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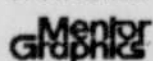


Swan Lake, Act III - Yuka Iino / Photo by Andy Batt

CONCERTO BAROCO
Bach / George BalanchineORPHEUS PORTRAIT
Liszt / Kent StowellSWAN LAKE, ACT III
Tchaikovsky / Christopher Stowell
after Petipa

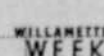
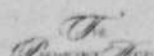
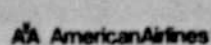
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CULTURE

Saint Morrissey is right

New book and CD put cultural icon right back on top

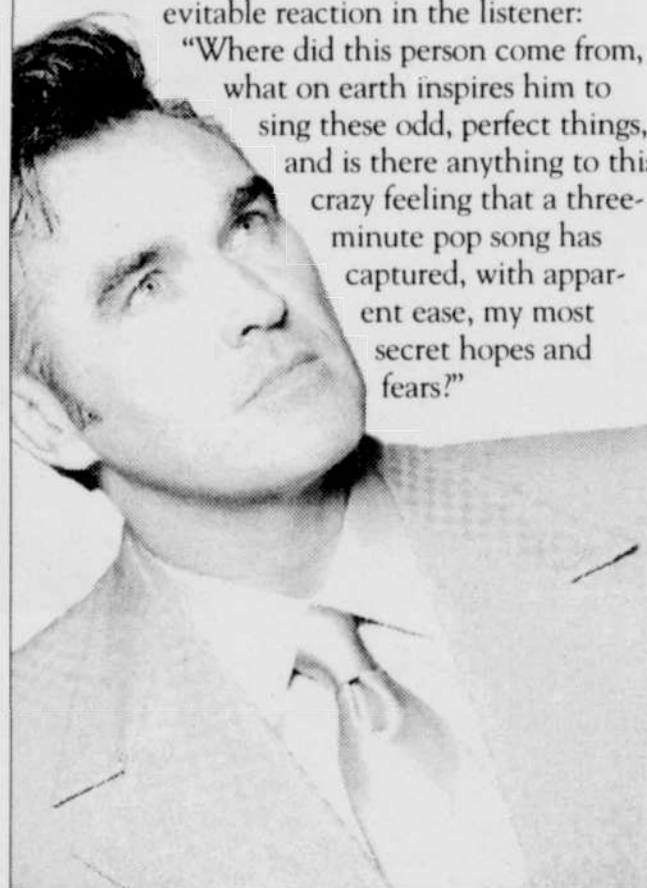
BY CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN

At last, a persistently misunderstood gay is the subject of a book worthy of his almost indescribable uniqueness. With *Saint Morrissey*, eminent English queer theorist Mark Simpson (whose *Male Impersonators* is also essential reading) comes out of the closet as a rabid fan of Morrissey, the ex-Smiths singer who's long had a sizable queer following.

Simpson enticingly calls his book a "psycho-bio"—in addition to referencing his records as landmarks in his own life and demonstrating an encyclopedic familiarity with all things Morrissey, he brings an expansive, enthusiastic knowledge of pop culture, sex/gender analysis and queer iconoclasm to bear on his study of a figure it's often seemed there's no getting to the bottom of, so to speak.

On record, Morrissey's striking, universally resonant musings, assertions, turns of phrase and brazen emotion provoke an inevitable reaction in the listener:

"Where did this person come from, what on earth inspires him to sing these odd, perfect things, and is there anything to this crazy feeling that a three-minute pop song has captured, with apparent ease, my most secret hopes and fears?"



getics, which could be *Saint Morrissey's* most salient contribution to the Morrissey discussion. Morrissey always deflects questions about his own sex life (or lack thereof) with comments like "Sex is a waste of batteries," provoking consternation and derision from those for whom his relentless subversion of all sexual dogma isn't a clear enough indication of solidarity. Queer significance is Simpson's area of expertise, and he makes short work of arguments against Morrissey's viability as "one of us," cogently concluding that, politically important as a good old-fashioned coming out is, there is a more insidious queerness to Morrissey's imperious dismissal of the sexual classification system itself.

In other words, Sir Elton John's unthreatening "openly gay" celebrity status undoubtedly behooves us, but he's unlikely to shatter anyone's "normal" ideas of sex, love and life. That sort of liberation has always been Morrissey's territory, a point never made more convincingly than Simpson does here.

Just in time to bolster Simpson's reclamation of Morrissey as vital to queer culture, the musician's long-awaited "comeback" album, *You Are the Quarry*, finds him more unequivocally vocal on the subject than ever.

"America Is Not the World" targets the United States as falling short of its purported egalitarianism by being a country "where the president is

**Morrissey has rarely
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or sung more
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than he does here**

never black, female, or gay." "All the Lazy Dykes" is a shimmering Sapphic lullaby wherein Morrissey entreats a repressed housewife to "be good to yourself, and come and join the girls," invoking the name of a venerable Los Angeles lesbian watering hole: "Free yourself/be yourself/come to The Palms and see yourself/and at last, your life begins." It's quite possibly the most affecting, passionately evocative gay-lib tune ever written.

The rest of *Quarry* is a succession of triumphs. The ballads ("Come Back to Camden," the self-deprecatingly suggestive "Let Me Kiss You," the vindicating, anthemic "You Know I Couldn't Last") and the rockers ("First of the Gang to Die," "Irish Blood, English Heart") are all irresistible.

Morrissey has rarely written better lyrics or sung more beautifully and confidently than he does here; he may finally have fulfilled his impossible dream of simultaneously capturing both the heartbreaking croon of Frank Sinatra and the punk pugnacity of Johnny Rotten.

Simpson's riveting book and Morrissey's excellent album comprise a bona fide Morrissey revival. There's rarely been a prouder time to be a fan, and if you've never entered Morrissey's galvanizing, singularly empathetic hall of mirrors, *Saint Morrissey* and *You Are the Quarry* make for impressive introductions to an indispensable artist who's also, to many, a true culture hero. **JM**

CHRISTOPHER MCQUAIN is a Seattle free-lance writer who would happily go back to Camden if only Morrissey would ask.