

# Fuck music

## Sexy hard rock band Sparrows Point releases new EP

by Adrian Roberts

Tight leather pants. A guitar thrust out provocatively from the crotch. Gorgeous long hair whipping about. Smoke billowing out from the stage. And powerful music that sounds louder than God. This is what a rock 'n' roll show used to be about: sexy spectacle, frenzied energy, and shameless entertainment. Sparrows Point has not forgotten.

Although seemingly anachronistic in this day and age of sensitive musicians where "it's all about the music, man," Sparrows Point make no apologies for their old-school stage antics. And their powerful live show proves it. Watching these local hard rockers, you just might feel a little displaced, feeling as if you're standing up close at a really huge arena show, instead of at a small San Francisco club. And that's exactly how lead singer Sean Cip likes it.

"For five dollars, you're getting a show you wish you'd see when you pay your \$30 to go see any of these dinosaur rock bands," claims Cip. "Because what we don't have in million-dollar lighting rigs we make up for in energy! Behind all the smoke and the lights and whatever else we drag out on stage, Sparrows Point still gives one of the biggest and most aggressive rock 'n' roll shows around. We're like this demented little metal version of Cirque du Soleil.

"There's contorting body parts and sweat, and we always end up getting cut while we're on stage, 'cause we're always bashing into each other. And it's not planned at all. It just happens. We just get out there and the emotion kind of takes over. When I get off stage I've probably lost five pounds in sweat. My body is bruised, and I don't even remember what just happened half the time."

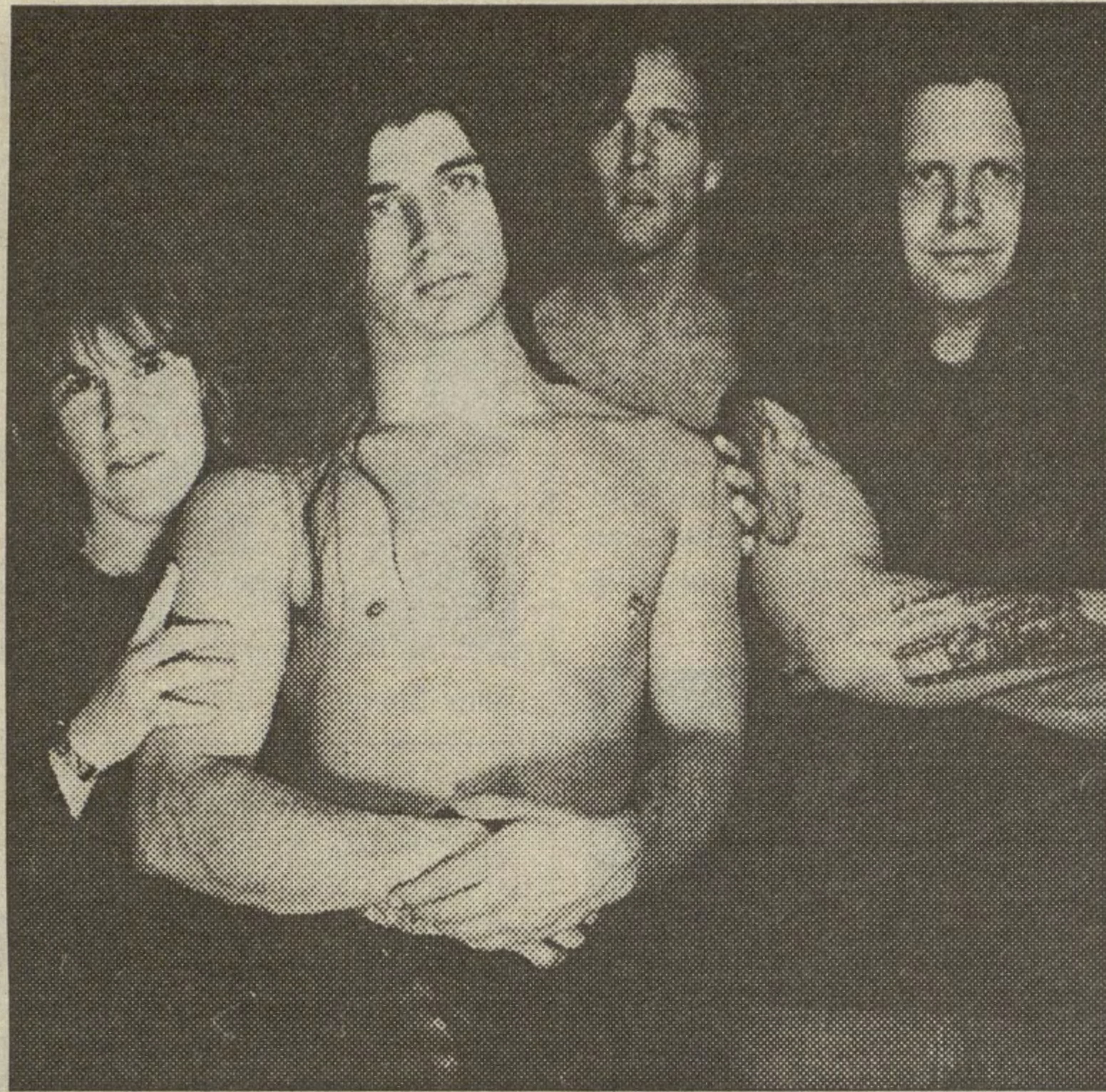
Despite the inherent entertainment value of the sort of frenetic

