

COMMENT

CONNECTING OUR COMMUNITY VIEWS

The Night of the Living Dead?

Halloween came to North America with the Irish in the 19th century. Called Samhain in Gaelic, the ancient Celtic festival was in an evening towards the end of harvest that served a similar purpose as pesticides do today. People believed that on Samhain the dam between the realms of the living and dead broke, releasing evil spirits into our world to spread disease to people, crops and livestock. To appease the spirits, people would dress up like them. It got its name from the calendar as it used to occur on the eve of Christian All Saint's Day, which was previously called All Hallows' Day in honour of the sanctified dead.

The imagery surrounding Halloween today is a version of the old themes of death and magic processed through years of use by migration, marketing and filmmaking. The jack-o-lantern tradition combines the North American harvest crop with ancient symbolism of the head as vessel for the spirit. Legend has it the devil put a curse on a clever farmer for tricking and trapping him in a tree carved into a cross. The spell condemned the farmer to wander forever at night with nothing but a turnip with a candle inside for light. Many of the old motifs are still active today; ghosts, black cats, skeletons and witches.

The witch theme in particular has resonance in both the deep past and shallow present. 'Witch' has traditionally been a term put to misunderstood women; everyone from pagan lay healers that a

Christian, male-centred medical profession wanted to suppress to prostitutes. The witchhunts and burnings of the 1700s in Europe and North America attest to the severity of certain beliefs and the power thought to be harnessed by these dangerous, bewitching women.

Halloween is closely tied to the ancient pagan rituals of witchcraft, superstition, afterlife and the nether-regions of human consciousness. On a holiday steeped in superstition and the personification of death, it's meaningful that we wear costumes and release ourselves from our daily identities as we set forth into the charged October evening.

And if you go out on Halloween night, wade through the waist-high waves of sugar-hungry ghosts, zombies and princesses, through the barroom doors and into the softly poisoned watering-hole, you'll see the new era of witchcraft at work: a slur of young barely-dressed women hooping the attentions of men. Women costuming themselves in their own skin, as if their own bodies were an identity available to them only in the anonymity of Halloween.

Which is what costuming is: whether in religious ceremony or rites of passage, it's a release from your daily identity into a chosen one that reveals a shadow side of what you are, or want to be.

And so many women use Halloween



Colleen Sanders
Taber Times

night as an opportunity to wear as little as possible in public that it warrants consideration. It takes a strong act of will to go out near-naked in public on a near-freezing evening. What's being expressed in this phenomenon? Is it just good old-fashioned sexual opportunism, or is it something deeper, something about culture and gender that isn't as obsolete as we'd like to think, baptized in freedom as we North Americans are?

On a night when you're supposed to dress up like something other than what you are, women go out naked. I can't help but see that as a misguided, desperate cry for recognition. As a female in a society that, while granting a breed of freedom to women, still claims their bodies and self-images through hypersexualized portrayal with a marketing scheme that puts the appeal to masculine attention as the bottom line.

Freud said that what we repress in ourselves will surface inevitably and with double the force. And while this culture's hypersexualization of women would seemingly relieve women of their need to be valued on that scale, it's not their true sexuality being marketed. You can't market intimacy, you can only market aggression and competition. The feeling gets reduced. It's almost as if women's liberation isolated women from an older understanding of

themselves they still require to be secure. It offered the facade of treating men and women the same; meaning treating women as men. The part of womanhood that was cultivated, distinct, and intentional went underground, where it is still seeking expression, the living dead, surely making an appearance on Halloween night.

I don't want to rain moral indignation down on these women; I don't have any. I don't want to say that in steadfast North American custom, we've taken a holiday with deep mythological significance and reduced it to its most immediately pleasing and irrelevant form. I don't want to reduce our fun, because Halloween is good, good fun. It's one of the few occasions in this culture we're allowed to play dress-up at all ages and let our minds inhabit magic. Some dress up, some hand out candy, some play games; some get naked like they're going to confession.

