



STEPHANIE CHARNIKOWSKI

His grimace has the enigmatic depth of mime, or commedia dell'arte—or maybe just a mad old man.

Tony Bird: A Surprising White Voice—from Africa

By Carola Dibbell

While I was waiting for Johnny Paycheck to come out at the Other End this July, a blond, fragile-looking type appeared on stage with a guitar and began to fuss about the amplification. He showed good bones and good breeding, and I was preparing to daydream through a set about a misunderstood refugee from a plastic society when the type went into a sort of spasm, produced a nasal, buzzing voice in an unknown accent, and, with contortions that put 40 years on his face, began to sing about Africa.

I had stumbled on a genuine oddity: a white, African protest singer. Tony Bird was a man with hereditary links to England and emotional ones to southern Africa, working in an American idiom. There was a sheer grotesqueness about his stance and voice—which broke freely into hoots, howls, barks, hums, and falsettos—and at the same time a courtliness that seemed to come not so much from another culture as from another century.

Intrigued, I tracked down his debut album and found it true to his idiosyncrasies: a mixture of folk rusticity, American rhythm and blues, and the lilting, shufflebeat rhythms of African pop. Bird has a gift for vivid lyric and wonderfully simple melody, and an exuberance, even radiance, the more remarkable because it comes edged with a sense of hard historical realities. As a son of former colonists, he belongs nowhere for good reason; he's attached to a place where he should never have been born, and he knows it. If his topical songs describe this complicated situation, his eccentric vocal presence is living evidence, and it puts a distance between his music and the simplifications of so much topical songwriting.

When I spoke with Bird at the beginning of his current promotional tour (he opens for Cathy Chamberlain at Reno Sweeney this week), I asked him how he accounted for his voice. "I've had people laugh and chuck beer cans when I opened my mouth," he admitted cheerfully. "It probably

comes from trying to sound like John Lee Hooker and Hank Williams and failing at both." But the images he evokes, particularly in the half shadows of stage light, aren't from blues or country; his grimace has the enigmatic depth of mime, or commedia dell'arte—or maybe just a mad old man, full of private jokes. If the whole effect seems wildly inappropriate—a gargoyle sings about apartheid?—that's part of the reason it seems right. It makes a comment not unlike the much more conscious one that Garland Jeffreys makes with a blackface mask. The pair of them would make a wonderful double bill, each with his theme of mixed heritage: Jeffreys, half-black, half-white, wondering where he comes from, and Bird, an Englishman from Africa, wondering where he'll end up.

He was born in southeast Africa, in the small, landlocked, and extremely beautiful country of Malawi, 19 years before its independence in 1964. His father was a planter; his mother, who brought him up, worked for the colonial service. He went to boarding schools in the considerably tenser environment of Rhodesia and then, in the old colonial tradition, went to England to complete his education. A shy, sensitive boy with a bad stutter who found the mysterious distinctions of colonial life upsetting without knowing why, he left Africa, as he says, "not a racist but blind."

In England, his education took a different turn. He dropped out of forestry school and wandered down to London, where, in the isolation that city tends to force on foreigners of any race, he forced himself to go out and sing his songs at clubs. Then he took a job on a geophysical survey ship circling Africa—an apt metaphor for his situation. Four years later he asked himself what he was doing there, writing c&w songs with names like "Going Back to Cincinnati," left ship at Madagascar and went home for the first time in 10 years.

"I came back an educated man," he recalled. "I hadn't

VOICE ARTS

What's touching about this artist isn't postcolonial alienation but the old Afro-European encounter, starker because of its fresh setting.

realized that things were so bad." One Saturday night, while hitchhiking near Salisbury, Bird walked into a classic colonial nightmare when he was left alone at nightfall in a black zone. Apartheid restrictions meant to protect whites trapped him, for even the local taxis were forbidden by law to carry him away. And racism itself meant that Bird had no way to prove his real sympathies. "I felt like a sacrifice/for the years of bad, bad news" runs the refrain of "Athlone Incident," the song Bird wrote about that night; "for how can you tell a man you're neutral/when he's always been misused?"

