

Books Reviewed by Alexander Varty

All reviews based on a five star rating system

needed:

Cramps, on the

Date with Elvis, just

Incredibly Strange

Just what you always

Elvis meets the

semi-collectible A

one item covered in

Music, Volume 1.

Incredibly Strange Music, Volume 1

Edited by V. Vale and Andrea Juno

(RE/Search Publications, 206 pp., CAN\$23.50, softcover)

With some collectible records fetching hundreds and even thousands of dollars, it's no wonder that there's currently a boom in discographies and price guides. With a little research, it's possible to tell the difference between black- and yellow-label Savoy LPs, find out how many surf records were released in Saskatchewan in 1963, and even untangle the thorny mess of Elvis Presley's RCA releases. But only now is there a book available which attempts to plumb the lowest depths of record mania. *Incredibly Strange Music, Volume 1* examines the world of 50-cent thrift-store specials, as seen through interviews with icons of kitsch like Martin Denny, Eartha Kitt, and "Popcorn" composer Gershon Kingsley, plus collecting tips from such notable vinyl hounds as the Cramps' Poison Ivy and Lux Interior.

This book attempts to portray "bad" music as a cultural treasure—and some of its arguments are convincing. Pop-culture archivists Mary Ricci and Mickey McGowan, for

instance, theorize that a society's real story is told in its throw-aways; given the attention archaeologists give kitchen middens and Pompeian graffiti, they may well be right. What makes Ricci, McGowan, and their peers seem like kooks is only that they're stockpiling this junk before it's buried.

Anyone who has ever thrilled to the discovery of a Screamin' Jay Hawkins or an Yma Sumac record in a pile of yard-sale wax will share their enthusiasm — and this book's.

Whole Brass Band

By Anne Cameron

(Harbour Publishing, 302 pp.)

B.C. storyteller Anne Cameron has won a measure of fame for her reworkings of aboriginal legends and for her 1979 film *Dreamspeaker*. Despite the integrity of her work, however, and despite her life-long advocacy of Native rights, she has recently come under attack by cultural appropriation activists for writing of others' experiences instead of her own realities. Perhaps impelled by this, she has moved closer to home with her new novel, *A Whole Brass Band*, and for once we might have reason to cheer the thought police of the politically correct — it's her best writing in a long time.

A Whole Brass Band is the saga of a typically unconventional contemporary family, led by a caustic, funny, foul-mouthed, and intuitively anarchistic single mother and supermarket cashier-turned-commercial fisherman, Jean Pritchard. The Pritchard clan's ups and downs are charted exhaustively, and occasionally in ludicrous detail: so many calamities befall Jean, Eve, Patsy, Sally, and Mark that towards the end of the book one is half expecting a plague of frogs to swamp the family fishboat. Instead, a Fisheries vessel rams it, and... but we're not in the business of giving away plots.

The pleasures here are in Cameron's enjoyment of her own characters — by the end of the book you feel like the Pritchards are your neighbours, so real does she make them seem — and her way with dialogue. Cameron has a genuine flair for capturing colloquial speech: whole sections of this book could be lifted verbatim for use in a film-script. *A Whole Brass Band* could make a brilliant made-for-TV movie, or perhaps even be serialized as a North Coast successor to *The Beachcombers*.

And that's not in any way intended as a put-down. *A Whole Brass Band* has the pacing and the humour (and, occasionally, the sentimental overkill) of film, but it also has some very powerful things to say about the difficulties of building and maintaining family bonds in a culture dominated by selfish individualists.

ard Core Logo

by Michael Turner

(Arsenal Pulp Press, 200 pp., CAN\$13.95, paper)

Vancouver's rock 'n' roll underground will be buzzing about this volume for some time to come, if only because the fictional punk-rock band that gives the book its title seems a lot more like DOA than author Michael Turner's own outfit, the Hard Rock Miners. Endless break-ups and reunions? Acoustic benefit gigs for hippy Greens? Scuz-bag ex-managers? A singer named Joe Dick? Seems familiar to me.

But whether Turner's intentions were satirical or simply fictional, Hard Core Logo is a great road novel, its innovative mix of song lyrics, flashback sequences, straight narrative, interior monologues, diary jottings, and grainy black and white photographs an exceptionally apt way of capturing touring's series of random incidents — without the accompanying stretches of boredom.

It's true that Hard Core Logo's four musicians are difficult to like, and somewhat unconvincingly fleshed-out. They're rock 'n' roll ciphers, each bedeviled with one or more of the travelling band's several deadly sins: greed, drugs, insecurity, arrogance, ambition, cheap hotels, bad food. But this book's not really about its human characters. Its central focus is the road itself, and Turner's clear observations and dark wit illuminate real-life rock 'n' roll more forcefully than any number of celebrity bios ever could.

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