

Alternative Music

by Nik Weller

Ces extraits du journal intime de l'auteure ont été écrits lors du festival de musique Infest, un festival de musique alternative, qui a eu lieu à High River en Alberta.

These excerpts from my journal were written during Infest, an alternative music festival at High River, Alberta.

Sunday, August 1, 1993.

Stephen was again observing my "How dare you presume I'm heterosexual?" badge. When he first noticed it, while we were out listening to a band, he said that I could even cross out the "hetero." Then yesterday he suggested that perhaps I am heterosexual, but choose not to participate.

"I don't know," I said. "Not necessarily."

I don't look at people in a sexual way and I don't know if I ever have. I find certain men and certain women interesting and admirable, but celibacy is a transformation in the "normal" way of thought. If, for some reason, I am not celibate forever, I can't say if I'd prefer men or women.

I'm not a heterosexual woman who locks up the desire to copulate. The thought of sex is not dirty. But it represents a violation to me. So many men physically force themselves on their girlfriends, their lovers, on all women in general....

I hate that aspect of men. I swear, their idea of sexuality is to have access to the image of Woman, to the image of all women they ever see. Funny thing about Stephen. He still comments on the beautiful women who walk past, even in the presence of Karen. But then he goes over and gives her a kiss. He is always kissing her, but in this context...it seems he can only love images. It's as if a girlfriend can give him access to all women. This is the way men love. I don't believe that any of them, any of these heterosexual men, ever

ask. It is their right. No matter how "gentle" they are, they can't separate spontaneity from right. I am very aware of my body as my body now and no one has a right to it, no matter how much I like them. My body is not a generic woman's body, but it is mine and it is totally original.

We went as a group to hear *SNFU* but caught only the end. Then, the *Meat Puppets*. Suddenly, everyone went to get (more) stoned. Jason was totally wasted. So it was just me and Karen standing in this field, listening to this band, being quiet. Neither of us has ever been drunk or stoned. I don't know how thrilled she was over Stephen getting high.

It got dark and cold and strange. It seemed like we were the only sane ones there. But then we saw Nigel. Nigel with long red hair. He wasn't stoned either, but he was looking for a friend on LSD who was lost. I began to shout "I am in my right mind, even if no one else is!" &c.

Not long after, something happened. Someone came up behind Karen and me and put an arm around each of us. Instinctively, I pulled away. Then I saw that this was a complete stranger. ("Hi, Girls.") I reacted immediately. "Fuck off!" I shouted at him, facing him. "Fuck off!"—again, resolute. He just stood there. "Get lost!" I shouted. He left.

This will have to be continued later. I am tired. I will have to chronicle my rage!

Monday, August 2, 1993.

It's unfortunate that I didn't have the chance to fully express my wrath when I felt it. Listening to *The Meat Puppets* Saturday night, then *The Violent Femmes*, I realized that I hadn't seen a single woman on stage. There were at least as many women as men in the audience, but only men on stage. I thought of how accessory women are. I listened to the words of the songs and thought of how no woman could sing them—they did not correspond to female experience. So much *posturing*.

Alternative music? I thought of how narrow it is. What about it? They aren't being sexist, these bands, but a significant aspect of human existence is dislocated. I was angry at the crowds around me.

I think of myself as an individual, not part of a package. I think of Pete saying "You're Jason's girlfriend, right?" I think of my correction: "No, I'm Stephen's friend." What is the difference? In the first, I am an attachment. In that scenario, we have Stephen and Jason as vital aspects, with their two attachments, two accessories. In the actual scenario, I am also vital. I mean I am vital, full stop. I suppose, as Stephen's favourite person, Karen is vital. But she's also a given.

It's weird, all of it. Why do people have girlfriends? Boyfriends? Husbands? Wives? I think of Pete and his wife and their two children. All live with his in-laws. They let us take showers there yesterday morning and we were also served brunch. Very hospitable, this large extended family.

These cats and dog, adults and babies. Everything down to the *Go, Dog, Go!* book and the photos on the wall. Why? Why Pete's job at the packing plant? He seems just like us and he's our age...yet? Pete spent two nights with us while his wife stayed at home with her children and parents. It's strange. I am in a twilight world. I am one of the boys Pete hangs out with. Yet I'm also this girl standing in a cow pasture getting angry at the immaturity of men.

My anger turned to mad delight around four yesterday. Stephen had gone to Calgary with Pete to see their old high school friend. The rest of us dispersed. But I looked at the program and noticed that there was no band listed for 4:10. So I thought I would see who this mystery band was—on my own.

It was on the main stage and I got there early. I went and stood near to the stage. A few kids were there with their instruments

already and a small gathering of people lined up against the stage was asking the band questions.

Right away, I noticed the bass player. This kid of no more than fifteen was holding a yellow, blue-backed bass. There was a small green toy frog attached to the head of the instrument. I thought that this fresh-faced youth was dead interesting, right up to two flat pigtales which hung loosely, straight down, one on each shoulder. I thought at first that this young person was a boy, but I wasn't sure. But I heard the bassist answer a question and her voice was a female voice.

The band was *Placebo* from Calgary. This band is three quarters female. I can't say there was anything more surprising during the entire festival than hearing this tiny, amateur band. They were so casual and so uncertain that I couldn't help but find them charming. They would play some marvelous speed metal hybrid with powerful, wild female vocals and then spend thirty seconds at a complete loss. They spoke to the audience, held conferences, apologized. They were great. Here was this teenager in a baseball cap and long headbanger hair singing about erections and castration. She was vocally unhuman or vocally superhuman. Perhaps both. She pounded on her thighs with her hands and flung herself about.

Then there was the bassist, who was totally internal. She was very much into what she was playing and she had this most beautiful movement of her head, moving her attention from fretboard to bridge, and in complete time with an inner harmony.

The people I know also heard *Placebo*. Jason said it was good to see some women on stage, but it wasn't the men's fault that no women wanted to join a band. I kicked him in the shin. Later, I saw Terry and he liked them a lot. Actually, Terry said that he thought that bass-player was me at first. I don't know how much I resemble her, apart from my build and hair. But he said it was that "casual air."

The whole band made me want to pick up the bass again—seriously—and form a band of my own. With women in it.

The author is an undergraduate student at the University of Alberta whose favourite girl-band is Slits.

NATHALIE STEPHENS

l'homme (et je dis bien l'homme)

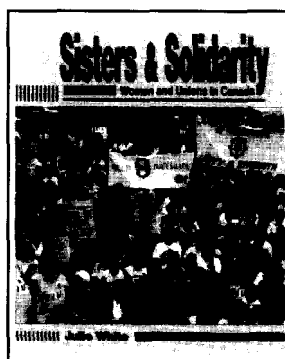
*l'homme a si peur de la mort
qu'il a dû un jour construire des musées
où il fait vivre les cultures mortes*

qu'il a tout fait pour annihiler

Nathalie Stephens est étudiante en humanités et en études du «tiers monde». Ses poèmes sont publiés dans LittéRéalité et The Authors.



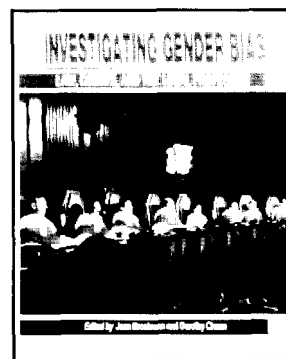
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