

Trouble is a Lonesome Town

Nick Cave: Can I Get a Witness

by Richard Langston

I rang Nick Cave and his mother answered.

"Ne-eeek it's for you."

Minor noise, the Voice. Introduction, request. "Erm... well... I'm not really doing interviews at the moment, don't like them, don't really see the point..."

Thinking silence. "It's the time really, Erm. Maybe after tomorrow's reading. Yeah, we'll work something out." Polite.

Time. Nick Cave, musician, and this year to debut as actor and writer. He is in his hometown of Melbourne putting the final touches to his first novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel* and a soundtrack to a local independent movie *Ghosts of the Civil Dead*, a movie Cave helped write and in which he appears as a misfit prisoner. A collection of his stories, poetry, lyrics and drawings is out under the title *King Ink*—"one of the most important Birthday Party songs."

Cave and the Bad Seeds were also featured in Wim (Paris, Texas) Wenders' latest movie *Wings of Desire*, recently screened at the Wellington and Auckland film festivals. And soon, you'll be able to hear a new album from the band, their fifth, just completed.

Oh yes, Nick Cave, the zonked-out, decadent, lazy, drunken bum.

Cave spent last year holed-up in Berlin (where he has lived these past three

years) working on his novel, apparently a sizeable 500 pages or so. These days he is liable to refer to his early days with the Birthday Party as his "salad days," and realises that some people are going to have trouble taking Nick Cave, the Writer, seriously.

"There's nothing I can do about that except forget about it and make the book the best I possibly can," he told one interviewer. "I mean, people's basic image of me is pretty incredible."

He says the book's ideas came to him five years ago and he has worked on it intermittently for the last three.

Today he is reading extracts to a Melbourne student audience. He is good-humoured and you can sense he is comfortable and he reads well to the accompaniment of bleak, gurgling music. People listen.

The reading is in perfect contrast to one a few days earlier at a rock venue where Cave is uncertain, dismissive.

"A half hour of this and we can all go home."

It smacks of the Circus, the Bullshit: the I Saw Nick Cave Read and Fall Down Drunk scene.

Wipe the crud and go to work. Clearing of throat, are we ready out there?

In a slow drawl we descend into a world of familiar Cave-isms, the lurid, the

grotesque, spun in the language of the Bible and the American South. But there is humour. Black, of course.

We are introduced to the young inbred mute boy, Eucrid, the novel's protagonist. There is slit-eyed, one-eared Pa, his fat, slovenly, bottle-sucking alcoholic mother. There is Jobe the dog, spiders and bugs and insects, molten heat, air that smells like dog's breath, tin-roofed shacks, water tanks and snakes.

