

SPOTLIGHT: BOOKS

“These people are my friends, so I didn’t want to hang them out to dry. I had to be respectful of how comfortable they were about talking about it.”
— AUTHOR STUART BERMAN ON WRITING ABOUT THE BAND BROKEN SOCIAL SCENE

ERIC VOLMERS
CALGARY HERALD

A picture near the back of This Book is Broken: A Broken Social Scene Story suggests Stuart Berman was not particularly interested in keeping an objective distance from the band he was writing about. Berman is a longtime editor and music critic at Toronto’s Eye Weekly, but nevertheless found himself at a photo shoot for Broken Social Scene in the U.K. six years ago. Used as the “author picture” of the book, it shows Berman lingering behind the sprawling collective as if he were the band’s semi-forgotten tambourine player. “I was over in England with them in 2003 and they’re like, ‘We’re doing a press photo shoot . . . you’re in it,’” says Berman. “So I was actually in Rolling Stone magazine with the Feist article that ran. It was like, ‘Mom, I made it!’”

Alt-weekly writers often have cosy relationships with the bands they cover and Berman comes clean on the issue within the first couple of lines of his introduction. He reruns the opening of his 2002, five-star review for the band’s seminal second album, You Forgot it in People, where he admits to being friends with many of the principals of the band — drinking with them, sleeping on their couches, attending their weddings.

Berman’s friendship is no doubt one of the reasons his book is so fascinating, giving him the access to delve into the history, prickly politics, friendships and romances that define one of Canada’s most curious musical entities. With a revolving membership that includes Calgary native Leslie Feist, Jason Collett and musicians from Stars, The Dears and Metric, Broken Social Scene was at the forefront of an indie scene that was coming of age just as old formulas for musical success and major label dominance were fading in Canada and around the world. Using mostly first-person reports from dozens of band members, fellow scenesters and indie label heads, Berman’s account is a compelling time-and-place snapshot of Toronto’s music scene. However, the book’s inclusion of Lisa Lobsinger, occasional BSS member and singer of Calgary’s Reverie Sound Review, and the post-Calgary musical history of superstar Feist makes it a must-read for fans of homegrown talent as well.

Berman took some time to chat with the Herald from his home in Toronto.

Q: You are friends with many of the people you quote in the book, including BSS founder Kevin Drew and Brendan Canning. How have they reacted to the book?

A: It’s been fairly positive. Kevin Drew has mixed feelings about it. He’s very happy with the book and he thinks it looks great, but he was a little apprehensive of putting his life out there and under the microscope. That’s something I’ve had to deal with doing the interviews as well. Even in this day and age of Facebook and Twittering every second of your life, not everybody is into this culture of openness that seems to be prevailing right now. Even in the context of a single relationship, one person may be totally cool with talking and the other person may want to keep things private. These people are my friends, so I didn’t want to hang them out to dry. I had to be respectful of how comfortable they were about talking about it. The old cliché is it should be all about the music, but in this case the music is a product of these friendships and relationships that have had ups and downs over the years. The ultimate theme of the book is that these people are friends first



Courtesy, Anansi
Rock critic and author Stuart Berman has gotten mainly positive reaction from members of Broken Social Scene from his book on the band.

5 questions with . . . AUTHOR STUART BERMAN

and bandmates second. Even when something happens that would seem to affect those relationships, they eventually work things out.

Q: How tricky has it been to write about the Toronto indie scene in general given that you are friends with so many of these people?

A: The traditional relationship between critic and subject should be one that is slightly removed to maintain the all-important objectivity. On the flip side of that, being deeply immersed in a scene gives you a sort of perspective that you don’t get being the outside critic. So it’s definitely a balancing act. Certainly I’ve been in positions where I’ve refrained from writing about bands because I know them personally and didn’t necessarily love their latest record. In general, I got to a point where I did actually stop writing about Broken Social Scene in around 2003. I felt I had said my piece and didn’t need to oversell it.

Q: Why did you think the story of Broken Social Scene would have appeal beyond the rather insular Toronto music scene?

A: They are not a regular kind of band, so there are a lot of stories to unravel and tie together. And I feel they were kind of emblematic of a certain moment not just in Toronto music history but also the changing nature of the music industry as a whole. They were really one of the first bands to benefit from this model of music promotion where the buzz comes from a local level and spreads online and bypasses traditional media. Back in 2001-2002, that wasn’t really happening quite yet. Now it’s almost like publicists feed blogs with MP3s to start the buzz and it’s like a calculated business plan. But back then it was

this fortuitous convergence of circumstances that allowed the band to break out of Toronto.

