Weekend Entertainment

Travolta takes the bull by the horns

CINEMA

AFTER swapping his dancing shoes for a beach-bum's sandals in "Moment by Moment" John Travolta is back with a spring in his step as a hard-nosed honky tonk "hero" in **Urban Cowboy (ABC-4).**

Shown in Derry back in March, "Moment by Moment" went by hour by hour and was all too quickly dismissed as the downfall of jiving John. But in "Urban Cowboy", it seems, he rarely puts a foot wrong.

He plays Bud, a Houston oil worker who escapes after hours to Gilley's bar, the home of honky tonk, where stetson-hatted country cousins really do live out cowboy fantasies, shooting down beers and coming face to face in one hoedown after another.

But the star attraction at Gilley's is a mechanical bull and although Bud's affection for his wife twists and turns his passion for riding the bull never falters.

And that might lead y'all to believe that Bud is a bit of a chauvinist but when he thinks Sissy is making eyes at another mechanical bull hotshot then he's gotta do what a man's gotta do. For Bud, that means throwing her out of his trailer park home.

Through fights and flirtations the movie heads towards a rodeo night climax and Bud gets his gal — heaven help her.

Another man who gives his wife a hard time is Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) in Stanley Kubrick's ultra-expensive horror show **The Shining (ABC-3).**

Torrance, a hard-luck writer, takes on the job of caretaker at the massive and gaunt Overlook hotel, somewhere in Colorado. He is accompanied by his put-upon wife (Shelley Duvall) and son Danny, a cherubic-looking chap with the knack of seeing into the past and future ("Shining").

Danny has a psychic playmate, as horror movie children tend to, and Torrance changes from hack to snowman in a hotel which has a familiar past of murder and mystery.

Nicholson, by the way, carries on as Randle P. McMurphy in **One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest** at the New Vic and Strand 1 (Derry).

Meanwhile, a new disaster movie and another Kung Fu caper are brought together in a double bill which goes on blanket release next week.

Spectacular stuntwork in **City On Fire** attempt to salvage some respect for the much-maligned and ageing disaster movie format — a style being taken off by **Airplane** at ABC-2.

As disasters go, "City On Fire" manages to create unlikely catastrophe around a new hospital.

An embittered oil worker sabotages a power plant, shutting down machinery at a refinery. A house is burning in the city and petrol has leaked from the refinery into the sewers. Whoof, the place is ablaze and manholes belch fountains of flame, cars are wrecked and buildings totter.

Everything goes nicely wrong as the fire chief prepares to evacuate the hospital.

A host of characters provide countless niggling sub-plots and human interest. Ava Gardener plays a drunken newspaper man and Henry Fonda is the fire chief.

The support film, **Jagger Lives,** is not a sales promotion for BL cars but is a martial arts type thriller about an extra-special agent who sets out to crack a case codenamed "The Killing of the Kings".

"City On Fire" is showing at the Avenue, Curzon, Strand 2 (Derry), Tonic (Bangor), Regal (Larne), Playhouse (Portrush) and Astor (Dungannon).

Rude Boy at the QFT is packed with raw energy and rage from the Clash performing, among other songs "White Riot".

Ray Gange plays Ray Gange, a down and out kid who joins the Clash as a roadie but becomes disenchanted with their politics. Containing excellent shots of the Clash in concert, Jack Hezan and David Mingay's picture dispassionately portrays frustration and discontent in Punk era Britain.

Margaret Thatcher, prisons, unemployment, the National Front and race relations are the background for the story of Ray, who jerks to the beat but chokes on the message.

Elsewhere: **The Exorcist** and **Exorcist 2 — The Heretic,** ABC-3; **Love At First Bite,** Comber Cinema; **Private Nurse** and **Make Love With Me,** Rialto (Derry); **Good Guys Wear Black,** Palace (Derry).

Brian Hunter

Belfast is rocking around the clock

ROCK

AS JOE Jackson put it: "If my eyes don't deceive me, there's something going on around here": The Son of Stiff Tour, UB40, The Tourists, The Skids, Siouxie and the Banshees, The Ramones, Hawkwind, Mr. Jackson himself and a whole load of other Rock persons all here in one month.

It will be like Piccadilly Circus at the back of the Ulster Hall within the next few weeks as articulated lorries queue up to deposit their various owners' sound and lighting equipment.

Through the Lext month or so the rock scene at the Ulster Polytechnic should also be lifting off the ground for the first time in the inglorious history of live entertainment at the Jordanstown establishment. New social secretary Ann-Marie Mullan promises a full bag of local and imported acts and regular Poly evenings of fun at different venues in Belfast, including the Art college.