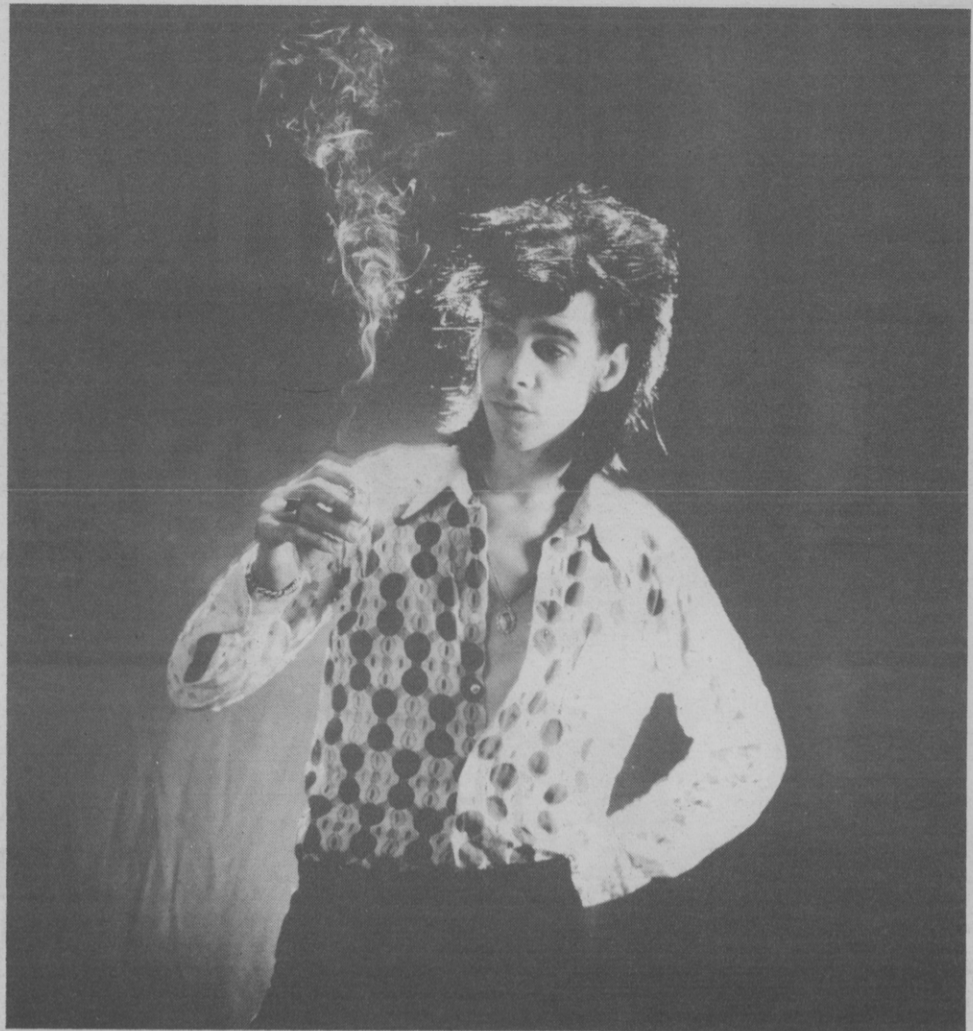
Eucrid's mother lies drunk in the back of an old Chevy while she gives birth. Pa is inside the shack cleaning his cruel, cruel traps, and then plays midwife with "intuition and a piece of broken glass."

Jesus Two, cried Pa, but the First Born snuffs it, true to the song, true to Elvis. There is murder, there is the lurid.

Which can have the ring of Nick Cave playing Nick Cave. Which may not be your cup of junket but there is story telling going on here even if the prose is, by turns, impressive, uneven, or a touch cooked-up.

It is not the surreal babble/poetry past rock musicians and the typewriter have spawned. The story is told by Eucrid and the narrator, who Cave says is a mean-spirited liar, not based on himself but he concedes there are similarities.

We get 45 minutes worth for three dollars.



Thanks, bye, applause.

Cave, the interviewee: Yes, he looks like he could do with a month's sleep, that he and the sun are still not on terms, and he is a little disconnected. A small bottle of whisky is close by. The talk comes slowly. Err-um.

The language you use people associate with the deep South.

"Well, I don't think the language... well maybe the themes of it are like that. I've not

tried to associate with the South as such. There're a lot of Biblical references through the book which I've discovered myself. It's not through any desire to write a Southern kind of novel. The Bible is one of my biggest literary influences, certain sections. I've become more and more interested in the New Testament. I would say Luke is my biggest literary influence."

Is there a Catholic background in there somewhere?

"Well, yes. I don't think the things that you're raised by have a lot to do with the way you end up thinking. I mean as far as I'm concerned the things that have been thrust down your throat as a child and so forth most people find themselves rebelling against in one way or another."

That's being very much influenced by your past...

"Truthfully I wasn't raised a Catholic. It's just that as I've become more and familiar with

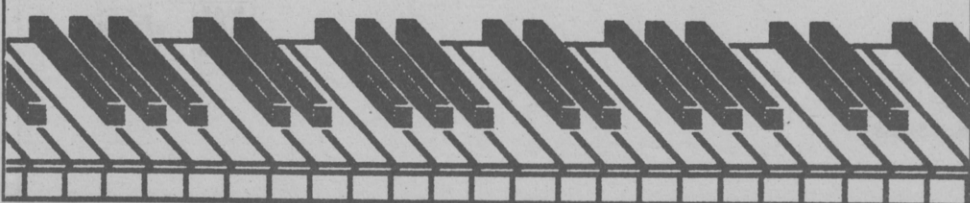
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