



Celebrating
Alan Brunton

a concert
to honour his life and work

Saturday 26 October 2002 at 8pm

Jazz Club (formerly James Cabaret), 5 Hania St, Wellington

Produced by friends of Red Mole and Bumper Books
with assistance from The Space and the 6th Wellington Jazz Festival.

Alan Brunton (1946 – 2002)

a life of literary and artistic innovation

Alan Brunton was New Zealand letters' one truly iconic radical figure... (he) combined poetry with performance artistry, and was a charismatic absurdist who believed that provocative arts and letters, stripped of élitist distance from their audience, could be true humanist vehicles to encourage the re-evaluation of contemporary politics and social organisation.

The Independent, London 9 July 2002

At an avant-garde cabaret in Auckland in 1969, Alan Brunton nailed bits of wood together to make the word POEM. He was initiating a vocation in which composition and performance were to be given equal weight in the making of art. There is no true distinction between thought and act in his work, the one is always becoming the other.

Alan, with Sally Rodwell, formed Red Mole in 1974, to make a new theatre that would 'keep romance alive.' They used their work to report on experience; utilising random events, improvisations, fragments of information and true confessions, they made performances that exalted the circus of daily life, scored to the extremes of hysteria and passivity but with the actors' own happiness showing through.

Red Mole went to New York in 1978 and performed there for seven years. They lived and performed in New Mexico for two years. In 1987, they created an English-speaking theatre in Amsterdam. When Alan and Sally returned to Wellington, Red Mole expanded into workshops/performances for immigrants, films, publications, recordings, site works, festivals and political activism with particular concern for heritage issues.

The dimensions of performance encompassed in Alan's years on the stage, like his writing, are fractal in scope, pieces of detail revealing universals. The characters he played were various and strange but what they had in common was a bent away from the norm in which their gut-busting humour originated. His ability to negotiate the warps in reality made him loved by audiences. Its other side was a capacity to inspire a kind of reverent dread. He was a magnificent reader of his own poetry. More recently, his performance changed in that the persona projected to the audience partook of that unity of soul towards which Alan was strongly impelled. The performance scripts he called 'jazz poems' were conjurations of beatitude; *Theories of Everything*, *Compostela: A Walk*, *Grooves of Glory*.

Red Mole and Bumper Books, in association with The Space and the 6th Wellington Jazz Festival present this concert to honour Alan and to launch his latest book, *Fq*, an astonishing sequence of 144 poems finalised for publication just before his death. In addition, the Alan Brunton Trust Fund will launch Project Bumper Books, dedicated to archiving and publishing Alan's work and maintaining Bumper's operation as a small press producing experimental writing.

Books

- 2002 Fq. Wellington, Bumper Books. Poems
2001 Ecstasy. Wellington: Bumper Books. Poems
2000 Big Smoke: New Zealand Poems 1960-1975, ed. Alan Brunton, Murray Edmond and Michele Leggott. Auckland UP. Introduction, poems
2000 Es Como Es / How It Is. Medellin, Colombia. Poems
2000 Comrade Savage. Wellington: Bumper Books. Playscript
1998 Moonshine. Wellington: Bumper Books. Long poem
1997 Years Ago Today. Wellington: Bumper Books. Critical essay
1997 Goin' to Djibouti. Wellington: Bumper Books. Playscript
1996 Saga: Romaunt of Glossa. Wellington: Bumper Books. Poems
1994 Ephphatha, with Richard Killeen. Auckland: Workshop Press. Poems
1991 Slow Passes. Auckland UP. Selected Poems 1978-88
1989 A Red Mole Sketchbook. Wellington: Victoria UP. Playscripts
Day for a Daughter, with Sally Rodwell. Christchurch: Untold Books. Poems
1985 Chant of Paradise. Taos, New Mexico: Red Mole. Poem
1986 New Order. New York: Alexandra Fisher. Poems
1984 And She Said. New York: Alexandra Fisher. Poems
1978 Oh Ravachol. Auckland: Red Mole. Poems
1976 Black & White Anthology. Taylors Mistake: Hawk Press. Poems
1973 Messengers in Blackface. London: Amphedema Press. Poems

Editing

- 2001 The Brian Bell Reader. Wellington: Bumper Books
1997 Writing Island Bay. Wellington: Bumper Books
1991 'Hamilton Hometown'. Landfall 180 (December)
1975-77 Spleen 1-8, with Ian Wedde and Martin Edmond. Wellington: Red Mole
The Word is Freed 1-2. Auckland University Students' Association

Compact disc

- 2002 Nietzsche / Zarathustra. Wellington: Red Mole/The Space
1997 33 perfumes of pleasure, with The Free Word Band

Films/video (Writer / Director / Performer)

- 2001 Crazy Voyage. Dir. Rodwell / Brunton
2000 City of Night. Dir. Rodwell / Brunton
1999 Krapp's First Video (Samuel Beckett). Dir. Shahin Yazdani
1998 Heaven's Cloudy Smile, with Michele Leggott. Dir. Sally Rodwell
1996 Things We Don't Talk About. Won Smal Bag, Vanuatu
1996 The Intruder. Dir. Andrea Bosshard
1994 Zucchini Roma. Dir. Sally Rodwell
1993 Gravity and Grace. Dir. Chris Kraus
1986 This Black Valise. Dir. Sally Rodwell
1985 Eye of the Tiger. Dir. Rodwell/Brunton
1980 Life is a Zoo. Dir. Tony Holden
1978 Red Mole on the Road. Dir. Sam Neill