The Queen's scene also looks like moving out of the unrelieved boredom which overtook it in the past two years. In previous years, the Student Union at the University was a hot place for good esoteric rock music, but in the last few years students' musical tastes seemed to veer towards the middle of the road.

Despite the plethora of middle-league rock bands, there so far has been no announcements of the real big names. But, it is fair to say that The Who might be putting on a date here at the start or finish of their forthcoming British tour. Dire Straits are confirmed for January, and loose talk in the streets has it that Eric Clapton might be gracing our shores.

And talking about good old Eric, his former drummer friend, Ginger Baker, may also be paying a visit as people in London have recently seen and heard evidence of him playing with Hawkwind, who have Belfast down on their British tour list.

But, despite the quality and quantity of the visitors to Northern Ireland this year, the local band venues seem to have take a bit of a dive.

Belfast must have reached an all time low. While the city spawned good Punk rock bands in the last two or three years not one entrepreneur seemed awake to the fact that thousands of young people were waiting for the chance to go see any of these bands in half human surroundings.

Maybe now that big crowds are returning regularly to the city centre at night, someone will come up with the bright idea of opening a club.

Meanwhile everyone will be wishing the epitomy of Belfast punk bands, The Outcasts, well as they fly over to Paris, France, for a couple of days of appearances and things. Apparently Les Punques over there have taken to the boys' records in a big way.

The band has also signed a contract with the Energy label which is also the home of one of the most promising bands in England at the moment, Killing Joke.

Also one of the most promising around here at the moment, The Nerves, who come from Newry, are going to release about 12 tracks on a cheap album. Terry Hooley of Good Vibrations Records has been raving in everyone's ears about the truly excellent young band, and he hopes that the label will be able to put out an album of 12.50.

Also Nigel Hamilton, who — while not quite a household name — must have played in more bands than anyone else in Northern Ireland, has formed another band. This one is called Teenarama and they will be playing support to The Ramones at the Ulster Hall next week. The next night, Nigel will be playing in Castlederg without The Ramones.

Jim Cusack

Joe Jackson (centre) and group: Coming soon.

Eddie McIlwaine's SCENE

Frankie aims for the top again

A SNATCH of song he heard on radio could turn out to be Frankie McBride's biggest hit since he recorded the evergreen "Five Little Fingers" 13 years ago.

"I was half-listening to a discussion on the air about John Travolta when the presenter played a few bars of a ballad Anne Murray sings in his new film Urban Cowboy," McBride told me today.

And immediately the man who took "Five Little Fingers" straight into the British charts after an appearance on the Dave Allen television show pricked up his ears.

"I knew after only a few chords that here was another number that could have been written just for me.

"In fact I was so impressed that I immediately drove from home in Omagh all the way to Maluk to persuade George Doherty in the Solomon and Peres studios to get the song for a single disc.

Frankie McBride chart contender.

Just how quickly Doherty worked after agreeing with the star of the Polka Dots band, can be heard next week when the record is released on the Mint Label (Chew 41).

Title of the song McBride believes will take him back into the hit parade is "Could I Have This Dance" with "Gentle To Your Senses" from his album of the same name on the reverse.

After a sneak pre-release listen I think Frankie's judgment is right. It's a lilting, romantic love song nicely ripened for his mellow voice.

One-time music teacher John Anderson has done a superb arrangement which could spend one of Ireland's top cabaret and ballroom artists back into the charts.

"I feel exactly the way I did after recording 'Five Little Fingers'," Frankie confided. "And I'm still asked to sing that oldie every time I go on stage."

Frankie and his wife Anne have a newsagents' shop at Market Street, Omagh, although he still tours extensively on the cabaret and ballroom circuit.

He and the Polka Dots (Artie McClinn steel guitar; Frankie O'Neill, bass; Red Cunningham, lead guitar, Kevin Irwin, keyboards, and Brian Mullan, drums) are off soon on a ten-day tour of England and later in the month they head for the Scottish clubs.

McBride's look alike contemporary Billy McFarland from Ahoghill — the pair are always being mistaken for one another — will carry his cabaret and roadshow career to even newer heights this month with the release of his new album for Homespun.

It's called "Country Songs and Sad Tales" and has tracks of six old Hank Williams numbers including the classic "Be Careful Of Stones That You Throw."

Meanwhile the Alexander Brothers of "Nobody's Child" fame will be back in Belfast for the umpteenth time tonight at the Errigle Inn (7.30 p.m.). The Scottish pair have hardly missed a year here since they first appeared at the late, lamented Empire Theatre back in 1969.