Maybe I'm being too sympathetic. Maybe vain exposure is all it is. But that's even more of a loss, because it means what's lurking beneath the surface of many female personalities is little other than the desire for attention and a cheap route to get it. I don't want to say if everyday tight clothes and low cuts aren't enough, there's Halloween to vent all that pent-up sexual vanity and misplaced power politics. All I want to say is that it's a chance to dress up as something fun and original and go out and play that gets wasted on another boring grown-up dysfunction.

Taber Takes

A weekly look at the world through the lenses of the cameras of our readers

Photo submitted by Cpl. Pierre Purcotte



Reading at sea

Leading Seaman Wren Danforth, a Taber native, takes time out to read his hometown newspaper, even while on a mission on his ship, the HMCS Protecteur.

Lofaro labours to create a consistent sound

Toronto-grown singer-songwriter Clara Lofaro recently released her third record on ComeTrue Records, a label she founded while studying at Berklee College of Music. The 11 tracks on *perfect world* were recorded in New York City by Mark Turrigiano, who also did *juno* (synthesizer), guitar, and back-up vocal tracks on the album. Lofaro sings and plays piano, while an entourage of musicians back her up with bass, drums, and trumpet.

The tones of the songs oscillate in between radio-friendly sentiments of sympathy for anyone having to live in this remarkably unperfect world and a self-con-



Colleen Sanders
Music Minute

structed edge seen mostly in songs like *Bitch Go Off* and *No Way Home*, where Lofaro chronicles her outsider status, "You don't want to marry me, I'm not the kind of girl to give birth to a family to leave them insecure... I live my life too fast."

The cleanliness of the recordings gives a polish that contradicts the edge she's going

for in some songs but pays off in other areas with well-delivered instruments. The blurry jazz-lullaby piano suits the melancholic spirit developed especially on the latter half of the album, which slows down considerably after a strong three-track start where interesting, layered arrangements welcome the listener.

Birds of a Feather has a dreamer's narrative backed by urban electric guitar and catchy vocal percussion. The melody lines follow a fluid jazz ethic trained around folk returns; they begin and end reliably but go exploring in the space between. "It's a hard line to keep humming," she sings alongside chimney piano in a soulful delirium.

Bitch Go Off, the second track, shares a similarly intentional texture. The vocals are a jazz-hiphop hybrid, and the song is driven mostly by the percussion there and in the drums. A theme emerges here that will dominate the rest of the album: the picture of an artist emerging from a painful past, and the music being unable to decide between exploring the old emotions and inventing a new future. Recurring throughout the album are words like "crossroads," "heart," "world," and "crawl."

Track three, *No Way Home*, starts slow and delivers in the second half (the opposite of the album structure, which starts hard and fizzles out). *No Way Home* is Lofaro at the height of her songwriting confidence. The song holds up with a cyclical lyric structure with catchy hooks and simple lyricism ("I sing for my mother, I live off your cash").

At first, the centrality of the vocals in the mix pulls off amongst the careful arrangements. As the album goes on, however, the level of instrumentation decreases and the songs lean towards sparser piano ballads. It's not that she put two different albums on one record — the songs are related by theme. It's that arrangements of individual songs and the order of songs on the CD is such that the energy is imbalanced, and the lull in energy after the first three tracks leaves the listener to rely more heavily on the vocals for sustenance. Lofaro has a mid-to-low range, smooth vocal style. It's malleable as it shifts through folk directness, rock angst, jazz warbling and R&B new-age coffee-row-soul twang that savours vowels and twists pronunciation for effect.

Waterfall begins with a reverbed, low-attack piano with big floor toms and distorted guitar, singing, "I bleed for you from this seedy room." The tension pours into an anthemic radio-singalong chorus, saying, "Will you catch me when I'm falling, give me something to hold onto?" The song serves as a slow-down into *Blue*, which is a minimalistic piano piece that takes liberties on the listeners' attentions and sympathies.

