

ARTS

Off the Beaten Groove

Barking snakes don't bite

Bark Along With the Young Snakes, the Young Snakes on *Ambiguous Records*.

Shortly after my return to Boston in January of 1981, a friend and local music critic dragged me to 'the Channel to see "what could be the most exciting band in Boston." What I saw was a tall blond woman dressed in second-hand sartorial splendor (i.e., completely mismatched punk's garb) leaping about the stage, accompanied by a guitarist who not so much played his guitar as hacked at it viciously, being calmly watched by a drummer hidden in the safety of his drum set. I later learned that this pleasant assault on my senses was a band called the Young Snakes, and that I had seen one of their first gigs.

Two years later the Snakes are still striking, both musically and visually. Lead singer/bassist Aimee Mann's voice is as varied as her attire, sometimes operatic, sometimes seductive, sometimes harsh and hard-edged. Guitarist Doug Vargas has refined his technique, coaxing all manner of sounds out of his instrument while retaining his rhythmic attack. New drummer Mike Evans maintains the role of his predecessor — an observer who provides punctuation — but his jazz-derived style seems more suited than the talents of former drummer Dave Bass.

Their EP *Bark Along With the Young Snakes* presents the work of a band that has greatly matured since their initial vinyl foray, the cut "Brains and Eggs" on Modern Method Records' compilation *A Wicked Good Time!* The Snakes' talent is for combining other styles into new constructions, which makes it difficult to fit them into any preexisting category. For example, the opening cut, "Give Me Your Face," begins with a Gang of Four-ish march tempo but almost immediately slides into a Latin shuffle. "Suit Me" would almost

be a typical angst-ridden post-punk observation if it weren't disrupted by Mann and Vargas' quirky, folkie-affected harmonies.

"Don't Change Your Mind" is the record's high point, a ballad that centers on Mann's wordless singing and Vargas' gentle harmonic-laden guitar strumming, which includes a short, understated solo reminiscent of Robert Fripp's fluid guitar improvisations. In "The Way the World Goes" Mann pushes her voice to its atonal limits, but her vibrant soprano doesn't always land back in key — it's difficult to decide if this was a desired effect. "Not Enough" closes the set with a frenetic, all-stops-out mustering of forces.

Despite the excellence of the material presented and its satisfactory production, *Bark Along* hasn't captured the ears of many listeners, a state of affairs that can best be attributed to reluctance to listen to truly unique music. The band is usually perceived as being "too weird" for a mainstream or even a punk audience, but the fault lies more with the audience than the band. Because the Young Snakes aren't easily categorized, the listener can't lean on familiar reference points in order to decide whether he likes the band or not.

This general reluctance has taken its toll on the Snakes, and after a few more gigs this month they will disband in order to work on individual projects. Doug Vargas expolained: "It seems that Boston wasn't ready to hear our music just now. We're frustrated, and there's no sense in banging our heads against the wall any longer. Perhaps in a few years people will be willing to listen to us, and perhaps we will play together again." The small but devoted group of fans can only hope so. Until then, *Bark Along With the Young Snakes* will be the only proof we have that these snakes can be charming.

David Shaw



This weekend's LSC movies:
From Russia With Love, Friday, 7 & 10pm, 26-100.
Spies, (Classic) Friday, 7:30pm, 10-250.
The Paper Chase, Saturday, 7 & 10pm, 26-100.
Casablanca, 6:30 & 9pm, 26-100.
The Chinese Wall will be presented in German with a summary in English tonight and Saturday night in the Kresge Little Theatre at 8pm. Admission is free. Performed by Die Deutsche Theatre Werkstatt (German Drama Workshop). Written by Max Frisch.
 A concert of *musica moderna americana* will be presented tonight at the Longy School of Music. Beginning at 8pm, the concert is at 1 Follen Street in Cambridge. Tickets are \$10. More information is available from NE.9-0768.
 This afternoon at 4:30, WGBH presents *Star Wars*, episode three of the original greenplay. Tune to 89.7 FM.

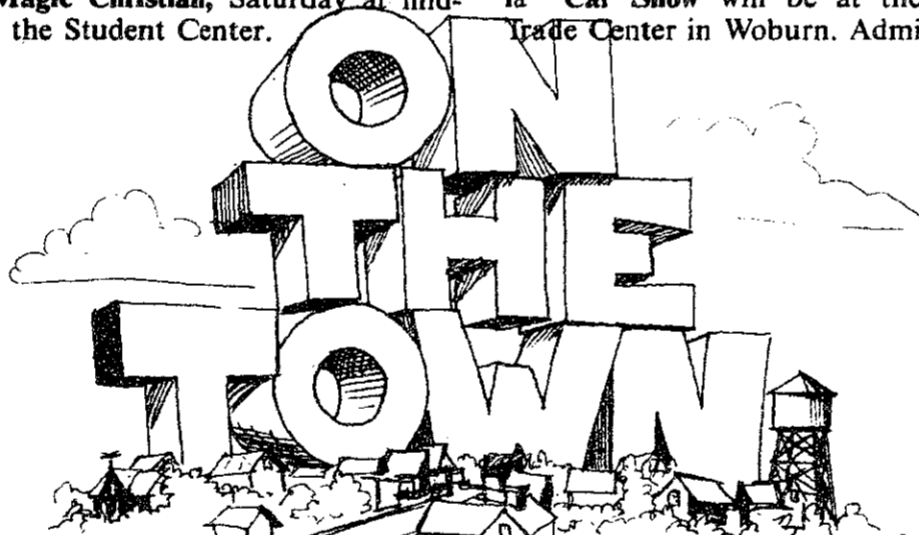
Student Center Midnight Movie:
The Magic Christian, Saturday at midnight in the Student Center.