Another Scottish star appearing at the New Vic next Wednesday night is country singer Lena Martell who will be on stage at the Tonic in Bangor next night.

A silent spectacular by a Chaplin

THEATRE

MOST interest next week will centre on the opening at the Grand Opera House, of a spectacular show that has won virtually unanimous acclaim from the British critics and which has yet to generate here the interest that it apparently warrants.

It is **Le Cirque Imaginaire** (The Circus of Make Believe), starring the husband and wife team of Victoria Chaplin (Charlie Chaplin's daughter) and Jean Baptiste Thierree which runs nightly at 8 pm, starting Tuesday.

The Times review concluded, "It is not to be missed" and it has played to full houses virtually everywhere — including the Dublin Theatre Festival this week where tickets for the show were completely sold out at the Gate Theatre from the first couple of days.

Publicity officer Jane Quinn told me during the week that the shows main strength lies in its appeal to audiences of any age — "from eight to eighty."

Victoria Chaplin, Ms Quinn says, performs a variety of incredible mime acts as well as a daunting routine in which she suspends from a tight rope. Said the Daily Telegraph, "Victoria Chaplin can dance, sleep and even hang upside down on the high wire. But more astonishing than her atleticism is her imagination.

"She specialises in transforming her shape, and appears as an enormous beast, or (with the help of a multitude of fans) as an ostrich, a geisha, an ant, an eagle or a moth."

Of her magician husband Jean Baptiste, The Times reviewer wrote: "Often his routines depend not on trick properties but on revealing the mechanisment in commonplace objects; a string of soap bubbles which burst with a metallic chime as he pops them; and the school of paper fish which he puts through a four act tragedy in two minutes flat."

It should be no less an entertaining week at the Arts Theatre where John Rooney's **The Queen's O'Neill** enters its second week. I had the privilege of seeing this show on the opening night and it can only be described as historical drama at its best.

I will be very surprised if this excellent play — which tells the story of the Earl of Tyrone's battles and intrigues with the fellows and Queen Elizabeth in the late 16th and early 17th centuries — is not a hit in Dublin, London and Broadway. It is a production that breaks new ground and must be strongly recommended. This three hour play begins in the Arts Theatre each evening at 7.45 pm.

I am hoping to see Martin Sherman's play **Bent** when it enters its final week at the Lyric on Monday (8 pm). As Lyric assistant administrator Robert Hutchinson reminded me during the week, this play deals with the persecution of homosexuals in Nazi Germany. Robert pointed out that the play is particularly topical since its production in Ulster coincides with the European Commission on Human Rights judgment on the law on homosexuality here.

Said Robert: "Love story or hate story? Ar or propaganda? Whatever the answers to these questions about 'Bent' it does show what the despising and rejecting of sexual minorities can lead to."

The St. Dorothea's Players are performing a new play in the Group Theatre next week (Monday-Saturday, 8 pm). The stage version of a film starring James Stewart, it is called **Harvey,** an amusing comedy in which a grown man claims a bizaare friendship with a six feet tall white rabbit. His family try to have him committed to an asylum but their plans rebound.

Martin O'Brien

Sounds of Scandinavia

CLASSICAL

THE music of Scandinavia and England provide effective contrasts this week, and I start with a record entitled Scandinavian Music, which offers a good blending of pieces which are mostly very familiar. It comes from Decca and features the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, directed by Neville Marriner (ZRG 877. Also on cassette).

The programme starts with an eloquent account of two Grieg Elegiac Melodies ("Last Spring" is particularly effective), and the popular Dag Wiren Serenade, of which the March achieved fame as a signature tune, is finely rhythmical and well presented.

Less often heard, the three-movement "Rakastava" suite by Sibelius is well worth getting to know, while the "Valse Triste" is here heard in the version Sibelius made for small orchestra. A little lacking in the eerie atmosphere inherent in the music, perhaps, but like everything else on this disc, immaculately played.

Nielsen's Little Suite is another worthy performance in this well recorded programme in which the lovely, sombre colouring of much of the music is finely captured.

UNDER the title "English Serenade," Abbey records have brought together an array of English music which makes most attractive listening. The players are the Scottish Baroque Ensemble, directed by the leader, Leonard Friedman (ABY 810).

Despite the 'ensemble's name, I cannot detect anything baroque about the playing, but it is uniformly good and finely disciplined, and the recorded sound is of fine quality.

