesting album, because its analyses of 1960s musical styles tell you more about those styles than listening to the originals. But where are the Flamin' Groovies in all this?

#### Crossroads: Eric Clapton (Polydor 835-261) (6 records or 4 CDs or 4 cassettes)

Bob Dylan did it. Bruce Springsteen did it. Now Eric Clapton's done it. This time it matters.

Eric Clapton is the third major performer of the 1960s and 1970s to submit to a multi-record/CD/cassette retrospective boxed set of his songs. This time the boxed set is necessary.

Dylan's Biograph featured a lot of unusual and previously unreleased songs, but not in chronological order. Springsteen's Live 1975-85 was a disappointment for fans who had been waiting for all those legendary stage performances of songs he's never recorded in the studio.

Clapton's Crossroads gets it right, setting high standards of discography. Not only are all the performances presented in chronological order of recording but most of them have never been available before on record, or only from obscure sources. Here is Clapton's work with the Yardbirds, John Mayall, Cream, Blind Faith, Delaney and Bonnie, Derek and the Dominos, and his 1970s and 1980s bands. Most importantly, here are the seven tracks from the never-completed second Derek and the Dominos album. For these, the \$90 package is worth buying.

Crossroads is so richly useful that it stimulates endless speculations about Clapton's career. The official legend about Clapton is that he was the shy genius of the guitar who licked heroin addiction and went on to be healthy, wealthy, and well liked. The truth, as shown here, is that Clapton is a hard-nosed operator who has consistently crippled his genius and sacked bands in order to keep his career rolling. Cream, Delaney and Bonnie and Friends, and Derek and the Dominos broke up when Clapton saw them as career dead ends. In the last ten years -- as the last CD in this set shows -- Clapton has suppressed his innate musicality in order to generate Top Forty hits.

But genius keeps breaking through. Crossroads leaves out most of the boring hit songs and concentrates on those moments when Eric Clapton plays blues guitar. He can't leave the hard stuff alone. Wonderful things like 'Ramblin' on my Mind', 'Have You Ever Loved a Woman', both slow and fast versions of 'Crossroads', and 'Snake Lake Blues' are here. A rich mixture.

The only performances conspicuously missing from Crossroads are Clapton's appearances on other people's albums. After all, his best performances include second guitarist on Stephen Stills' 'Come Back Home', uncredited guitarist on Jackie Lomax's 'Sour Milk Sea', and lead guitarist on the Edge of Darkness album. Surely they are all excuse enough for another six-record/four-CD package. Please? Soon?

Guitarist: Christopher Wood (Red Hill Music RHM-CWG-001)

Tazzad: Tazzad (Jarra Hill JHR-2006)

Australia has become a hotbed of new and original musical talent, although you would never guess it from listening to the radio. The small record companies are betting their shirts on new performers, such as Christopher Wood and Tazzad. Should they bother? No, say the radio and TV stations; we only want the old or the boring. Melbourne Report readers will just have to seek out the new music for themselves.

Christopher Wood's Guitarist album fits no categories. No wonder the radio stations aren't interested. Wood plays a solo classical guitar, but his music is neither classical, jazz, nor pop. A few tracks on Side 1 remind me of John McLaughlin's best work, but only because of their speed and brilliance. Wood avoids jazz chords. The best tracks, with confusing names such as 'Long March: Druid Dreaming' and 'Raga 5: "Joy"', owe much to flamenco chords and rhythms, yet they do not sound Spanish (or Celtic or Indian). The quiet tunes, such as 'Song of Hope', could be called classical or pop, but they are neither.

Christopher Wood is a refreshingly original performer-writer, whose new record will give lasting pleasure to fanciers of all kinds of guitar music.

(Distribution might be patchy; write to Red Hill Music, PO Box 36, Red Hill South, Vic. 3937.)

Since the 1960s, artists such as Yehudi Menuhin and Ravi Shankar have tried to blend the Indian and Western classical traditions of music. The results have usually sounded more Indian than classical, but not satisfactory as either.

Tazzad, the work of a strikingly original Australian group, forges a new union between Indian and Western music. Tazzad -- Davood Tabrizi, Devendran Gopolasamy, and Ram Chandra Suman -- play eight instruments, mostly of Indian origin. The four compositions on this record sound as much Western as Indian, but there are no compromises. Indeed, on 'Bush to the City' a wide range of contemporary percussion effects are linked to the underlying classical sound.

I find the concept of Tazzad so original and refreshing that I'm almost ashamed to note any fault in it. But the members of the group still sound a bit tentative, especially on Side 2. They're not quite sure that Australia can stand excessive brilliance during its Bicentennial year. Don't be so polite, fellas. Go wild next time. Blow our ears apart!

(If you can't find Tazzad in the shops, write to Jarra Hill Records, PO Box 162, Paddington, NSW 2021.)