The song, braced by an r&b arrangement on the album, indicates the direction Bird's material was starting to take. "I didn't in a calculated way decide to sort of tell the world about Africa," he explained. "But if you want your art to be meaningful, you're going to have to relate it to yourself." "Athlone Incident" is powerful because it does

FRENCH

Audio-Visual Audio-Lingual
Small Day & Evening
Conversation Classes
Qualified Native Teachers
\$35 for 7 weeks \$59 for 14 weeks
FREE French Parties
ECOLE DU CERCLE
FRANCO-AMERICAN
24 East 39th St. off Park Ave.
For Registration Call
490-2068

plastics.

Learn from the experts. Use
mold-making & casting
body reproduction urethane foam
fiberglass embossments, playgias
3 week course \$125
ACCEPTING NOW FOR
Tues. Jan 11 & Sat Jan 15
★ Featured by
BEST BETS NY Mag
NewsCenter 4
THE PLASTICS FACTORY
18 E 12th Street NYC 10003
Call us: (212) 691-6611

THE JEWELLERY WORKSHOP and GALLERY

150 Spring St.
Joseph English, Ellen Hutchings
Susan Reinstejn, Fredrika Kulicke
Instruction in Classical Jewellery
Arts: Cloisonne Enamel, Lapidary,
Silver and Goldsmithing.
Class in bowmaking, chalices, boxes.
Winter Session Jan. 3 - Mar. 10
226-5303
For Registration & Information

SPANISH

and all Modern Languages
CRASH XMAS COURSE DEC. 27-31
Career-oriented programs / Day
and Evening/Groups of 4 or 12
Approved by NYC Board of Education
for In-Service Credit / At...
■ 80 Fifth Av (opp. New School)
■ 501 Madison Av (18 floor)
■ Bank Street College of Ed.
■ Major New York Organizations
PRIVATE & SEMI-PRIVATE INSTRUCTION
CERTIFIED TRANSLATIONS
Call to Register/For Free Testing
To Observe A Class 529-2100
Bilingual Skills Center
THE LANGUAGE LAB
80 5th Avenue, N.Y. 10011

MALE MODELING

Professional Training
Now Available

- Photography Modeling
- Professional Makeups
- Personality Projection
- Voice Diction
- Hair Care
- Trade Shows
- TV Commercials
- Radio Commercials
- Physical Relations
- Business Etiquette
- Actor's Workshops

The Barbizon School Announces
their complete male modeling
program, day, eve, Sat Classes.
CLASSES FORMING NOW
For full information without obligation
PHONE: 355-5700 or use coupon

BARBIZON SCHOOL Dept. V
689 Fifth Avenue, New York 10022

NAME _____
AREA PHONE _____ AGE _____
ADDRESS _____
CITY _____ ZIP _____

READ FASTER '93

5 weeks guaranteed
course, DOUBLE or TRIP-
LE your speed. Under-
stand more, retain more.
Nationally known profes-
sor. Class forming now.
READING SKILLS
864-5112

ITALIAN LANGUAGE SCHOOL

19th year. Own proven prac-
tical method. Fundamental
classes: Beginner, interme-
diate, Advanced—plus Conversa-
tional classes on 10 different
levels of fluency. Daytime,
Evening, Saturday morning.
Native teachers. Next ten-
week courses start January.
Ask NOW for free bulletin
AMERICAN-ITALY
SOCIETY, INC.
A Non-Profit Organization
667 Madison Ave., N.Y.C. 10021
(Between 60th & 61st) 238-1561

Learn Fashion Design in less than a year...

Fashion Workshop Method
with emphasis on Dress-
making, Draping, Sketching,
Patternmaking, and Fitting.
Day-Eve-Sat Co-ed. Inve-
guidance. Placement svcs.
Foreign students.
Est. 1931 Request Catalog C
MAYER SCHOOL OF FASHION
64 W. 36 St., N.Y.C. 10018 • 563-3636

THE EDUCATIONAL ALLIANCE ART SCHOOL

197 East Broadway, N.Y.C. 10002
Register now for new term start-
ing January 17, 1976-New morning
class in metal sculpture. Also
classes in watercolor, painting and
drawing, ceramics, sculpture and
evening metal sculpture classes.
Call, write or visit The Art
School—475-4595.