rock show that Sparrows Point puts on, it's not all shallow posturing. Their songs pack a wallop, with guitarist Kenny Stoned and keyboardist Margrit Eichler writing powerful, crunchy hooks to complement Cip's tortured, provocative, and often sexual lyrics.

### Sex soundtrack

"All our songs tend to be either extremely sexual or really angry," explains the bisexual Cip. "Those are two of the strongest emotions there are, and that's sort of what I base my whole life on. I mean, rock is about sex — it's the soundtrack to fucking! It's very primal."

Take the throbbing "What's Next" for instance, the first track off their brand new EP, *Silence Makes A Sound*. "It's a 'fucking' song," exclaims Cip. "You hear yourself sliding in and out on that song! But mostly, it's about an S/M trip. That's more where I come from, personally. I'm really into fetish sex. I honestly believe that pain is the final frontier of sexuality. Pain involves such trust. It's everything that love is supposed to be. When you're playing



Sparrows Point: Margrit Eichler, Sean Cip, Chris McGrew, Kenny Stoned

with pain, you have all these emotions that you're supposed to have when you're in love."

*Silence* is a marked improvement over last year's debut release, *Throwing Rocks At God*, owing

much to the band's frequent gigging over the past year. The group sounds tight, assured, and focused. Cip is pleased with the results. "This is the kind of shit that you're either going to pump your fist to," he says, "or have sex to." Although, with only three tracks on the EP, even Cip admits that it would probably have to be a quickie.

It's Sparrows Point's live show, however, that really proves the band's ability to kick ass. "We're trying to bring the entertainment back to music," says Cip. "Because I think a lot of bands took their shit so seriously that it just ended up not being very much fun. I mean, it's great that Bono and Eddie Vedder want to change the world or whatever, but I just want people to have a great time." ▼

Sparrows Point's record release party takes place this Saturday, January 2, at the Paradise Lounge, 11th & Folsom Streets, at 10 p.m. Cover is \$5. For more information, call 861-6906.

# The divine Ms. M's

## Two legends returned in '98

by Gregg Shapiro

Two of the most eagerly anticipated discs of the year came from two true legends of popular music. Joni Mitchell's and Bette Midler's fans have pretty much known what to expect on each of these diva albums over the course of their lengthy (30 years and 26 years respectively) and illustrious recording ca-

reers. There have been the occasional forays into the forgettable (Mitchell's *Mingus*, Midler's *For The Boys* soundtrack), forgivable because we know that an artist has to experiment in order for her to grow and become that much more perfect.