Good Thing He Can't Read My Mind: Christine Lavin (Larrikin LRF-226)

I feel like whingeing at radio stations yet again. If Christine Lavin's Good Thing He Can't Read My Mind had appeared in the late 1960s or early 1970s, radio stations would have played it until it became a hit album. Come the late 1980s, all stations except the ABC's 3LO ignore this wonderful and very accessible record. The big stores don't even stock it in their pop bins.

Why should a great singer-songwriter like Christine Lavin be forced to languish while radio emits waves of boredom? Because observant, tart, subtle, funny lyrics are no longer valued. (Perhaps that's why Joni Mitchell stopped writing observant, tart, etcetera lyrics.) Because acoustic music is no longer valued. Because wise, funny people are no longer valued. If humour has become a weapon of violence against listeners, Lavin pleads no contest.

And yet Lavin's observant songs are entirely contemporary. It's an emotional wasteland out there, and she's seen it all. 'Good Thing He Can't Read My Mind' is about a modern woman with firm opinions, all of which she abandons when she falls in love. ('I do not like sushi / but he loves sushi / and I love him.') This love affair can't last, but she is working so hard at it.

In 'Ain't Love Grand' Christine Lavin observes an old lady riding the subway. Seated opposite a kissing couple, the old lady sings: 'Oh ain't love grand / almost makes me wish when I was young / I'd had the patience to put up with a man'. A life's tragedy (or triumph?) in one song.

Lavin sings of joy as well as sorrow. 'Bumblebees' is a delicious confessional song about a woman who actually meets the man of her dreams. He's no macho madman. 'You are so shy, so soft spoken / for a man so very young / you are so very wise / but you are probably just as scared as I am'.

Since Christine Lavin is out there somewhere, and she knows all these things, there is hope for the rest of us. But if you listened to commercial radio, would you ever know about her?

Talk Is Cheap: Keith Richards (Virgin 7-90973-2)

Why should we pay attention to an ageing rock star who can't sing very well and, to judge from his first record, is not very good at writing songs? Because the ageing rock star is Keith Richards, sometime anchorperson of the Rolling Stones, and because attention must be paid when he releases his first solo album.

To some of us, the effective breakup (or breakdown) of the Rolling Stones is a mournful event. After the funeral, we get to inspect bits of the body. Although neither critics nor record-buyers agree with me, I found Mick Jagger's Primitive Cool to be one of the great pop albums of the 1980s. Charlie Watts' jazz big-band album was brilliant. Ron Wood and Bill Wyman have each produced three enjoyable solo albums. They don't need the Stones. Does Keith?



The trouble with Rolling Stones albums of the last decade has been the declining quality of the songs themselves. Keith Richards can no longer write a good tune, as his new record shows clearly. But Keith can inspire other musicians. He believes in his own musical vision so completely that somehow Talk Is Cheap works. People like Steve Jordan (drums) and Waddy Wachtel (guitar) join Keith in one long powerful jam session. Here is all the dark fire of the great Rolling Stones albums, without the classic tunes.

With luck, Keith and Mick will patch up their quarrel -- Keith needs some Mick Jagger songs for his next album.

#### SHORT NOTICES

The record companies held up many long-announced items until Christmas. A few of the best:

The Traveling Wilburys, Vol. 1 (Wilbury 9-25796-2)

Brisk, tuneful entertainment from (so far) the most super supergroup of them all. But why are three-fifths of the group (Bob Dylan, Tom Petty, and Roy Orbison) made to sound like clones of the other two-fifths (George Harrison and Jeff Lynne)? And with Roy Orbison dead, can there be a Volume 2?

American Dream: Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young (Atlantic 7-81888-2)

It's not every group that waits eighteen years between releases. Play the first few tracks and you wonder if American Dream were worth the wait. Suddenly Neil Young steps on stage ('This Old House') and the album comes to life. The other Neil Young songs give backbone to American Dream. David Crosby proves he is both detoxified and resurrected with two powerful songs ('Nighttime for the Generals' and 'Compass'). 'Soldiers of Peace' is the ultimate Graham Nash song. An exuberant album, occasionally achieving greatness.

Land of Dreams: Randy Newman (Reprise 925-773-2)

With such malign masterpieces as 'Roll with the Punches' and 'Masterman and Baby J', Randy proves that he is still grouchy after all these years. The tone is sweetened by the first two songs, autobiographical sketches accompanied by Mark Knopfler's guitar. 'It's Money That Matters' is the hit song. It's only when you listen to all the words that you realize it's downbeat, not upbeat. Brilliant lyrics and vintage Randy Newman tunes.