LECTURES • YOGA • POETRY

THE ST. MARK'S POETRY PROJECT BENEFIT POSTPONED

due to construction
Later Date To Be Announced
10th st & 2nd ave

SOCIETY OF NEW YORK

100 W. 72nd St.
Suite 501
799-8270
Hatha Yoga classes Daily
Year-round country retreats at
ANANDA ASHRAM 914-763-1084

TAI CHI CHUAN

authentic Tai Chi Chuan for
HEALTH, SELF-DEFENSE
also PA-KUA & HSING-I
TAOIST MEDITATION
SMALL CLASSES
Tai Chi Chart (285 photos) \$2.50
monthly rate or complete form \$115
1117 8th Ave. (42nd) 221-9118 or 275-8451

Aikido

49 Bond Street
Dojo
EVENINGS 477-0899

YOGA BASED EXERCISE CLASSES DAILY

CELESTIAL
Suddenly Your Skin Begins To Peel!
190 E. 16 St. at Union Square 477-5410

CHAOTIC MEDITATION

and other techniques daily of
Bhawan Shree Rainesht
Weekend workshops and
intensives. Books & Tapes
also available
Call 486-3261 or write
Ananda Rajneesh M.C.
29 E. 29 St. NYC 10014
Leave clear headed & let
love & life happen now.

East Side Karate Dojo

302 East 62nd St.
535-7677 Nr. 2nd Ave.
Traditional
training as an Art Form
• Classical Form (Okinawan)
• Yamamoto Sparring (Japanese)
• Practical Self Defense
• Specializing in Pvt. Instruction

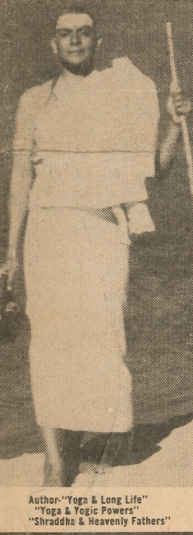
NEED WHEELS FOR THE WEEKEND?

SEE THE AUTO PAGE FOR CAR RENTALS

HEAR YOGI GUPTA OF INDIA

at
50 E. 50 St. Suite 10H
759-1548

Sat. Dec. 25 - 6:45 pm
"GROW VITAMINS IN YOUR KITCHEN"
Mon. Dec. 27 - 7:00 pm
"YOGA PREVENTS AGING, TENSION AND OVEREATING"
See Hatha Yoga demonstration



Author "Yoga & Long Life"
"Yoga & Yogic Powers"
"Shradhs & Heavenly Fathers"

YOGA

BETTER HEALTH • TRIMMER BODY • CALMER MIND • SELF-REALIZATION

- DAILY EXERCISE CLASSES 12:30 pm, 6 pm, 7 pm \$3
- COMBINATION CLASSES (1 1/2 hrs.) Sat. 8 pm, Sun 11 am \$3
- BREATHING CLASSES Mon & Thur 7 pm \$3
- SPECIAL FITNESS CLASS (1 1/2 hrs) Wed 10:30 am, Fri 6 pm \$3
- MEDITATION Tues. & Sun. 7 pm, Fri. 7:30 pm \$3
- PRIVATE LESSONS & CONSULTATION by appt. only

50 East 58th Street
Suite 10H
New York, NY 10022
Yogi Gupta Ashram (212) 759-1548
(info answer) (212) 359-4200

NORTHERN EAGLE CLAW KUNG FU

TAI CHI CHUAN (Wu Style)
Call For Schedule And Rates 691-3564
YING JOW PAI
120 W 28th St. 3rd Floor New York NY 10001

The Liberal Catholic Church

a small church which accepts
Esotericism & Reincarnation
Sung Mass and Meditation
Sundays at 11:00 a.m.
Christmas Eve-Mass 11:45 p.m.
We meet in a garden bookshop at
242 E. 53 St.; 532-1055, 753-3835

THE RIVER FLOWS HOLISTIC CENTER

29 John St. bet. Bway and Nassau
FASTING MEMBERSHIPS AVAILABLE.

The Poetry Project

DICK GALLUP
(Above the Trellis)
STEVE HAMILTON
(pub. in many magazines)
Wed. Dec. 22 8:30 pm
St. Mark's 10th st and 2nd ave

SINGLES PROTEST!!