*Taming The Tiger* (Reprise) by Joni Mitchell and *Bathhouse Betty* (Warner Brothers) by Bette Midler are no exceptions to these rules. Both albums find both

women returning to familiar ground, while continuing to broaden their respective grasps. For example, for twenty-five years, Joni Mitchell's albums have had certain constants (personal and political songwriting, a subtle jazz influence, a rock influence à la "Raised On Robbery," and the occasional cover tune, to name a few) that can all be found on *Taming The Tiger*.

The same holds true for Midler. You know that you can count on a retro number or two, comic relief, and inspired covers of songs by both well-respected and up-and-coming songwriters, and you can find all of those things on *Bathhouse Betty*. In fact, Midler opens *Bathhouse Betty* with a stunning cover of Leonard Cohen's "Song Of Bernadette" (which Cohen co-wrote with Jennifer Warnes and Bill Elliot). Midler nails it in her special way, which is why the song that follows, "I'm Beautiful," is such a disappointment. A comedic dance number that was probably perfect for her live performances simply loses something on disc. Redemption comes in the form of "Lullaby In Blue," about a woman who gave up a child for adoption when she was younger, which, ironically enough, was co-written by Cohen's son Adam.

Midler goes Polynesian (she is, after all, a native) on the sweet "Ukulele Lady," but loses her footing on "I'm Hip." She doesn't regain it until her inspired cover of Ben Folds's "Boxing." I advise you to skip "Big Socks," which makes her claim on the song "I'm Hip" a bald-faced lie. All is not lost, especially on the trilogy of songs that close the disc, "That's How Love Moves" (co-written by Jennifer Kimball), the appropriately schmaltzy *One True Thing* movie theme song "My One True Friend" (co-written by Carole King, Carole Bayer Sager, and schmaltz-



Bette Midler

meister David Foster), and the smart "Laughing Matters."

### Overdue honors

Coming four years after her last studio disc (*Turbulent Indigo*) and following her long overdue honors at the Grammy Awards and from *Billboard Magazine* (among others) and induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, *Taming The Tiger* finds Mitchell at her most unaffected. In fact, her phenomenal songwriting and guitar-playing (her guitar sounds like a harp throughout most of this album), combined with her distinctive and evocative vocals, are nothing short of the most logical progression occurring over the course of her more than 15 studio albums.

Wayne Shorter's soprano sax, which has been a presence on Mitchell's albums for more than twenty years, is back on *Taming The Tiger*. The way it works in tandem with Mitchell's voice and fret-work gives new meaning to music having charms to soothe the savage beast.

Where to begin? "Man From Mars," from the movie *Grace Of My Heart*, has been re-recorded (another version exists on a promo-only cassette of the soundtrack) and, along with "Love Puts On A New Face," "Crazy Cries Of Love," and "Stay In Touch," ranks with the best songs Mitchell has written on the

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After he worked through the night. Rudolph relaxed in our jacuzzi.

Happy Holidays!

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# Reveling in the year's best books