One Fair Summer Evening: Nanci Griffith (MCA MCAD-42255)

Nanci Griffith has the sexiest, sweetest, most perfectly pitched voice in country music. She also has the thickest Texas accent you've heard, but this is obvious only when she introduces the songs on One Fair Summer Evening. Nearly an hour's concert performance is on this record; wonderful full-bodied songs, mainly written by Nanci; and a small group that knows how to stay in the background.

Bob Dylan (CBS 462835-2)

Bob Dylan's first album, finally released on CD, for a mere \$11.95! Proof that Bob was always brilliant, even before he wrote 'Blowing in the Wind'. Proof that even CBS is starting to respond to what CD buyers want -- prices we can afford when replacing the record collection with CDs.

Rattle and Hum: U2 (Island TVD-93285-6)

Whether you buy this on CD, cassette, or 2 LPs, it's still 73 minutes of unpredictable music. Usually I don't like U2's blockbuster tactics, but that's because their tunes are less than subtle. Faced with somebody else's songs (Beatles' 'Helter Skelter', Hendrix's 'All Along the Watchtower'), U2 rise to the occasion. They are also good with offbeat arrangements of their own songs ('I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For' with the New Voices of Freedom; 'When Love Comes to Town' with B. B. King). Concert recording quality is excellent. I must see the film some time.

Melissa Etheridge (Island TVD-93290)

Melissa's gutsy, bluesy voice. Passionate lyrics. Great tunes. And a rock and roll band, featuring Waddy Wachtel, that avoids clichés and synthesizers. Surprise New Performer of the Year.

These are two of the three columns I've written so far for The Melbourne Arts Centre Magazine. The aim of writing these reviews, apart from earning some pocket money, was to attract hundreds of CDs for review. This aim did not succeed.

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#### REVIEWS OF CLASSICAL RECORDS

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Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by Giuseppe Sinopoli:  
Mahler: Symphony No. 2 in C Minor (Resurrection); Songs of a Wayfarer; Six Early Songs (Deutsche Grammophon, 2 CDs: 415-959-2). Symphony No. 5 (DG CD: 415-476-2). Symphony No. 6; 'Adagio' from Symphony No. 10 (DG, 2 CDs: 423-082-2).

In the history of recorded music, no phenomenon is more puzzling (or more substantial) than the continued popularity of Gustav Mahler's symphonies. There they stand, ten great craggy mountains of music -- eleven if you count The Song of the Earth -- scarcely approachable and almost unclimbable, except for the First and the Fourth. Yet the world's best conductors and orchestras keep battling to conquer them, and record-buyers leap on the new versions. Why?

Mahler's symphonies remain popular, I believe, precisely because they are unapproachable -- but also because they are highly listenable. Each epic contains such a wide variety of musical experience that both performers and listeners take away something new from each performance. There are no correct interpretations here, only new ones.

The newest and most exciting cycle of Mahler symphonies is being recorded by Giuseppe Sinopoli and the Philharmonia Orchestra. Don't throw away your Tennstedts, Inbals, Soltis, Chailly, and the others -- but listen to Sinopoli's versions of Nos. 2, 5, and 6.

My darkest Mahler blind spot has always been his Symphony No. 5. Of course I know and love the fourth movement, the Adagietto (better known as the theme from Death in Venice). But I've never made any sense of the first three movements -- until I heard Sinopoli's version. Other versions bury them under giant orchestral rugs, hiding the music rather than revealing it. Sinopoli lets us hear the structure of the first three movements, analysing them and showing just where the structural connections are. Paradoxically, the more remorselessly he analyses, the better he reveals the physical luxuriousness of the music. For the first time I can enjoy this symphony as a complete experience.

Where has Sinopoli succeeded where others have failed? For a start, he's a great and energetic conductor, as was revealed first in his recordings of opera. He demands extreme precision of expression as well as vivid sensuousness from his orchestras and soloists.

He has a great support team. To judge from this Mahler cycle, Deutsche Grammophon's Wolfgang Stengel and Klaus Hiemann must be the best recording engineers in the world. They have finally got the measure of digital sound; they can pick out instrumental details inside giant soundscapes without making the music sound grotesque. At last they have created music worthy of the compact disc medium.

And Sinopoli, or his record company have found miraculously resonant recording venues: All Saints Church, Tooting, for the Fifth, and Watford Town Hall, London, for the Second and Sixth. If only we had such venues in Australia.

Sinopoli's Mahler cycle is unmissable.

Academy of St-Martin-in-the-Fields, conducted by Neville Marriner (Karita Mattila: soprano); Villa Lobos: Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5, Aria; Satie: Gymnopédie Nos. 1 and 3, etc. (Philips CD: 420-155-2)  
Galleria CDs (Deutsche Grammophon); Studio and Resonance CDs (EMI); Ovation CDs (Decca).