(Latin for "REBIRTH")

Melissa, Manhattan Art Editor, 27, SINGLE:
"Listen, I've just a bout had it with the singles' bars in this town. The guys I meet in these places are so creepy. I mean, what ever happens to us women, intelligent conversation? ... Look, I'm no prima donna, but I certainly do resent it when someone tries to pick me up without even first asking me my name!!!"

Robert, Forest Hills Attorney, 34, SINGLE:
"It's true ... I'm a successful lawyer and I'll vouch for the fact that even if you've got a lot of money to throw around, it doesn't mean you're going to attract the kind of sophisticated independent woman who's truly interested in a meaningful give-and-take relationship. Most of the females I meet are so superficial ... I'm really a sensitive guy, and I feel I've got a lot to offer the right person. But ... how do I find her???"

What you've just read are just small samplings of the things we hear at our offices every day of the week, from the hundreds of SINGLE MEN AND WOMEN who've stopped by to visit us ... of whom we've only accepted 325 as members to date. Funny how so many of them are whistling a happy tune! But then, we're not too surprised. We know, from first-hand experience how OVUS has already transformed the lives of countless intelligent, dynamic SINGLES in so very short a time. If you are thoughtfully searching, and not too proud or cynical to still believe THERE IS A BETTER WAY ... then CALL US at (212) 986-1580 for a personal interview weekdays 9-7 or Thurs evs 6-9 ... or write: Director-OVUS, 12 East 46th Street, New York, N.Y. 10017 ... and get ready to meet some of the most exciting, sensitive, attractive people of your life!!!"

ISN'T IT ABOUT TIME WE FOUND ONE ANOTHER? ...

THEOSOPHY

United Lodge of Theosophists
347 East 72nd Street
SUNDAYS, 7:30 P.M.
General Lecture
December 26th
"THE SCOPE OF REINCARNATION"
WEDNESDAYS, 7:30 P.M.
Informal class in REINCARNATION, KARMA, OCCULT PHILOSOPHY
Informal Discussion.
Other Meetings:
FRIDAYS 1:45 & 7:30 P.M.
SUNDAYS 10:30 A.M.
(for children and adults)
All Meetings Free
Phone 535-2230
for Program and Free Literature

KOREAN PLACE HEALTH CLUB

SAUNA SHOWERS EXERCISE EQUIP'S
JEEAP(SHIATSU) LOUNGE
604 5th Avenue (BTW 48th & 49th St)
MON - SAT. HRS: 10A.M. - MIDNIGHT
PHONE: (212) 586-1920

JOY

Christmas Eve
10:00 P.M.
Choral Concert
11:00 P.M.
Candlelight Service
Dr. Bryant M. Kirkland

THE FIFTH AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

5th Ave. at 55th St.
Seminar in
KABBALISTIC INSIGHTS
Dr. Herbert Weiner
author of
"9½ Mystics—The Kabbala Today"
Thurs.—beginning Jan. 6, 1977
7:30 to 9:45 p.m. (7 wk. course—\$45)
N.Y. Theosophical Society
242 East 53rd St., N.Y.C.
for information:
Call MO 3-8141 or PL 3-3835.

A UNIQUE ESOTERIC BOOKSHOP

Books ON Eastern and Oriental
Mysticism, Theosophy, Astrology,
and related subjects.
QUEST BOOKSHOP
242 East 53 St
New York
tel: 758-5521
Open Monday through Friday
10 am to 6 pm

Tai Chi is
for Everybody
DEMONSTRATION FREE
Dec 19, Sun. 1-3
LONG FORM Class
12/20 M. 12/22 W. 6-7pm
An Tai Chi Studio
81 SPRING ST. N.Y.C.
226-8664