The bill of fare opens with a very good account of Britten's Simple Symphony, which makes its due effect even if the tempo generally tends to be slowish.

The same can be said of Warlock's delightful Capriol Suite, while the Elgar Serenade for strings comes across beautifully, with no reservations about the choice of speed, which, I felt, slightly inhibited my favourite number in the Warlock, "Pieds-en-l'air."

The novelty on this record is Malcolm Williamson's "Six English Lyrics," likeable settings that frequently nod towards Quilter, Parry and others. Not very original music, perhaps, but as sung by Yvonne Lea, a mezzo who is clearly destined for fame, these are beautiful and interesting performances.

The sonic splendour and full impact of Tchaikovsky's 1812 overture can be enjoyed on an RCA re-issue of the 1968 recording by the New Philharmonia Orchestra with the Central Band of the Royal Air Force (Gold Seal GL 43924, £2.99. Also Cassette).

The difference between this version and others is that the conductor, Igor Buketoff, uses the Ambrosian Singers very effectively in the opening hymn "Save O God, Thy People" and also towards the end, while the folk song featured in the overture is touchingly sung by the children's choir.

I imagine that side two will exert a strong pull since it offers choral music by Rachmininov otherwise unobtainable, as far as I am aware.

They are, Three Russian Folk Songs, most attractive music finely sung by the Ambrosian Singers and the "Spring Cantata" (sung in Russian) in which the baritone soloist is John Shaw. Altogether, very attractive music worth acquiring apart from the novelty of the 1812 overture.

ANYONE on the look-out for very good performances of Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsodies in their orchestral guise, the budget priced re-issue by Philips of a recording made by Antal Dorati and the London Symphony Orchestra can be well recommended. (Festivo 6570.140. Also on cassette).

Side one offers No. 1 in F minor, No. 2 in D minor and No. 5 in E minor. On the reverse side is No. 3 in D, No. 4 in D minor (arr. Müller-Berghaus), and No. 6 in D.

Rathcol

John (and little John) say it with flowers

COUNTRY

JOHN GREER junior, a dreamy-eyed five-year-old, played a part in finding a title for his dad's sentimental new Homespun album.

The little boy with big romantic ideas was asked which was his favourite song on this winner of an LP.

No' only did he plump for the slow, sad ballad "Roses For Mama" but he thought it should be the overall title of the record.

The Downtown Radio presenter backed his child's judgment, stopped searching for a catchy name and arranged to have a picture of both John Junior, complete with roses, on the front of the sleeve.

"If my son John is making the sun shine on this new production," Greer told me. "Advance sales are great and the album is only released today."

But "Roses For Mama" is already being hailed as the album of the year in Ireland . . . and that took more than luck.

Silky-voiced Greer needs to ape no one, yet on at least one track he sounds uncannily like the late Jim Reeves when he sings "Nothing Sure Looks Good On You." And its a compliment to mistake any voice for that of the late superstar.

There are other pieces like "Daddy's Eyes" and "The DJ Cried" — already a favourite of Big Trevor Campbell — which pull at the heart strings.

The backing from accomplished musicians is haunting as Greer makes a huge and significant impact with the most important recording of his career.

Homespun Records are so impressed by the way the album is being received that a single featuring "Roses For Mama" with "The DJ Cried" on the flip is being pressed.

And I know John is already at work on a country gospel LP which will be followed soon by an Irish country production.

Away from the recording studio and off the Downtown air with his Sunday programme "Keep It Country" (7-9 p.m.) Greer relaxes at home in Moira with his wife Jacqueline and their family Cathy, 9, John, 5, Jo-Ann 3½ . . . writing country songs.

In fact, deep voiced Gene Stuart from Donaghmore, has a Greer composition — "Nothing What Makes A Country Song" — on the flip of his new release label single of which the topside is the Hank Thompson oldie "Bring Back The Waltz."

Stuart is hard at work on a Christmas waxing. What's the betting that a Greer number will be on that disc too?

"I Believe In You" (MCA Label, MCF3077) is a vintage Don Williams album which will make us think back wistfully to the several times he visited Belfast in concert.

We're left with the memories and a handful of songs many of which were penned by the talented Bob McDill in Nashville.

Will he ever bring his Stetson back to Belfast?

Which brings me to the fact that we are now entering international Country Music Month which is being celebrated here by the opening tonight of The Round Up Club at The Huntsman in Castle Street, Newtownards.

At The Round Up you can enjoy good c 'n' w music with resident DJs Pat Coyle and Tom Jones who are well known on hospital radio.