Q: I actually had no idea that Feist was ever in Toronto’s By Divine Right or Guelph, Ont.’s Royal City. It was interesting to read about her post-Calgary career. How were you first introduced to her?

A: The Royal City one was a pretty brief stint, although when we had them on the cover of Eye Weekly in 2000, she was on the cover. It might have been the only time she was ever photographed with the band. It was a six-month kind of deal. I first became aware of Feist in By Divine Right and she put out her first solo record shortly after that. She was playing around here a lot in 1999, 2000.

Q: What did Feist provide to BSS that the other members (which include Emily Haines of Metric and Amy Millan of Stars) didn’t?

A: Obviously her voice is spectacular and it’s really different from even standard female, indie-rock voices. At that point, the airy, post-My Bloody Valentine, Cocteau Twins vocal styles were predominant and she was just like this firecracker on stage. I think she was really instrumental in transforming the band from being just a bunch of dudes playing post-rock jams on stage to bringing this melodic element that really distinguished the band at the time. Coming from this more soulful, pop background, it didn’t immediately make sense of how she would mesh with this post-rock ensemble. But it was one of the new elements that they were bringing to the mix. I think she brought real energy to the stage. She gave this faceless collective a presence. There’s this really telling anecdote in the book. She initially wanted to play guitar in the band and at the time Kevin wasn’t really into the idea. Apparently, Kevin is still embarrassed by this story. Feist realized early on that her voice would be her contribution to the band.

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- On the Scene blog has late-breaking reviews at [calgaryherald.com/entertainment](#)

THE NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW BESTSELLERS					
THIS WEEK	FICTION	LAST WEEK	THIS WEEK	NON-FICTION	LAST WEEK
1	THE 8TH CONFESSION • James Patterson and Maxine Paetro. Lindsay Boxer investigates a pair of killings.	—	1	LIBERTY AND TYRANNY • Mark R. Levin. A conservative manifesto.	1
2	LOVER AVENGED • J.R. Ward. A vampire ally hides his mixed blood.	—	2	OUTLIERS • Malcolm Gladwell. Why some people succeed.	2
3	FIRST FAMILY • David Baldacci. The search for an abducted child.	1	3	THE GIRLS FROM AMES • Jeffrey Zaslow. An enduring friendship among a group of women.	5
4	SUMMER ON BLOSSOM STREET • Debbie Macomber. More stories from a Seattle knitting class.	—	4	ALWAYS LOOKING UP • Michael J. Fox. Fox's last 10 years.	4
5	TEA TIME FOR THE TRADITIONALLY BUILT • Alexander McCall Smith. The 10th No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency book.	2	5	COLUMBINE • Dave Cullen. A full account of the Columbine massacre.	3
6	JUST TAKE MY HEART • Mary Higgins Clark. A detective discovers that her life is at risk.	4	6	THE END OF OVER-EATING • David A. Kessler. How eating sugar, fat and salt affects us.	—
7	LOITERING WITH INTENT • Stuart Woods. Stone Barrington takes a case.	3	7	MOMMYWOOD • Tori Spelling with Hilary Liftin. Humorous stories about Hollywood motherhood.	6
8	THE HOST • Stephanie Meyer. Aliens have taken control of most humans.	6	8	A BOLD FRESH PIECE OF HUMANITY • Bill O'Reilly. The Fox News commentator on his life.	8
9	THE LANGUAGE OF BEES • Laurie R. King. A painter searches for his missing wife and child.	—	9	LOSING MUM AND PUP • Christopher Buckley. A memoir of the lives and deaths of his parents.	—
10	LOOK AGAIN • Lisa Scottoline. A baby may have been abducted from his birth mother.	7	10	HOUSE OF CARDS • William D. Cohan. The beginning of the Wall Street collapse.	7

RANKINGS REFLECT SALES FIGURES FOR THE WEEK ENDED MAY 2, AT ALMOST 4,000 BOOKSTORES PLUS WHOLESALERS SERVING 50,000 OTHER RETAILERS (GIFT SHOPS, DEPARTMENT STORES, NEWSSTANDS, SUPERMARKETS), STATISTICALLY WEIGHTED TO REPRESENT ALL SUCH OUTLETS NATIONWIDE.