Today through Sunday, the "Automania" Car Show will be at the Northeast Trade Center in Woburn. Admission is \$5.

Bicentennial 1976 or the continuation thereof: Commemoration of French participation in the end of the American Revolution in 1782 will take place on Saturday. A parade, in period costume, will run from Copley Square to Tremont Street beginning at 12:30pm. A reception will be held at the Alliance Francaise Rotunda beginning at 3pm.

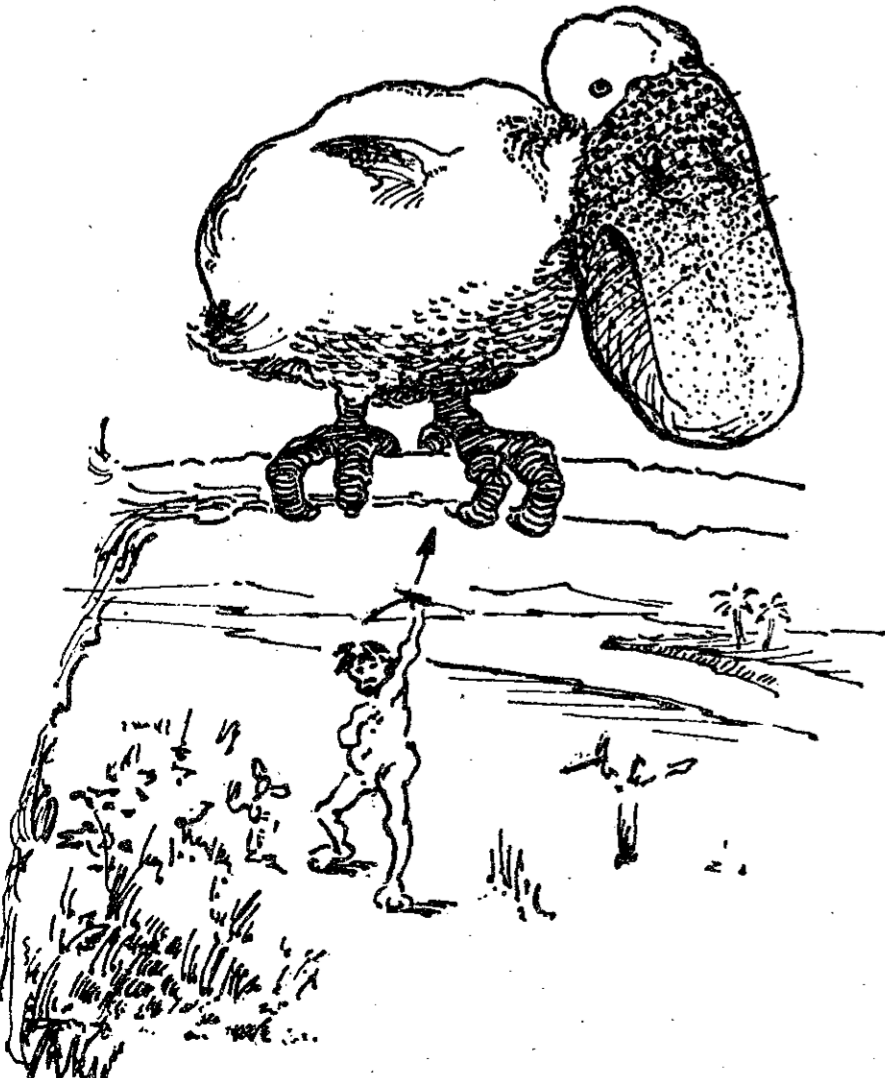
The MIT Symphony with violinist Ron Golan plays at 8:30pm Saturday in Kresge. No admission charge. Works of Ravel, Dvořák, and Frank Martin will be presented.

Center Screen, at 24 Quincy Street in Cambridge, presents *The Best of Adult Animation* this weekend. The group of films includes a number of animated shorts which Center Screen has introduced locally over the past few years. Information is available from 494-0200.



Christmas Lights will be in the Common this Sunday at 4pm. This will be preceded by a parade from City Hall Plaza to the Common which begins at 1:30. Musical performances will begin at 2pm.

The Christmas Antiques and Crafts Show will be at the Hynes Auditorium in the Prudential Center today through Sunday. Admission is \$4. Call 426-9002 for information.



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