Sir Thomas Beecham used to call them 'lollipops' but performed them with as much zest as he played the major symphonies. Many artists still call them 'encores', and use them as such in their concerts. Like many listeners, I regard them as fillers between important works. They are the short classics, the tunes that become all too familiar yet never go away.

But why do performers as distinguished as Sir Neville Marriner and the Academy of St-Martin-in-the-Fields record an entire compact disc of small pieces? The obvious answer is that they need the money. But that answer (inaccurate as it probably is) implies there is an assured market for such a disc. Why?

The answer lies in the programming of Marriner's new disc. Here are 1988's favourites, not those of the 1950s. They include the soprano aria from Villa Lobos' Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5, a majestic and haunting melody that has become popular without having been used as a film theme; two of Satie's Gymnopédie pieces, which first achieved fame as themes in French films; and Barber's Adagio for Strings, a searing polyphonic string symphony that is only rivalled by some of Vaughan Williams' finest efforts. (One of them, the Fantasia on Greensleeves, is also on this record.) Short titbits include two sections from Walton's Facade suite and a movement from Britten's Simple Symphony.

This CD is a good way to begin a collection, especially as it concentrates on melodic twentieth-century music. If this disc has any failing, it is its smoothness and sweetness. These pieces are just a bit too easy on the ear. There are, I suggest, even better ways to begin a CD collection.

In recent months EMI has issued two lines (Studio and Resonances) of \$20 CDs, all of great performances from the past. Decca has issued its Ovation discs and Deutsche Grammophon has its Galleria line. Rather than buying CDs of small selections from great works, buy the great works themselves. For instance, many of the classic Karajan performances have suddenly been rereleased within a few months of each other. DG has the 1970s set of Karajan performances of the Beethoven symphonies. (No. 3, the Eroica, is the best of them so far.) EMI, also reviving Karajan performances from the 1960s and 1970s, has just released on CD one of his greatest performances: the heroic account of Beethoven's Triple Concerto, with Rostropovich, Richter, and Oistrakh as soloists.

Buy samplers if you enjoy them -- but it would be cheaper in the long run to buy classic performances on the new midprice CD range.

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THE 'MELBOURNE REPORT'  
BOOK REVIEWS

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Flies of a Summer: Peter Kocan (Angus & Robertson; \$17.95)

Peter Kocan is well known in Australia for his troubled past life, his poetry, and two novels, The Treatment and The Cure (New South Wales Premier's Award 1983). Kocan's success in the stiflingly limited world of Australian letters will obscure the fact that Flies of a Summer, his third novel, is a standard science fiction novel for young adults. If he had published this book with one of the major US science fiction houses, he would have made a lot more money than he can ever make in Australia, and he might have found an audience sympathetic to his achievement.

Flies of a Summer is a deceptively simple story about a group of children growing up in a special kind of captivity. In some far-future era, the Margai, their masters, are a race that have taken over Earth, enslaved its people, and wiped out all traces of our own era. Human children are kept on rural settlements. Their parents are taken away when the children are young, and they are kept on the settlement only long enough to reach puberty and produce a new crop of children.

Kocan's world is one in which the masters, the Margai, enslave through brutality and ignorance. The children, it seems, can never break an age-old pattern because they have no history or legends. Flies of a Summer is about one generation who tries to break free from the masters.

All this has been done before many times in science fiction. Kocan has the advantage of talking to an audience largely unfamiliar with that genre. Also he gives his child characters a constant vein of good humour that brings them to life and prevents them from being merely parts of an adventure story. The Margai might have the strength, but most of them are stupider than Rambo. They rely on time-honoured methods to rule the settlement. One child, Rowan, works out a method of tricking the Margai, but the mechanisms of oppression are so powerful that his plans nearly fail. The author does not underestimate the frailty of either the Margai or the children, the 'flies of a summer'.

Kocan has no villain in this novel except history, or the lack of it. Take away all knowledge of the past and you deprive an entire world of the power to act in the future. Heroism comes from asserting basic, unquenchable human qualities -- love, sex, aggression, co-operation, competition. But without a superstructure of thought around which to wrap these human qualities, heroism remains naïve. Hence the naive quality of the book, which makes me think it should be entered for the Australian Children's Book of the Year Award. Teenagers would understand Kocan's insights better than many adult literary readers.

It is possible that Kocan intends the book to be an allegory. Obviously he is making some comparison with the debilitated position of Australia's Aboriginal people in the years since 1788. Less obviously, he is showing how all Australians, black and white, could become merely the historyless pawns of foreign powermongers during the twenty-first century. If either allegory is intended, the ending of Flies of a Summer seems too optimistic to me.

The Baltic Business: Peter Corris (Penguin; \$8.95)

I must have been the last person in Australia not to have read a Peter Corris novel before I gave myself a treat by slipping into The Baltic Business.