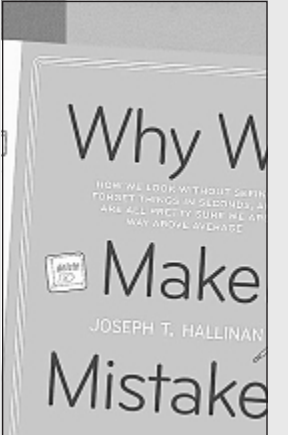
THIS WEEK	CALGARY BESTSELLERS FICTION	LAST WEEK
1	GOOD TO A FAULT • Marina Endicott. A lady takes a family in, then questions her own motives.	1
2	GUERNSEY LITERARY AND POTATO PEEL PIE SOCIETY • Mary Ann Shaffer. Finding connection in surprising ways.	4
3	PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES • Jane Austen. An expanded edition of the novel.	—
4	PERCY JACKSON AND THE OLYMPIANS • Rick Riordan. Book five in the Percy Jackson series.	—
5	THE CHILDREN’S BOOK • A.S. Byatt. An era that came of age before 1914.	—
6	SIX SUSPECTS • Vikas Swarup. Six suspects in a murder mystery.	—
7	PYGMY • Chuck Palahniuk. Young adults sent to U.S.A. to inflict terror.	—
8	B IS FOR BEER • Tom Robbins. Inhabitants of a planet consume large amounts of beer.	9
9	PEOPLE OF THE BOOK • Geraldine Brooks. A novel of a rare-book expert.	2
10	THE MISSING • Tim Gautreaux. The fate of a stolen child.	—

THIS WEEK	NON-FICTION	LAST WEEK
1	WHAT’S SO WRONG WITH BEING ABSOLUTELY RIGHT • Judy Johnson. The nature of dogmatic belief.	—
2	WHY WE MAKE MISTAKES • Joseph Hallinan. The science of human error.	—
3	THE BIG PICTURE • David Suzuki & David Robert Taylor. Reflections on a changing planet.	1
4	CANADIAN ROCKIES TRAIL GUIDE • Brian Patton. A hiker’s guide to Banff, Jasper, Yoho and Kootenay parks.	6
5	IN BED WITH THE WORD • Daniel Coleman. Living in a culture of distraction.	—
6	CARBON SHIFT • Thomas Homer-Dixon. Oil depletion and climate change.	5
7	MY WINNIPEG • Guy Maddin. A personal portrait of his home town.	—
8	HAT TRICK • Harley Hotchkiss. A memoir about hockey and the oilpatch.	—
9	THE MAN WHO LOVED CHINA • Simon Winchester. A scientist who unlocked secrets of China.	7
10	TRUE PATRIOT LOVE • Michael Ignatieff. A family memoir.	8

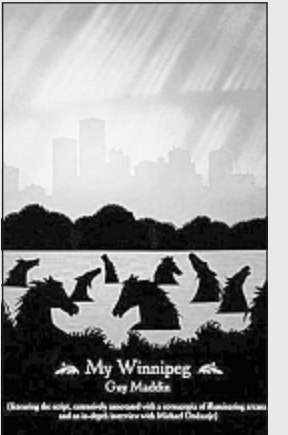
INFORMATION PROVIDED BY OWL’S NEST BOOKS AND PAGES ON KENSINGTON



Complete with romance, heartbreak, swordfights, cannibalism and thousands of rotting corpses, *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* transforms a masterpiece of world literature into something many would actually want to read.



Why We Make Mistake gives real-life stories and offers valuable advice, such as how to remember where you’ve hidden something important. You’ll learn why multitasking is a bad idea, why men make errors women don’t, and why most people think San Diego is west of Reno.



When Guy Maddin decided to tackle the subject of his home town, it could only have ended up as a “docu-fantasia,” a melange of personal history, civic tragedy and mystical hypothesizing.

GALLERY SEEN WITH NANCY TOUSLEY

Landscapes will set your mind free

Whet your appetite for travel, by plane or armchair, at Mark Holliday’s show of recent landscape paintings at the Paul Kuhn Gallery. Holliday’s vistas of open fields stretching out underneath skies piled high with clouds are inspired by the English countryside of his youth. He renders them in oil paint mixed with beeswax, giving both the image and the painting surface a palpable dreamlike presence. Seen here is Landscape 049 (2009). The show by this “committed empiricist” continues in tandem with Toronto artist Malcolm Rains’ Sunyata & Tathata Paintings, through May 23.