Meanwhile Boxcar Willie, already a favourite in the city is returning to the Ulster Hall on November 5 along with Jean Shpard and Second Fiddles as part of the 18th Belfast Festival.

This is the first time country has featured in the plans of director Michael Barnes.

THE CHARTS

COUNTRY TOP 20 ALBUMS

1 — Philomena Country — Philomena Begley.
2 — Country Gentleman — Jim Reeves.
3 — Crystal Gayle Singles Album.
4 — I Believe In You — Don Williams.
5 — Kenny Rogers Singles Album.
6 — Willie Nelson/Ray Price.
7 — Charlie Pride Golden Collection.
8 — Collectors Hank Williams Vol. 3.
9 — Kenny — Kenny Rogers.
10 — King Of The Road — Roscoe Willis.

TOP 20

1 Don't Stand So Close to Me — Police
2 Masterblaster — Stevie Wonder.
3 My Old Piano — Diana Ross.
4 D.I.S.C.O. — Ottawan.
5 Bad Girl Treasures — Madness.
6 I Got You — Split Enz.
7 Johnny and Mary — Robert Palmer.
8 One Day I'll Fly Away — Randy Crawford.
9 Rock and Roll To Me — Billy Joel.
10 Feels Like I'm In Love — Kelly Marie.
11 Love Times Love — George Benson.
12 Killing On The Loose — Thin Lizzy.
13 Modern Girl — Sheena Easton.
14 Start — Jam.
15 These Little Birds — Bob Marley.
16 Eighth Day — Hazel O'Connor.
17 It's Only Love — Elvis Presley.
18 Trouble — Ian Gillan.
19 Arrival — Mike Oldfield.
20 All Out of Love — Air Supply.

Supplied by Smyths for Records

Ballinascreen keeps up a tradition

FOLK

NO BETTER town to launch a folk column with than Draperstown, up there in south Derry, and convenient to my favourite Irish valley, the Glenelly.

They have a thriving historical society there which goes under Draperstown's old name, Ballinscreen, which is itself generally assumed to be the setting of that lovely traditional song "The Verdant Braes of Screen."

Anyway, the Ballinascreen Historical Society recently launched a book of ballads by two former local poets, George Barnett (1876-1965), and John Kelly (1884-1944), and a very commendable publication it is. Full marks to chairman Pat Loughrey and his enthusiastic band of helpers.

They launched the book in great style a couple of weeks ago with the poet Seamus Heaney coming back to his own part of the country along with folk singer David Hammond to help do the honours.

The book is entitled "The Wee Black Tin" and it takes its name from one of the Barnett ballads.

Every folk music fan, go to the society for getting these rhymes into a collection, thus ensuring their preservation.

Lack of space prevents me from publishing one of them in its entirety, but I liked this verse from George Barnett's "Tonagh Hill" and, in particular the last line:

"So mighty tools were brought along, to push, to dig, to swing,
No house or hedge could check their work, nor any other thing,
Paul Crilly's hedge went with the rest, his heart is filled with woe,
For the road is high before his door and his house is standing low."

Anyway, "The Wee Black Tin" was accorded a baptism which was as long as it was memorable. I know because I was lucky enough to be there and I saw the sun rise over Slieve Gallion.

The book is excellent value for £1 and you can get a copy from Graham Mawhinney, 144 Sixtowns Road, Owenreagh, Draperstown (£1.25, including postage).

Liam Farrell: Going on tour

I have news this week of what sounds like an interesting series of lectures to be given by that tireless folk enthusiast, John Mouldens, up in Ballycastle.

John, who edited the excellent collection of Sam Henry songs, published by Blackstaff Press, will host ten meetings in Ballycastle primary school on the subject, "Traditional Music and Song."

He tells me he will be giving an introduction to the various forms of folk music, particularly the English-speaking tradition.

The first of the talks is at 7.30 next Thursday and they will continue every week at that time. The final get-together will be an informal music session.

Enrolment fee for the course is £4, and John can be contacted at 21 Morrison Park, Portrush.

It is good to see two Ulster names on the COE party which leaves on Monday for the annual concert tour in the United States and Canada.

They are Liam Farrell, the banjo player, from Tyrone, who now lives in London, and Jim McKillop, the well-known fiddle player from the glens of Antrim.

This year the tour will be visiting the west coast of America for the first time. San Francisco won't know what's hit it.

Finally, since this is my first column, just a note to say that I would be glad to hear from anyone who is running a session, concert, come-all-ye, or whatever, and wants it noised abroad a bit. I'll try to give everyone a mention. All right?

Neil Johnston

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