I always approved of the idea of Peter Corris. At last Australia had an author

making a success of genre fiction; in his case, mystery fiction. Australia has rarely had successful genre writers, except in children's fiction. The result has been a literature top-heavy in pretension and low in staying power. Not only do the steady-selling genres, such as detective, western, romance, and science fiction, provide the money to support American and British fiction in general, but they provide the books that people actually read. In Australia we have long had the tradition of reading Australian books only when we want something that is good for us. Books for light pleasure inevitably come from overseas.

Peter Corris's success has changed the situation, however temporarily. Perhaps for the first time since Upfield's 'Bony' books, mystery stories written in Australia sound like good reading. Now we wait for Corris's successors so that a real Australian mystery genre will continue.

The Baltic Business is a spy story rather than a standard detective mystery. Ray Crawley appeared first in the ABC's television mini-series Pokerface. Played by Bruno Lawrence, Crawley was a wonderfully crumpled and down-and-out spy, racked by perennial sins and a rocky marriage, forever on the brink of getting the boot.

Reinstated in The Baltic Business, Crawley finds himself warned off a case just as it becomes interesting. The interest, in this case, is in Irina Gilbus, the feisty but single-minded daughter of the Lithuanian leader of a ferociously anti-Communist organization called Nations in Chains. Obvious questions spring up. Are these people Nazis? If so, are they training people to go back to Lithuania to fight the Communist government there? If so, why are Crawley and his sidekick, Huok, warned off the case? Whose thugs belt the backsides off them every time they get near the answers to their questions?

I must report that I did guess the ending, and I was a bit disappointed by the tone of casual violence and easy sex that seemed imported from American genre novels. But this mattered little, because Corris was able to evoke a suburban Melbourne peopled by ferocious European patriots living in quiet bungalows and hideaway apartments. A kernel of genuine passion lies at the heart of The Baltic Business. This grim undertone, plus Corris's ability to tell an action story, makes this one of the most refreshing Australian novels of 1988.

The Sea and Summer: George Turner (Faber & Faber; \$29.95)

The Sea and Summer is the best Australian novel of 1987. So far, it has also been one of the most ignored Australian novels of 1987. Distribution problems have stopped it dead in its tracks. (Faber & Faber published it in England; Penguin is Faber's local distributor.) Reviewers have ignored it. Newspapers have conspicuously failed to print large slabs of it in their weekend supplements. Why?

In The Sea and Summer, George Turner chooses to tell the truth as he sees it about the future of Australia. To think seriously about the future in this country is almost treason. Worse, Turner paints an accurate and uncomfortable future for us all. Deep in our hearts we still believe we're the lucky country; Turner says we're wrong.

The Sea and Summer is not a tract. It's a fast-paced entertaining thriller of a novel. Perhaps that's the real reason why it's been ignored. Entertaining Australian novels have been rare recently. The Sea and Summer is the sort of novel you finish in a night, although it's 348 pages long, and then go looking for more of Turner's books.

The Sea and Summer tells what happens when all the compacted fecal matter finally hits a very big fan. The Greenhouse Effect can be seen in action; Port Phillip Bay is gradually invading the lower reaches of Melbourne. Massive weather variability causes constant worldwide crop failures. Nobody is rich anymore, although some people like to think they are. Melbourne has 90 per cent unemployment. The unemployed are packed into giant tower blocks in the western

suburbs. Services and police protection have disappeared; the tower blocks are run by warlords wielding power by controlling gangs of youths. They are called the Swill. The Sweet are the small number of people who still have jobs and can afford to live in houses.

The Sea and Summer tells the story of the Conway family, who were once Sweet, but suddenly become Swill when Francis Conway's father loses his job. Forced to move to a small house near Newport 23, one of the tower blocks, after Mr Conway commits suicide, the family find themselves protected by Billy Kovacs, the boss of the block. Francis and his brother Teddy are talented enough to be recruited back to the Sweet, only to be given the responsibility for retrieving some kind of civilization as the whole society deteriorates.

Readers of traditional science fiction will find this all very depressing, although it isn't. Turner loves a good disaster (in his capacity as fiction writer); he believes all these events are coming, or nearly here; and he offers some ways of getting through the mess.

The Sea and Summer is a novel for people who like thinking about the future -- and that's why Australians won't like it. Every element in Turner's future can be seen coming into existence: the Greenhouse Effect, unexplained droughts, enormous currency problems. Even the tower blocks can be seen as symbols of the present-day ghettoization of the western suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney. In his postscript, Turner says, 'The Sea and Summer is about the possible cost of complacency.'

Complacency -- an iron refusal to think about the future -- is almost an essential Australian quality. Therefore George Turner's future world is almost certain to come into existence. You won't enjoy it. You will enjoy The Sea and Summer.

