


THE CRY OF THE SANDHILL CRANE



STEVE GROOMS

Courtesy of NorthWord Press, Inc.

Book captures spirit of cranes



"The Cry of the Sandhill Crane"
NorthWord Press

By Mark Baldridge
Senior Reporter

The sandhill crane (*Grus canadensis*) was called the "preacher bird" by early American settlers because its characteristic dance-like antics resembled a preacher leading his congregation.

Preachers must have been a lot different in those days because the sandhills are quite flamboyant in this, their unique courtship ritual.

"The Cry of the Sandhill Crane," just out from NorthWord Press, offers the latest theories about why the birds behave this way, as well as a lot of details about the oldest of all bird species, the crane.

Written by Steve Grooms in easy-to-follow layman's terms, "Cry" is a fascinating book, full of beautiful photos. Although the material covers cranes from around the world, Grooms

focuses on the sandhill, the bird that made Nebraska's Platte River famous.

Some half-million cranes are gathering along the Platte this March, and this book serves as an excellent introduction to the sandhills and an informative guide to the avid crane watcher.

Grooms presents scientific fact in a way that appeals to the aesthetic sense, as well as appeases curiosity:

"Nothing about the sandhill anatomy is as remarkable as its windpipe, or trachea," he writes. "The trachea is a long flexible tube that runs between the throat and chest. Tough, cartilaginous rings keep the trachea from collapsing or binding. There's nothing strange about that. But while a typical adult sandhill might have a neck 23 inches long, its trachea is about 48 inches.

"The first obvious question is: Where are those extra 25 inches? They're located in the chest area, lying in convoluted loops along the sternum under the wing muscles. While the calls of the cranes are often described as 'bugling' or 'trumpeting,' the sandhill's windpipe has more in common with the french horn, a musical instrument that conveys a

sort of moody beauty similar to the effect of crane calls."

Other interesting things about the cranes:

Although they mate for life, young sandhills go through a "dating" period before settling down to raise a family.

As part of the nesting process, adult sandhills paint themselves with silt containing ferrous oxides (rust), matching themselves to the tawny vegetation where they nest. Only one other bird, another crane, stains itself so, and biologists are unable to explain why they do this.

Although at times Groom's prose is a little uneven, and he seems often to be offering the fruits of undigested research, the resulting book is a pleasure to look through.

The photography is excellent, although it might have profited the book more to include fewer pictures. After seeing hundreds of photos of cranes, even the most beautiful photos can begin to cloy.

In all, "Cry" is a beautiful and informative book on these birds so valuable and important to Nebraska.

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Blonde

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Birthday." The six-minute-plus title track shows off Napolitano's pipes and Mankey's distinctive finger-picking style.

Napolitano is still rock's best female vocalist since Chrissie Hynde, so anything she lends her voice to is worth a listen. And for a lot of bands, an album like "Walking in London" would be a respectable offering. It's just that from these guys, we've come to expect a little more.

—John Payne

American Heart Association



Album rages against '90s oppression of women

Reviews



"Little Earthquakes"
Tori Amos
Atlantic Records

"Little Earthquakes," Tori Amos' latest release from the Atlantic Recording Corporation, is going to rock the contemporary music establishment.

Amos is angry. She is furious with a society that sees women only as sex objects and stereotypes women as teases or whores. Her album describes the pain this kind of oppression has caused her and her struggle to overcome this injury.

But Amos is more than an enraged feminist. She also is an excellent musician. She wrote every song on the album. Her arrangements go beyond the standard drums and electric guitars heard on many pop albums. Amos uses violins, mandolins, choirs and even ukuleles to add color to the instrumentation.

In addition, Amos sings every track on the album and often accompanies herself on electric or acoustic piano. She is an excellent pianist. Her style is reminiscent of Elton John or Billy Joel. However, her voice sets her apart from these male musicians. She has a strong alto voice that quavers slightly when she sings loudly.

Amos makes the best use of these musical skills in the track "Winter." It is one of the few ballads on the album. It alludes to the fairy tales little girls are told and how these stories are no preparation for real life. Amos sings that, instead of telling their daughters to wait for a prince, parents should say, "You must learn to stand up for yourself/'Cause I can't



Tori Amos

Courtesy of Atlantic Records

always be around."

Amos examines a similar theme in "Girl." She sings, "She's been everybody else's girl/Maybe one day she'll be her own." The standard rock beat of the piece is the only standard part of the arrangement. The piano, violins and vocals are rich and complex.

The track "Me and a Gun" stands out in stark contrast to the other cuts. Amos quietly sings a capella. The song explains what goes through the mind of a woman who decides not to resist an armed rapist. Amos sings, "Me and a gun and a man on my back/ But I haven't seen Barbados/So I must get out of this."

The album changes pace with "Precious Things." This piece is almost trash. Here the band seems to be reaching for a style it cannot quite

achieve. The song is a tale of the horrors of promiscuity brought on by a lack of self-respect.

Amos gets back on track with "Silent All These Years." She sings about a woman who realizes that she has to be more than a reflection of her boyfriend. The lyrics tell of her surprise when she discovers her own voice. "Sometimes I hear my voice/and it's been here/Silent all these years."

Amos sings like the voice of experience. She recounts the seedy, painful aspects of being a woman in the 1990s. The album is brutally honest, and it can be difficult to listen to. But it contains some important messages and some beautiful music.

—Andrea Christensen

Melomania masters mellow music

Reviews



"The Darkside"
Melomania
BMG

A new English band has hit the scene with a different effect from usual.

The British pop artists of Melomania have managed to record an LP without conforming to the new-wave

British sound made popular by Jesus Jones, EMF and the Happy Mondays.

Nine tracks comprise this release by the English quartet, and the musical arrangements are simply superb.

Although they are terrific and flowing, the first two tracks will take some getting used to. Lead singer Pete Bassman (who, incidentally, plays the bass, too) neglects the fact that his voice blends too well with the music to be heard properly. So the first two tracks come off as more of a warm-up than the rest of the LP.

The band corrects this problem

with the remaining seven songs, and the outcome is excellent. Why they didn't go back and re-record the first two tracks is strange.

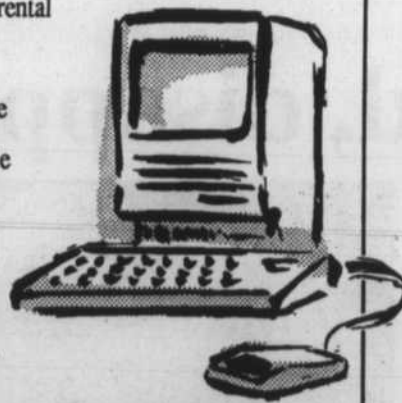
The third track, then, abstractly is the beginning to "The Darkside." Titled "Tornado," the music is driven by a low, buzzing guitar while the vocals repeat, "I've got a tornado in my heart." Although there are no other lyrics to this song, the way Melomania has arranged it works for its purpose, which is to portray a tornado

See MELOMANIA on 11

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