

# arts/entertainment



## Reviewer cleans closet of LP's

By Casey McCabe

A backlog of promotional albums has necessitated some spring(?) cleaning in the record reviewing department. The majority of these are by relative unknowns who the record companies have provided with a guarded amount of faith and a good deal of money, in hopes that the slick promotion will someday return far more than their original investment.

### album review

Then, there are the already established artists who the companies feel could use a healthy push now and then.

**Cat Stevens - Back To Earth** A&M Records

Thoughtful, romantic, melodic . . . but still a bit trying. For all the album's well constructed music, it still fails to capture and hold the listeners ear for more than one song.

Stevens produced two classic albums back to back with *Tea for the Tillerman* and *Teaser and the Firecat* in 1970 and 1971 respectively. They created the backbone for his loyal following, and the powerful emotions in his lyrics and voice served as his trademark.

*Back to Earth* finds little change in Cat's style, but apparently the power has been watered down. The strong emotional pleas are there with such sentimental renditions as "Randy," "Never" and "Father" as well as a biting attack on the Big Apple with "New York Times." The problem seems to be Stevens' ability to convey the same

emotional effect to the listener.

*Back to Earth's* best contributions are "Never," "The Artist" and his latest single "Bad Brakes." The L.P. should not be a disappointment to the loyal Cat Stevens' fan, but it's doubtful it will become his most frequently played album.

**John Denver - JD** RCA Records

Despite his incredible past success in record sales (a staggering 100,000,000 units) many people, including myself, find it hard to get too excited over the prospects of a new John Denver album.

Throwing away previous prejudices and overlooking some of Denver's obvious self indulgence on the album, *JD* does provide a few relaxing, enjoyable moments.

As the title and cover art suggest, Denver might possess his own rock star fantasy. Subsequently, he opens both sides of the album with wailing guitar numbers, "Downhill Stuff" on side one, and a surprisingly believable "Johnny B. Goode", on side two.

But wisely Denver leaves well enough alone and concentrates on the folk/country/balladeer vein which made him famous. Though the lyrics of Denver's songs (he wrote six of the albums 11) overflow to the point of saturation with his wholesome "gosh far-out" image, the songs are saved from total blandness by the pleasant additions of an occasional flute, fiddle or saxophone.

Some may find it hard to forgive him for the pretentiousness of such songs as "Life Is So Good";

*Life is so good*

*Life is so good these days*

*Life is so good these days*

*Life is so good (repeat)*

but give *JD* a fair spin before sending it to your friend with the terminal Rocky Mountain high.

**Patrice Rushen - Patrice** Elektra

One of the most prolific studio musicians on the jazz scene, Patrice Rushen has finally put out her own album with a little help from her friends. It is fresh, clean, imaginative music, tightly produced and extremely well recorded.

Her soulful jazz style is reminiscent of one of her mentors, Stevie Wonder, but her own compositions on *Patrice* should be enough to gain the recognition deserved by this highly talented keyboard player and vocalist.

**Robben Ford - The Inside Story** Elektra

Former guitarist with the L.A. Express, Ford follows admirably the Tom Scott school of music. *The Inside Story* is a mellow piece of jazz fusion, breaking no new ground, but providing over 40 minutes of pleasant diversion.

## Money shortage may silence opera

By Kent Wameke

It has been 20 years since Richard Valente of Ogleshorpe, Ca., drove over the Nebraska plains and decided Omaha would be the site of the opera company.

Opera/Omaha has been a successful Nebraska opera company since that momentous day. But things have changed and the company is now saddled with serious financial difficulties on its 20th anniversary.

In a meeting of the board of directors this past Sunday, the board's officers resigned and six members were selected for an emergency committee to temporarily handle daily operations. The main concern is to raise funds to maintain solvency.

"This new committee has the job of raising money to keep us going for this year and also help us on our start for next year," said Ed Morsman Jr., one of the new committee members.

### Need \$100,000

"We're going to need right around \$100,000 to keep us solvent this year for our proposed production of *La Boheme* scheduled for April," Morsman, of U.S. National Bank in Omaha said.

Opera/Omaha has a history of financial and performance success, which was capped off in 1972 with a \$100,000 grant from the Corbett Foundation.

"The first production that Omaha Civic Opera (as it was called in 1959) staged was *Madame Butterfly* on Feb. 17 at a cost of \$5,520.71," Morsman said.

"The three-year, \$100,000 grant from the Corbett Foundation, which sum we had to match, really set us on our way," Morsman said. "It enabled us to do three performances instead of two and bring in some national figures from the opera world."

Some of the stars that have appeared in Opera/Omaha's productions are Beverly Sills and Richard Tucker. Frederica von Stade will appear in Opera/Omaha's production of *Werther* Thursday and Saturday nights.

### Production prices

But the price for staging productions has increased dramatically since *Madame Butterfly* in 1959.

The proposed budget for the 20th anniversary season includes \$75,714 for *Werther* and \$207,532 for the three other operas this season.

With these expenditures, come the financial difficulties. "Any arts organization is generally difficult to support, but this is the most serious financial situation that we have had for 10 years," Morsman said.

"In the next one and one half months we're going to be trying to dramatically increase our contributions" Morsman said. "But we also have to hope for an increase in ticket sales, both single and season tickets, as they account for 45 percent of our income."

### Response

"We have been getting a lot of response pouring in and people are making contributions even without being solicited. And there are some possibilities for grants

that we're looking into," Morsman said.

If the money is not raised, it would mean cancelling the April opera *La Boheme*.

It would also possibly mean the end for opera in Omaha because of a loss of face with artists and promoters, he said.

"Right now it's up to the community of Omaha and surrounding areas," Morsman said. "If they want Opera/Omaha to continue, then we need some financial assistance. We're going to give it our all."

## Student brings magic from home

By Cheryl Kisling

Don't be alarmed if you see white doves coming out of Schramm Hall. It's probably 10th floor's local magician, Gayle Becwar, at work.

Becwar, a UNL sophomore, started working with magic when he was about seven years old, he said.

"My dad was always interested in it and pushed me into it also," he said. "Now it is a family thing. Everyone is involved in one way or another."

Every year his family attends a magicians' convention and the Becwars are members in both the Society of American Magicians and the International Brotherhood of Magicians. Becwar said these organizations help magicians get the "recognition they deserve."

While in high school, Becwar took speech and drama classes that have helped him in his magical act.

"Half of a magic is presentation," Becwar said. "I have to relate to the audience because if I don't, I'm not believable and could get booed off the stage."

During the past four years he usually has worked alone but said he often has his sister Janene, who is a UNL freshman, assist him. She gets a chance to perform magic occasionally.

Becwar started doing stage magic but has gradually changed to close-up and seldom turns down a chance to perform. He said he changed his style mainly because it was awkward to constantly run after his dove appearing-box every time someone asked him to do something.

"I used to get nervous about a show, but I finally got to the point where I didn't care if I made a fool of myself," Becwar said. "Sometimes you make mistakes and you just have to expect it, not let it ruin your whole act."

His father used to arrange for professional magicians to stay at his house if they were doing shows in nearby towns. According to Becwar, they would exchange tricks and could add new ones to their family act.

Although he mainly does close-up magic, he says one of his favorite acts is one the famous magician Doug Henning performs—the illusion of the torn and restored newspaper.

"After a performance, people always ask how I did it," Becwar said. "I ask if they can keep a secret and then tell them 'so can I'."



Photo by Jerry McBride

Gayle Becwar