by Deborah Peifer

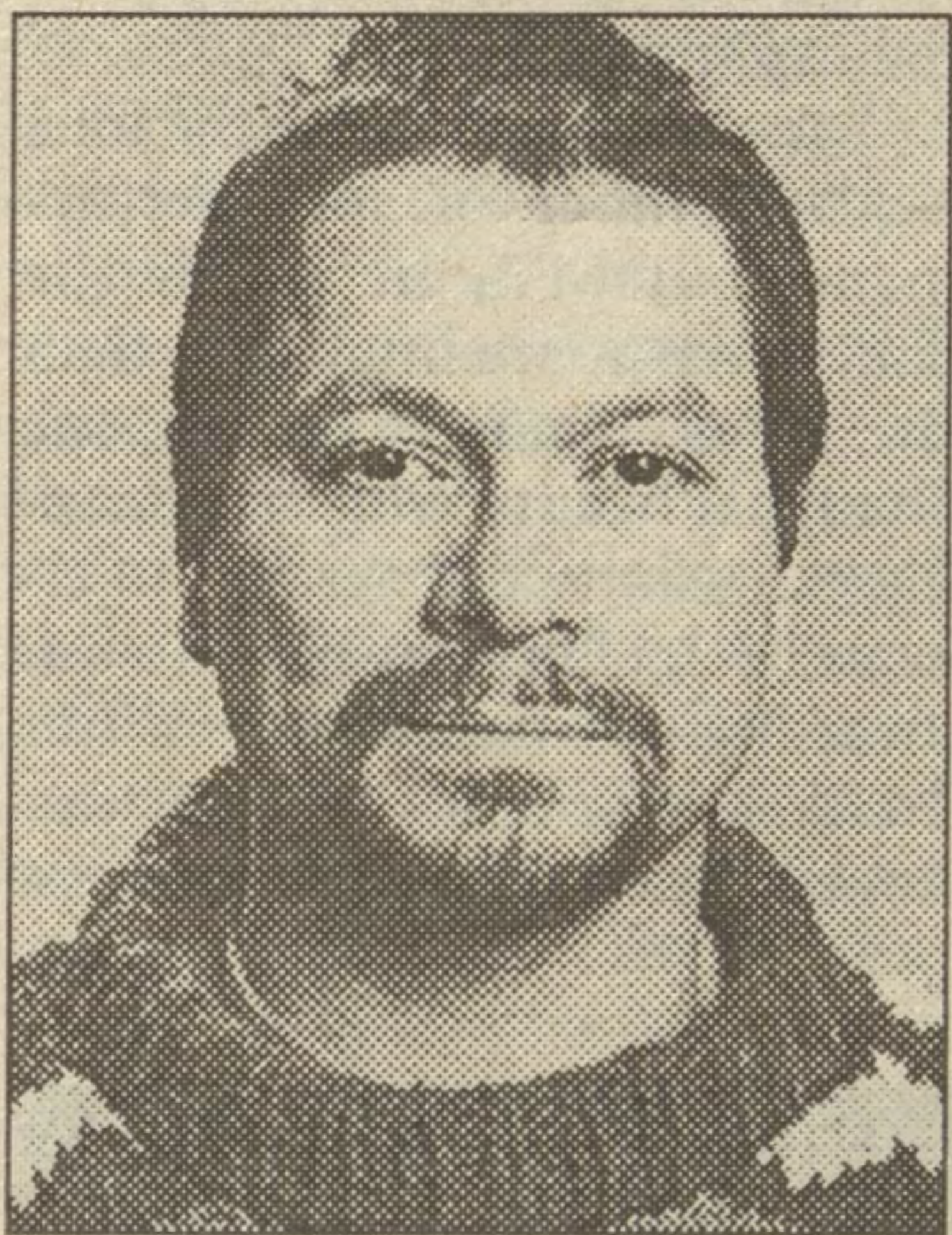
One of the real pleasures of being a critic is compiling the annual top ten list. Of course, one of the agonies of being a critic is compiling a top ten list, but in this rich and rapturous year, the agony involved limiting the list to ten. This was a year of extraordinary first novels, as well as glorious work by seasoned writers. In fact, 1998 was a year for readers to delight in the written word, to savor complex characters, to revel in plots that made us think and feel and celebrate. In selecting ten, I looked for those books I was still thinking about long after I read them, the books I recommended to friends, the books I knew I would reread with pleasure in the years to come.

**Black and Blue** by Anna Quindlen; Random House, \$23

In her astonishing story of Fran Benedetto, Anna Quindlen created vivid characters and terrifying truths as she traced a woman's journey to her own identity. Fran was a battered woman, trying to escape a brutal husband and save herself and her child. This was a stunning novel, one that raised questions about the very notion of self while offering a look at the creation of that self that was painfully personal, potently political. Quindlen's writing was extraordinary, her plotting flawless, her characters unforgettable.

**The Burning Plain** by Michael Nava; Putnam, \$23.95

In his sixth Henry Rios novel, Michael Nava took on questions



Michael Nava

of life and death, heaven and hell, and considered the possibility that we may create our own hell while we live. As with his earlier novels, Nava had much more to offer than diversion, although *The Burning Plain* entertained thoroughly, as he explored what it meant to be gay, to be sexual, to be human.