The title track *perfect world*, has a solid synth riff backing the piano, giving it a welcome persuasiveness. "What don't love you will make you stronger; now I'm stronger than a brick." The video for the title track nods to her collaboration with Action Against Hunger, juxtaposing shots of starving black children with shots of her in a red coat singing "It's not fair to say it's easy to be who I am" along ethnic city streets.

A self-titled indie-pop artist, Lofaro's Web site contains an extensive bio proclaiming her mission to create change through music. She emphasizes her "independence of spirit" translating into her pioneering approach to music. "I've always been the most popular girl in class because of who I am, not because of how I dress or how I look. I'm definitely not affected by trends in music."

Going on to cite Amy Winehouse and Annie Lennox as kindred musicians, she defines lasting music as a blending of old tradition and new style. It's a mandate to windowshop amongst other musical traditions, the most predominant on this album being R&B jazz, heard most in the melodies and drums.

Perfect world is pop that embraces pop's whims and conventions but attempts to achieve political relevance on top of the emotional, relationship-themed core. "Where did we go wrong believing in this perfect world where our mothers and daughters were perfect girls?"

Most of the songs have sturdy construction—they build up and tear down and play with tension in a dynamic way. Smooth timbre, clean jazz-framed instruments, washy piano, electric guitar and chimes lace through for emphasis and sometimes give the tracks a playful feel. The arrangements are quite intelligent and mature, appropriate to an artist three albums into her career. The songwriting appeals to the listener's sympathy, making it an album that wants to believe love is what the world needs to explain itself. Unsure of that outcome, and considering Lofaro's tenacity, it's likely we'll be seeing a follow-up in the near future.

Library fundraising still ongoing

After a long hiatus, welcome back to our latest edition of Books 'n' Bits.

We'd like to bring everyone up to date with what has been happening in your library! We recently had our patrons complete an in-house survey that is a requirement of the Libraries Branch in Edmonton in order for us to receive our annual government funding.

The survey asks questions pertaining to the various services this library provides i.e., Library staff knowledge/helpfulness, hours of opening, information services, electronic resources, collection materials, etc. We would like to thank those patrons who filled out the surveys and we truly appreciated the comments given. Hopefully, this edition of Books 'n' Bits will serve to better inform the public of what our library provides on a day-to-day basis.

Taber Public Library is one of 32 libraries in the Chinook Arch Regional Library System (CARLS). Taber is the second largest library in the system after Lethbridge. The Chinook Arch Regional Library System provides numerous services to its member libraries. The majority of these services fall into the following categories: Materials and Collections, Technical Services and Information Services, Delivery and Communication, Resource Sharing, Programs and Services, Training and Consultation. Our association with Chinook Arch Regional Library System also allows us to participate in The Alberta Library (TAL). Many of the services we provide to the public are certainly enhanced because of our

Books 'n' Bits

Taber Public Library

involvement with CARLS. Each year, the library receives funding from the provincial government (the figure we receive is based on population), our local government and the MD of Taber. The library does generate a small income from memberships, fines and the rental of our program rooms. Each year the Library Board submits a budget that insures funds are in place to allow us to provide the services that many of you have come to rely on. Because libraries have not had an increase in provincial funding for the past 15 years, it has become more difficult for libraries to increase library hours, hire more staff, provide more electronic resources (computers for the public to use) increase their collections, or provide more programming. Our present goal is to maintain the services we now provide and hopefully the government will come up with more funding for libraries across Alberta.

Even though we are in our new building, fundraising for the library is always ongoing. We have our annual Christmas Jingle Craft Sale and Silent Auction scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 15 from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Taber Community Centre. Items for the "silent auction" will be on display at the Taber Library two weeks prior to the event. Admission is \$2 per person, and children 12 and under are free. All children must be accompanied by an adult.

For more information about Taber Library please visit our Web site at www.taberlibrary.ca, or you can contact the library during opening hours at 403-223-4343.