Concert:
Randy Newman is realistic

By Jay Pollack

Don't send me no one with glasses.
Don't send me no one above me.
Just send me someone to love me.

Please answer my prayer.
Please answer my prayer.

Now who would write lyrics like that? Practically no one, and why is that? Because they are too obviously realistic. That's right. They're not tremendously poetic or idealistic or any of that stuff. They're just plain old practical, which is why you won't see too much like them. The only person who can write songs with such stark realism is Randy Newman. He's virtually alone in this. And his unique ability makes him one of the most important songwriters around today.

Randy Newman gave a solo concert in Sanders Theater at Harvard last Friday. Altogether he performed about thirty of his songs, and the crowd cheered him back for several encores. On his albums, there are sometimes small backing groups (including the likes of Ry Cooder and some of the Byrds) or a full orchestra. Live, he is alone in the piano. The difference is rarely noticeable.

Structurally, most of his songs are simple. Most of them have a Hollywood, pop flavor to them, which makes them highly adaptable. As a matter of fact, a good portion of his fame comes from the cover versions of his "Mama Told Me Not To Come" and "I Think It's Going To Rain Today", both of which songs are done better by Randy himself. It is strange to think of some of his songs which have bizarre lyrics as being catchy, but they are. Listen to "Yellow Man", which is as Randy tells it, "a pessimistic description of Red China". Sung straight by anybody else, the lyrics are embarrassing ("Eletrico all day! As the children play/You see, he believes!/ In the family! Just like you and me! He keeps his money tight in his hand/With his yellow woman, he's a yellow man") but Randy can charge straight ahead and do it without batting an eyelash.

The thing which sets Randy apart from any number of "blues" singers is the unmistakable middle-class tone to his material. Musically, it could be marginally related to the blues, but the lyrical content is entirely different. He sings of an obscure phone-caller, a lonely gas station attendant, a misplaced cowboy, people about whom nobody else would think to write a song. Such people are all around us. And we have only Randy Newman to thank for portraying them in music as accurately as he does.

He has three albums out, the last of which is an excellent sampling of a live concert. He will captivate you once you have heard him, but not enough people have. You shouldn't be deprived of Randy Newman for another minute.

Prof. Gurney receives Drama Desk Award

By Paul Schidler

Associate Professor Albert R. Gurney, Jr. is one of the four most promising playwrights of 1971. This is the opinion of the MIT Professor which is held by New York theater critics, who honored Gurney with a Drama Desk award recently in New York City. The award was given for Gurney's "Scenes from American Life", a play which Honest Life and Times, past, present, and possible future of a group of people in his home town, Buffalo.

Scene was first perfomed at Tanglewood by the B.U. Playwrights Workshop last year. During the fall five performances were given here at MIT by the Buffalo Arena Theatre. After that, the play went to the Forum Theater at Lincoln Center in New York, for an intended three-week run. Its popularity was such that it was held over for another two weeks. Consideration in now being given for a British production of the play.

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