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# Scratch Pad 61

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Based on the non-mailing comments section of *\*brg\** 43, a fanzine for the August 2005 mailing of ANZAPA by Bruce Gillespie, 5 Howard St, Greensborough VIC 3088. Phone: (03) 9435 7786. Email: gandc@mira.net. Member fwa. Photos: George Turner (pp. 2, 3).

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GREENSBOROUGH by Bruce Gillespie

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## A quiet month in beautiful downtown Greensborough

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I'm still recovering from Continuum, the Melbourne convention a few weeks ago. Socially, it was a success, with nearly 500 attendees, and lots of unexpected friends turning up. Rob Gerrand hadn't been to a convention for many years, and Stephen Campbell hadn't been sighted since Aussiecon II in 1985. Both seem ageless, which I wouldn't say about me. I was barely on my feet by 8 p.m. on the second day of the convention. I escaped before the Maskabolo began. My main dissatisfaction with the convention centres around the program. It makes me jealous, for example, to hear that at Interaction (this year's world convention) in Glasgow, people 'really seemed to care about science fiction'. In Melbourne, real science fiction seemed to have disappeared from sight. I did listen to Chris Lawson's wonderful exposition of recent discoveries in cutting-edge science. Andrew, Chris, Gillian Pollack and I put together what I thought was a successful panel on Cordwainer Smith. But the guests of honour were fantasy writers, and most of the program centred around various types of fantasy. Also, the purpose of the convention seem to be promote the wares of various writers. No sign of the critical sharpness that dominated Australian SF conventions during the 1970s. If I had the self-confidence to run a convention, I would put together a convention of people who wanted to talk about science fiction. No writers allowed, unless they are willing to attend as readers. SFCCommentaryCon? Potlatch South? Whatever the name, it's an idea that is boiling away in my brain. But I doubt if I will do anything.

In what is called Real Life I've been twiddling my thumbs, hoping for some paying work. My main project is finishing my Trip Report about the journey I took, all paid for by SF fans, in late February and early March. It was a hard slog writing the first draft (32,000 words), but the second draft is nearly finished. With lots of photos, it should come out as an A4-sized 40-page book; price \$10.

Among the books I've read recently is Larry Niven's *Ringworld*, which has just been reissued by Gollancz's

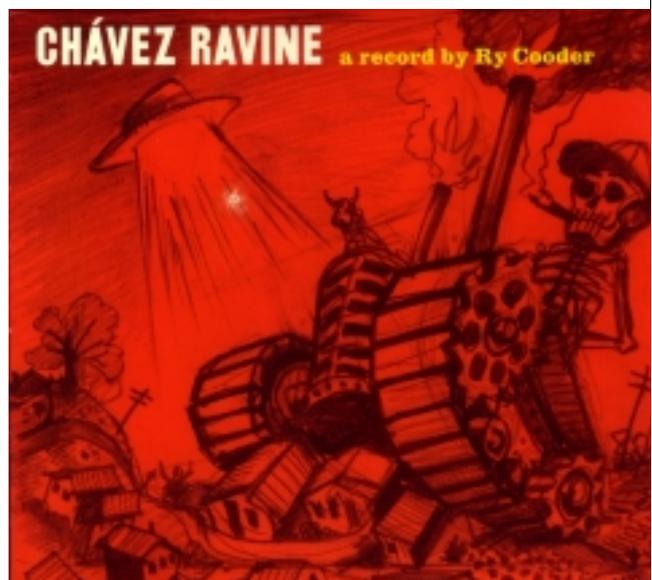
SF Masterworks series. I still don't see why it is regarded as an 'SF classic'.

Among the CDs I've listened to recently is a collection of the Flying Pickets issued in 1995. This a cappella group includes some instrumental background and a lot of clever riffs on then-current pop tunes.

Recent DVDs include *Kinsey*, which is remarkable, but somehow unsatisfying as well. Biopics are difficult to do; they always skate over what you would really like to know about the people they biograph. Taylor Hackford's *Ray*, about Ray Charles, is better.

### Ry Cooder's Chavez Ravine

Ry Cooder is one of those musicians who has followed the tracks of our lives — the tracks, that is, of the lives of people like me, who are the same age as Ry (58). He began as a session guitarist in the late sixties, most famously on the Rolling Stones' *Let It Bleed*. That's



where I first noticed a cover credit to his superb, bluesy, atmospheric guitar playing. A year later, his first solo LP came out: *Ry Cooder*. Then two albums within a few months of each other: *Boomer's Story* and *Into the Purple Valley*. Each combined folk blues with various other traditional American musical styles. In his singing style, Ry seemed to satirise the old musical styles as well as exploring them. I saw his concerts during three of his four trips to Australia.

In 1988 he gave up trying to make solo albums. In interviews he said that the company's creative accounting meant that making each album merely added to the 'debt' that the record company claimed he owed them. The only money he could make was from touring, and he hated being away from his wife and family. His one hit album, *Bop Til You Drop*, wiped out the debt to the company, but he still made no money.

During the late seventies and early eighties he found he could make a living from composing and recording film soundtracks. The film companies paid him a set rate for this work; he no longer had to worry about the record company's creative accounting.

So all of Ry's output in the last few decades has been film soundtracks or specialist 'world music' collaborations with African or Caribbean musicians. He seems to have lost interest in American blues, and instead become obsessed with Central and South American music. This led to his soundtrack for Wim Wenders' movie *Buena Vista Social Club*. Ry and Wim found and filmed a host of great Cuban musicians who were still living in Havana, although they had had little work since the revolution. Many were in their eighties, and have died since the film and CD have come out. There is a wonderful scene in the movie where the Cuban musicians wander wide-eyed through New York, before playing to packed-out houses.