Internet

Alan Brunton author page, New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre (nzepec)
www.nzepec.auckland.ac.nz/authors/brunton/index.html

Celebrating
Alan Brunton

MC Madeline McNamara

featuring performances by:

Stephen Bain
Wayne Baird
Arthur Baysting
Ruby Brunton
Chrissie Butler
Joe Callwood
Tom Callwood
Ksenija Chobanovich
Kim Clifton
Clare Cooper
John Davies
Martin Edmond
Dale Ferris
Jeff Henderson
France Herve
Bridget Kelly
Bill Lake
Michele Leggott
Aaron Lloyd
Tahi Mapp-Borren
Johnny Marks
Jean McAllister
Tony McMaster
Madeline McNamara
Kieran Monaghan
Kilda Northcott
Chris O'Connor
Ryan O'Leary
Chris Palmer
Awhina Pewhairangi
Lyne Pringle
Sally Rodwell
Duncan Sarkies
Michelle Scullion
Peter Simpson
Sharon Smith
Josh Sorenson
Grant Sutherland
Rapai Te Hau
Alex White

crew:

Producers: Jeff Henderson
Madeline McNamara
Stage Managers: Te Itirawa Nepia
Peter Frater
Programme Design: Grant Sutherland
Lights: Lisa Maule
Slides and FX: Joe Bleakley
Stuart Shepherd
Ian McMinn
Assistants: Robin Nathan
Dale Ferris
Bumper Books: Lisa Docherty

Thanks to our volunteers

Very special thanks to the supporters
of the Bumper Books Project

74 PRECIOUS STONE

I stand earthy here, baked by 1000 years of tyranny and
Man's inhumanity to Man, the dry sweat of trains, slab
constructions, daylight robberies, doctors with machetes,
electricity, gas coming out of taps, the definition of
exclusion, fulgid deaths of saints, discovery of vanishing
points especially the blank point through which saintgod
slipped

b u t

you will live in an era of new proprioception, quartre
étoiles, bright locofocos over Ocean City, leaving me in
my old age growing up again in the fuzzy town of my
childhood where nothing was original, not even our
peccadillos, where I promised with my hand stuck to a
tree by a knife I'd eat the wind all my life and ramble
from commune to commune as my blood

w e p t

onto stones like the 'unrecapturable nostalgia for nostalgia',
yes, arrive daughter somewhere in sunshine rubio with
the rapture of expectation, live in your immensity through
the longest years—live them as fired up as I am now,
wordless in the insomniac night of my bio-clock, at this
moment of worldly separation from

y o u

*for Alan
from your ever-loving daughter*

I cannot use words to express how much you mean to me
Now that you're gone all my words seem to have dried up.

Days go by so slowly
The clock ticks so loudly.
Nothing seems real anymore.

All I know is you are and always will be
My number one hero and guide.

If I had known my days with you were numbered
I would have soaked up more of your thoughts.
You are the greatest teacher, I am your grateful student.

Tears come as I write this.
You are always with me.
I love you.

Ruby

Alan, partner in life, in theatre

Alan and I founded Red Mole Enterprises in 1974. Alan's scripts led performers into a theatrical world of daring and mystery and such great beauty, they would become delirious with excitement and commit everything to the work. Alan made magic even with subjects as unlikely as the history of the NZ Labour Party. We first performed his *Comrade Savage* at the Newtown Community Centre in 1989. The writing was so powerful that even after weeks of rehearsals, the actors still wept every night in many scenes – as Karl Marx danced Joe's mother to heaven, as we chanted *All things we ask for all the people* pulling wooden carts with tiny figures, when Harriet said adieu to her comrade Joe, Mr Prime Minister now, in the empty dining-room at Parliament, or at their meeting (entirely invented by Alan, there was no record of this event) years later in the outback at a station, he with flowers pleading, then dying on his hard bed waiting for the light to announce he has won back the caucus ... but the lines we spoke at the end of the play, marching with our drums through the swinging doors and into the street, tore us apart. These are lines written by a master:

PHUT And what did he leave us? Anything at all?

CROWD He left us a voice.

PHAT / PHUT The sound of ourselves.

CROWD For the first time.

PHAT For the first time we made the sound of ourselves.

CROWD What can we say? What can we do?

PHUT Fall! We must fall!

CROWD Together. Fall together.

PHAT Fall into step!

CROWD In step together. Ever and ever.

PHAT So long.

CROWD So long.

PHAT drums. CROWD, disperses. A single light blinks. PHUT and PHAT get close to it.

PHAT Think we'll ever see his like again.

PHUT Never. There was only one. Then it broke. The vessel that brought him here.

PHAT What's left for us?

PHUT The light.

PHAT Oh, kindly light.

PHUT Lead us.

PHAT Yes. Lead us, kindly light.

Dearest Alan, you are a brilliant light. We are shaken with grief now. You filled my life with inspiration. You gave our daughter Ruby joy and laughter, and a passion for writing. I loved you. Every moment of our life together, I loved you. Now my heart is broken. But your voice still rings out through the windows and doors of this house, down the street to the Bay, to the island and indigo sea, around The Esplanade and up The Parade and across the valley and over the Makara hills – *whoosh* – shouting out to the evening star, to the rising moon and the night sky and the whole universe – the show is about to begin! You enter the immense theatre, the audience is ready to fly, you start as always, strong and urgent: *let me speak I have something to say*. And we listen. Breathless. Enchanted. Forever.

Sally

Alan Brunton (1946 – 2002)



New York City, 1981