((\*brg\* (Nov. 1988): The Sea and Summer is still ignored in Australia, although in Britain it has already won the Arthur C. Clarke Award, come second in the Commonwealth Literary Prize, and in America it was runner up in the John W. Campbell Memorial Award. American title is Drowning Towers, from Arbor House.\*))

Matilda at the Speed of Light, edited by Damien Broderick (Sirius Paperbacks; \$12.95)

Australia's best-kept secret is that there are Australians who write science fiction -- and there are even a few whose work is published here and overseas. There's no excuse for this being kept a secret, but Australian promoters of the home-grown product have not exactly been met with open arms, either from readers or reviewers.

Now is the time to catch up with a succulent selection of recent Australian science fiction. Damien Broderick, in Matilda at the Speed of Light, has collected a wide variety of stories that show (a) Australian science fiction is more entertaining and sophisticated than the current American stuff, and (b) Australian sf stories are very much more entertaining than the usual run of Australian short fiction.

Whereas American sf writers have retreated behind a cloud of Reaganite chaff -- right-wing politics and nostalgia for a past that never was -- Australian sf writers are still concerned about possible futures. This is, after all, what science fiction is all about. Lucy Sussex takes an exuberant look at a future feminist enclave in 'My Lady Tongue', and shows that life is rarely utopian in utopia. In 'Not in Front of the Children' George Turner tells of the difficulties of people who have had their lives extended so long that they dare not think of death. 'Things Fall Apart', the title of Philippa C. Mattern's contribution, tells it all. How do people cope as society falls apart? By finding solace in art and each other, and in the end, by finding out something about themselves.

The stories in this volume are better than most examples of the Dreaded

Australian Short Story because they are longer. Australian short fiction has been crippled by the 3000-word maximum length requirement set by magazines and literary competitions. Not so in science fiction. The stories in Matilda at the Speed of Light have a feeling of spaciousness, of enough words allowed to develop a juicy story properly. The two juiciest stories in this collection are Francis Payne's 'Albert's Bellyful' and Leanne Frahm's 'On the Turn'. Both stories would be known as Australian classics if they had appeared in the literary magazines. Both are too long for most Australian markets.

Payne's 'Albert's Bellyful' is the most enjoyably amoral story I've read. Payne describes a very weird family who live in Victoria after the Final Disaster has wiped out the rest of us. They get along as best they can. The result is surprising and funny. Leanne Frahm is a Queenslander who, in 'On the Turn', makes a tropical beachwater fishing expedition into one of the most effective horror stories I've read. This is classic sf, it's wholly Australian, and probably it wouldn't find a mainstream magazine market in this country.

Find out where the best Australian short fiction is being written. Sample our sf in Matilda at the Speed of Light.

Defending the National Tuckshop: Australia's Secret Army Intrigue of 1931; by Michael Cathcart (McPhee Gribble/Penguin; \$14.99)

Did you know that in 1931 an army of 30,000 men was prepared to fight against federal and New South Wales state Labor governments? That on the night of 6 March 1931 men shouldered arms in country towns across Victoria because they had heard the rumour that a Red Army was marching north from Melbourne? That Thomas Blamey, later to become Australia's most famous soldier during the New Guinea campaign, was the commander-in-chief of a highly secret loyalist organization?

These are just a few of the facts uncovered by historian Michael Cathcart in his new book Defending the National Tuckshop. This is first-class historical writing and a highly satisfactory reading experience. Very few current Australian novels are as entertaining as Defending the National Tuckshop, and fewer still are as important.

This is a first-class detective story. Cathcart tells two stories: the story of the formation of the loyalist organization -- the White Army -- in the 1930s; and the story of how he uncovered the information. At first people he questioned would say little. All the written records about Blamey in the 1930s are missing from the files. Many other papers have disappeared. The job seemed impossible.

Gradually Cathcart pieced together bits of the whole story. Ex-soldiers and conservative politicians were scared of the Scullin government in Canberra and Jack Lang's government in Sydney. If either had lasted beyond the early 1930s, Blamey had set up a highly secret organization of armed men who would march on Sydney and Canberra to 'liberate' them.

How could men who had shown great patriotism during World War I join a subversive organization? This is the question that Cathcart tried to answer. He provides a brilliant analysis of the older type of Australian conservative -- the kind of person whose first loyalty was to Britain, not to Australia; a person who believed in a mystical 'constitution' handed down from Britain, not the written Constitution established in 1901; a person who believed that people poorer than himself did not deserve a say in government. Such people, Cathcart says, enlisted the aid of returned soldiers, dissatisfied men who needed an outlet for their unused energies and aspirations. The result could have been civil war -- if things had turned out differently. If.