*Chavez Ravine* is the first Ry Cooder album with his name solo above the title, but it is as collaborative an effort as *Buena Vista Social Club*. Ry sings on very few tracks, and on a few tracks he does not play guitar. The concept is his, though. The CD is a sound documentary about bulldozing the Mexican-American community in Chavez Ravine, a neighbourhood of Los Angeles, in 1943. The Dodgers Stadium was eventually built on the site.

As you would expect, the music has a melancholy tone to it. The sound is quite ghostly on some tracks. Older Los Angeles musicians feature on most tracks, but Ry Cooder does take centre stage for two songs that were actually recorded first in the 1940s — 'Chinito Chinito' and 'Three Cool Cats'. On 'In My Town', Cooder impersonates the city boss who ordered the destruction of Chavez Ravine. The result is chilling and brilliant.

The CD is highly recommended, but some tracks will take more listening than I've given them so far. You need to read the lyric booklet as you go, as most songs are in Spanish, with the English words translated. I believe there is a book as well, and a documentary film, but neither has hit Melbourne yet.

### Malvern adventures

I had promised Irwin Hirsh, famous ex-ANZAPAn who's been a bit quiet lately, that I would have lunch with him in his part of Melbourne. I hadn't visited Glenferrie Road, Malvern, since I was a kid. Every September holidays, the three of us used to get on the train at Oakleigh, travel to Malvern, then ride the tram north to the Metro Malvern, where every year we would be scared to death



Ted Mundie, 1977. (Photo: George Turner.)

by the tornado in *The Wizard of Oz*. The building that used to be the Metro Malvern burnt down some year ago.

Irwin and I had lunch at a good Chinese restaurant. Then I looked for the Malvern store of Readings, which has four stores throughout Melbourne. Malvern Readings' strength is classical music. It must be the last classical store in Melbourne that takes some trouble to import the CDs being promoted by *Gramophone* magazine. I shouldn't have bought anything — but I did pick up the second Solti version of Mozart's *Magic Flute*. I thought this is the Solti version of which I've heard bits on the radio. Maybe it would prove to be The Version. (It isn't.) *The Magic Flute* is my favourite opera, and might well be the best piece of music ever written, but not even the two Karajan versions get it all right. Any excuse to listen to new versions. I still need to track down the first Solti version.

I bought very cheaply and saw Blake Edwards' 1988 comedy *Sunset*. Nobody talks about this film, but it's great — rather reminds me of *My Favourite Year*. Bruce Willis, James Garner, Mariel Hemingway, Malcolm McDowell and all other cast members are great. \$9.95 on DVD at the local DVD-Ezy shop. I also bought Bertolucci's *1900* — \$13.95 for two discs, each nearly three hours long!

### Thirty years ago today . . .

For two weeks I've been shanghaied by two indexes and a proofreading job. For somebody who's been feeling very unemployed this year, all this hard work has been a shock to the system. Just shows: if a deadline threatens and the job is interesting enough, even I can get through a fair amount of work in a short time.

I did catch up with some socialising, especially the August Nova Mob meeting. Murray McLachlan told us much of what he knows about New Zealand science fiction. In Australia, we don't know much about New Zealand. At least we thought we didn't. Murray mentioned quite a few names we did know. Philip Mann did very well in Britain for awhile, then disappeared. M. K. Joseph published *The Hole in the Zero* out in the late sixties. Stanislaw Lem expressed disappointment in the novel in *SF Commentary* 22 in 1972, but I remember it as being very entertaining. Margaret Mahy will be the main guest of honour at ConVergence (Australian national convention, 2007, in Melbourne). I found her



Monash University Writers Workshop, January 1977: (Standing, l. to r.) Paul Voermans, Philippa Maddern.  
(Seated, l. to r.) Stephen Campbell, Rayner Cyna-Tang, Vonda McIntyre, Kitty Vigo, Don Ashby. (Photo: George Turner.)

latest novel, *Maddigan's Fantasia*, in Readers Feast the other day, and it looks delicious. Now to find time to read it.

I was in Readers Feast because I was browsing with Randal Flynn, and Randal Flynn had nearly caused me a heart attack by phoning me a few days earlier. When we lived at Collingwood, Randal called in sometimes, but never never after phoning. The previous time I had seen Randal he was riding his bike down the footpath in Fitzroy. This week Randal had good news — he reminded me that it was the thirtieth anniversary of when we met in 1975 before we all went up the hills to the Ursula Le Guin Writers' Workshop that accompanied Aussiecon I — and bad news. Ted Mundie, who I had met at that workshop, has died. Seems he was much older than I had remembered him; Randal thinks he was 45 during the Workshop, and 75 when he died. He and Philippa Maddern had been married sometime in the late eighties or early nineties, but I had heard that news only by accident. I certainly didn't know that they were an item while they were both living in Melbourne. (Perhaps they

weren't.) Pip is now head of Medieval Studies at the University of Western Australia, and has stopped writing fiction. Ted published quite a few 'how to' books after the 1975 workshop, but I don't think he published again after he went to Western Australia.

Randal phoned to set up a lunch with Rob Gerrand, who was at the 1975 workshop, and Carey Handfield, who helped set it up. Carey, Rob and I were Norstrilia Press for ten years. It's not often that the three of us are in one room at a time. Not that we nostalgize much about Norstrilia Press. Rob is busy writing, Carey is busy helping people save their businesses from the ravages of the evil GST, and I'm busy being occasionally employed. Randal is writing lots, and has hardly changed a bit since 1975 (at least not in terms of enthusiasm).

I've read *A Tour Guide in Utopia*, Lucy Sussex's second book of short stories. This has a great cover, but that cover is odd because it doesn't list the various awards that the stories have won. Lots of good stories. A review will follow.