Dorothy Allison

**Cavedweller** by Dorothy Allison; Dutton, \$24.95.

In her first novel after *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Dorothy Allison created a novel about family and friendship, and most courageous of all, hope and the possibility of redemption. She created characters that lived in the memory and used language with the skill of the poet that she is. A gorgeous novel, filled with the real details of lived lives, *Cavedweller* was the novel you never wanted to end.



Emma Donoghue

**Hood** by Emma Donoghue; Alyson, \$11.95

Emma Donoghue's novel of loss (the hood of the title refers to

widowhood) was also an affirmation of life and of the joys of loving. She used language with elegance to create memorable characters whose lives were as important to us as our own.



Felice Picano

**A House on the Ocean, A House on the Bay** by Felice Picano; Faber, \$14.95

In his latest volume of remembrance, a memoir that read like a novel, Felice Picano reminded us of the halcyon days, after Stonewall and before the plague, when gay men celebrated their sexuality with ribald enthusiasm and the greatest pleasure, days which we dare not forget. He also allowed us to see the moment when he became a writer, an extraordinary gift to all of us who aspire to the writer's art.

**Love Ruins Everything** by Karen X. Tulchinsky; Press Gang, \$14.95.

Karen Tulchinsky took everyone's worst nightmare (a lover announcing to her partner, "I think we should become non-monogamous") and turned it into a rollicking, sexy, and very funny journey into the heart of relationships, with side trips to government conspiracies and parental angst. She took risks with plot and character and succeeded in making us believe in the possibility of happily ever after.

**Passing Remarks** by Helen Hodgman; Ballantine, \$11

I cannot remember a novel that made me laugh as hard or as often as *Passing Remarks*. Combining sharp observations with real emotions, Hodgman used language with exquisite care and consummate skill to create a novel that pleased on every level.

**Shaman's Moon** by Sarah Dreher; New Victoria, \$12.95

Sarah Dreher's seventh Stoner McTavish mystery was her best yet, a psychological thriller in which Stoner's willingness to believe in magic was the key to the plot, the danger, and the possibility of redemption. Using humor and romance to illustrate her characters' strengths and weaknesses, Dreher gave us a completely credible look at the world that lurks beyond the visible.

**What Girls Learn** by Karin Cook; Vintage, \$13

An extraordinary first novel, *What Girls Learn* was the story of an amazing mother and her two daughters and the ways in which they tried to cope with the mother's breast cancer. Laugh out loud funny, when your heart wasn't breaking, this novel explored mothers and daughters with power and warmth.

**The Wolf Ticket** by Caro Clarke; Firebrand, \$12.95

Caro Clarke's first novel was an extraordinarily engrossing tale of love at first sight in post-war Europe. She created a detailed and historically accurate picture of the ravages of the European war, and gave us characters we will always remember. *The Wolf Ticket* was a realistic romance, and a pleasure to read.

Finally, had I not had a hand in helping Nanci Little find *Odd Girls* Press, I would have included her newest novel, *First Resort*, in this list. My personal involvement aside, however, I do think that *First Resort* is an extraordinary novel, entertaining, touching, funny, sexy, all the things that we love in great fiction. Little's earlier novels, *Thin Fire* and *The Grass Widow*, marked her as a writer of skill and craft. With *First Resort*, she moves to that rarefied level where great writers hang out. ▼

## Joni Mitchell

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subject of love. "Harlem In Havana" elevates Mitchell's tradition of writing story songs from a youthful perspective to a new height, while "Facelift" finds her confronting middle-age with the same style and grace. Politics, both local and international, are given her expert treatment in the back-to-back "Lead Balloon" and "No Apologies," and she is as persuasive as ever.

Since *Court and Spark*, France has also been a recurring theme in Mitchell's songwriting (think of the songs "Free Man In Paris," "In France They Kiss On Main Street," and "Yvette In English"), and *Taming The Tiger* is no exception, as you can hear in the song "Love Puts On A New Face," in which she sings the chorus, "In France they say/Everyday love puts on a new face." The hidden



Joni Mitchell

track "Tiger Bones" fleshes out the Blake-reference-laden "Taming The Tiger," and her cover of "Here's To You" should be her theme song. Here's to you, Joni, for taming the tiger and staying fierce. ▼

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