Down the Lake with Half a Chook: Philip Hodgins (Australian Broadcasting Commission, \$12.95)  
I'm Deadly Serious: by Chris Wallace-Crabbe (Oxford University Press, \$14.95)

Confession time. I must admit that when faced with a book of poetry I used to look the other way. Schoolroom English classes inoculated me against poetry, and university classes failed to counteract the effect. I was ashamed of myself for not being able to read poetry for pleasure, but not even shame could make me like the stuff.

That was before I read Philip Hodgins' Blood and Bone (1986), a startling book of poetry that converted me to reading the stuff. Hodgins is a young Melbourne who discovered a few years ago that he has leukemia. He began to write funny, piercing poems about facing death, cutting deep with his deft, limpid lines of verse. As a reviewer of Blood and Bone said, Hodgins' dilemma is also ours, although we ignore it. We are all under sentence of sudden early death while nuclear weapons systems are still in operation.

In his second book of poetry, Down the Lake with Half a Chook, Hodgins realizes that he is still alive, despite doctors' predictions, and that he has the freedom to write about aspects of his life other than its imminent end. As the title of the collection suggests, Hodgins concentrates on observations about growing up and living in the Victorian countryside. No peaceful bucolic lyrics here. Death and suffering are implicit in every move a farmer makes. When farmers are not being ferocious, they live in a sad world that brings them little satisfaction.

Hodgins appears to say that country people are deprived because they are not willing to talk about the world around them. Hodgins does it for them. Of 'Gum Trees': 'Each gum tree grows to its own rules / And bends them to suit itself... / some of the veterans are lying down in the shade, / maybe propped up on an angled elbow / or prostrate in an afternoon daze.' Of 'Flies': 'I wouldn't mind two bob / for every blowie I've swallowed.'

Hodgins also recalls boarding-school days, and writes some more poems about dying. He is a writer with a lyrical scalpel.

More confessions. I must admit that I've always admired Chris Wallace-Crabbe as an important Australian literary person, but I've never read his poetry. I've pigeonholed him as one of those 'academic poets' who are based in the universities and who seem to speak to an audience who are themselves academics or aspiring poets. 'Academic' poetry has seemed much too elliptical, dispassionate, and difficult for people like me. But reading Philip Hodgins led me to Philip Larkin (Britain's best poet since T. S. Eliot), to Seamus Heaney (currently the most celebrated British poet), and back to Chris Wallace-Crabbe, whose latest collection is I'm Deadly Serious. I'm glad I made the journey.

Many of Chris Wallace-Crabbe's poems are too elliptical and dispassionate, and I don't understand some of them. (I didn't suffer from that problem when reading poetry by Philip Hodgins or Philip Larkin.) worse, many of the best poems are concerned with the process itself of writing poetry. Self-indulgence, surely.

Why read Wallace-Crabbe, then? Because he keeps trying to break out of the rigid moulds into which twentieth-century poetry has become set. On the one hand he detaches himself from the aspects of the world that move him most, but on the other hand the world moves him anyway. In 'The Thing Itself' he compares writing poetry to good sex. The metaphor is merely smart, so he throws it away. 'I would like to go right back, / devising a sentence / unlike any such creature in creation; ... / it would glitter, articulate, / strum and diversify. / It would be the thing itself.' All the frustration and achievement of writing is reflected in this poem, and therefore all the frustration and achievement of trying to live triumphantly.

Wallace-Crabbe writes about a wide variety of subjects in this book, and even has a tussle with God. He is best when he is least detached, especially in

'Thermodynamics', an undeniably difficult poem that is also a passionate reaction to learning while overseas that his father has just died. 'If I am shivering now / It is for the deaths of us all: / Such fire as I think of, the furnace / which turned my father to ash.'

For lines like these I will keep reading poetry.

An Australian in America: David Dale (Collins Australia; \$14.95)

A commentator in The Australian berated this book for being journalism, which is just what it sets out to be. This book is very good journalism, particularly as it does not pretend to be anything else. David Dale spent two years in the USA as a foreign correspondent, and returned recently to become editor of The Bulletin. An Australian in America comprises the despatches he sent home to Australian newspapers during his two years away. He updates the articles with postscripts when needed.

Good journalistic prose should be concise, precise, amusing if possible, and glittering enough to catch the eye of the casual reader. A good journalist should also have something to say. David Dale does all of these things. He depicts an America that is contradictory, outrageous, funny, depressing, and surprising.

For instance, Dale discovered that Americans are unnervingly polite. 'New Yorkers may push and shove and talk loudly and blow their horns a lot, but they cannot escape their American conditioning to be helpful, friendly and cute.' No fact about America could be more surprising to an Australian than this, but it is the most abiding impression one takes away from the country.

Another example. 'Americans are more diverse than Australians. They are also more conformist.' Dale documents the endless variety of America, which is not just one country, but a continent of alternative Americas. Foods, madmen, crazes, cities, and people and more people are here. Dale's gift is that he can bring them to life in a sentence. He watches Clint Eastwood perform his mayoral duties in Carmel City, California ('Eastwood doesn't like discussion to go on too long ... "Okay, but let's not have a debate, please"') and meets Isaac Asimov ('"I can't tell you the meaning of life, but I can tell you the meaning of my life. The meaning of my life is to write."')

An Australian in America is an invaluable American diary with all the dull bits left out, but a fair amount of truth left in. I hope David Dale does the same for Australia some time.

The Difference to Me: Garry Disher (Sirius Paperbacks; \$12.95)

The Stencil Man: Garry Disher (Collins Imprint; \$12.95)

The Man Who Played Spoons and Other Stories: edited by Garry Disher (Penguin; \$9.95)

Australian fiction usually seems a dull and murky small pond, containing many little fish swimming around it pretending to be big fish. I was surprised to find, therefore, that Garry Disher has gone a long way towards becoming a genuinely big fish.

The Difference to Me is an uneven collection of new short stories by Disher, but the best of them are very accomplished. Disher shows a dark, serious wit that breaks out unexpectedly.

'Blessed' appears to be nothing but the quarrelling conversations of some suburban women. Gradually the talk shows deep divisions between troubled people. In the last paragraph the story becomes a neat little horror story.

In the title story, 'The Difference to Me', Disher again does not show his hand until late in the story. A conventional young man hides away in a rented room in

inner-suburban Melbourne. He suffers from 'unrequited love'. He takes daily walks in the nearby park (which must be Studley Park, although Disher does not name it). He keeps passing an equally lonely man with a little dog. After months, they speak to each other. The other man can barely speak English. The conventional young man is so awkward that he barely keeps the friendship alive. I won't tell you what comes next. Disher is good at surprise endings.

If Disher has failings, they are not sins of incompetence. His stories are lithe and readable, darkly coloured. He still suffers from a lack of courage. 'Tap', the first story, is just another well-observed story about a failed relationship. Everybody else writes them. Disher has a gift for imagination, not merely for observation. In many of these stories he is still not using his gift.

The Stencil Man was, I guess, written after most of the stories in The Difference to Me. In this new novel, Disher shows a new confidence in his ability to render unique experience.

The stencil man of the book's title is Martin Linke. Of German extraction, he has been living in Australia for seventeen years when World War II breaks out. Although he regards himself as Australian, the authorities regard him as an enemy alien and take him to internment camp. The rest of the novel tells of a subtle nightmare made all the more nightmarish because the reader keeps protesting that this sort of thing couldn't happen in Australia.

Linke is treated well enough, but he finds himself separated from his wife and family and suffering from an acute sense of injustice. The Stencil Man is the story of the ways in which a good man tries to stay sane in insane circumstances. He makes stencils and keeps a journal, but finds it hard to escape the Nazi sympathisers who take control of the camp. His best friend breaks under the strain. Even the leader of the Nazis is made mad.

In The Stencil Man, Disher writes quietly powerful prose that suppresses and concentrates the emotional power of his subject matter. Linke is a suppressed spirit. A conventional person, he must surprise himself in order to stay alive. This is the story of those surprises.

The Man Who Played Spoons and Other Stories is an important book, although few of the stories are important. As the blurb tells us, Disher 'tutored in fiction writing at the Council of Adult Education for many years and has run writing workshops in country areas for the Literature Board of the Australia Council'. Disher has assembled stories by participants in these workshops. In particular he has chosen stories by Aboriginal people, elderly people, migrants, and women who had never written before they attended Disher's workshops.

As I've said, Disher himself shows an attractive quality of dark imagination in his writing. He has failed to foster this quality in his students. Instead he has encouraged them to write their life stories. Sometimes these pieces are bare snippets of reminiscence. Other stories, such as George Watts' 'My Dad', are epic tales of quiet suffering. It's a pity Disher didn't encourage some of these people to try writing fantasy or science fiction as well. (During my brief stint of school teaching many years ago, I found that very ordinary tech. boys have a great ability to write fantasy when encouraged to do so.)

There are only four stories here that are successful when judged by conventional literary standards. The best of them is Nan McNab's 'Etching — Untitled', a bravura experimental fiction about an artist and his lady. Flora Lee's 'The River' reads like a dream transcribed. Capolyne Lee's 'Dinner Dance' describes a marriage disintegrating during the few hours of a country dinner dance. And the title story, 'The Man Who Played Spoons', is an entertaining and subversive story about a really wicked man who was always praised during his lifetime.

Disher has tried a brave experiment in this book, and mainly succeeded. His new writers give a powerful impression of growing up in Australia in the 1930s and 1940s, but I suspect that most of them are capable of much more than reminiscence and documentary writing. Perhaps future volumes will show this to us.