



IN CONVERSATION WITH BRUCE COCKBURN

BY M.D. DUNN

Bruce Cockburn laughs a lot. It might surprise people familiar with only his heavier songs or the many causes he has championed. He even makes jokes, clever and funny jokes. His conversation is punctuated by belly laughs and a wit that runs from dry and cutting to outright silliness. Truth is, this legendary songwriter doesn't recognize his own legend.

Throughout his 50-year career, which he calls a “careen,” Cockburn has participated in numerous grassroots actions: working to help ban landmines in Mozambique and elsewhere, supporting the Haida and the Lubicon Cree in land rights disputes, promoting sustainable farming, and witnessing the desperation of refugees in Central America. Many of these concerns end up in his songs and have perpetuated the image of a cold intellectual, a worldly and jaded observer of human folly.

His autobiography, *Rumours of Glory* (Harper Collins, 2014), is one of the most impressive and articulate musical memoirs in recent memory. While the book does discuss Cockburn's life, it is more accurately a document of some of the major conflicts and cultural developments of the late 20th century. Like its author, the memoir looks outward, always working to recognize truth behind appearance.

He has also championed literature in an artform that often draws from humanity's baser interests. His lyrics are precise, often narrative in form, sometimes brutal. Yet, listening closely, there is also humour, faith, and undaunted hope.

The song "Maybe the Poet" from the 1984 album *Stealing Fire* argues for the importance of poetry, even if it goes unacknowledged by the greater culture. The song celebrates the diversity of poets—"male, female, slave, or free, peaceful, or disorderly"—and documents the dangers of truth-telling: "Shoot him up with lead / You won't call back what's been said / Put him in the ground / But one day you'll look around / There'll be a face you don't know / Voicing thoughts you've heard before." The poetic voice will survive, no matter how the domineering forces of money and fashion try to suppress it. Poetry and art, Cockburn seems to be saying, transcend the physical. The voice is larger than the form, and the human need to engage in poetry is unquenchable.

Cockburn wrote no songs in the years it took him to complete his memoir. He had stopped thinking of himself as a songwriter when an invitation arrived to contribute to the soundtrack of *Al Purdy Was Here*, a documentary about the Roblin Lake poet. The request resulted in "3 Al Purdys," a song bookended by two of Purdy's poems ("Transient" and "In the Beginning Was the Word") with Cockburn's eloquent homeless narrator ranting in the middle. Songs started flowing soon after, resulting in the Juno Award-winning album *Bone on Bone* (True North Records, 2017). Now, not even two years later, Cockburn has released *Crowing Ignites*, a collection of stunning new instrumentals and his 34th album.

This conversation took place on August 14, 2019, with Bruce Cockburn calling in from his home in San Francisco.

THE “I” IN THE SONG/OUR GREED-BASED ECONOMY

M.D. DUNN: To my count, you have just a few songs from characters’ perspectives: “Call Me Rose,” from *Small Source of Comfort* (2011), in which Richard Nixon is reincarnated as a woman named Rose; “3 Al Purdys,” from *Bone on Bone* (2017), in which a homeless man will recite Al Purdy poems for “a 20-dollar bill”; and “Guerilla Betrayed” from *Humans* (1980) that documents the thoughts of a desperate soldier.

BRUCE COCKBURN: The songs from *Going Down the Road* [a road movie from 1970, directed by Donald Shebib] are another example of that, where I really went out of my way not to write from my own perspective because I had never been to Cape Breton at the time. I had no idea what it even looked like.

MD: Is it liberating to write in a character’s voice?

BC: It worked with “3 Al Purdys.” I guess I haven’t done enough of it to know if it can be liberating or not. There is another song I wrote with Barney Bentall called “Atikokan Annie.” He’d come up with the beginning of the song and kind of a groove. It went: “Annie grew up in Atikokan. Did a lot of drinking. Did a lot of smoking.” That is what we started with. I took that and constructed a story of a woman who grew up in Atikokan and later gets involved with

Japanese industrialists. It’s from the point of view of her ex-lover, a guy who got her out of her small town and whom she later ditches for bigger prospects. And they meet up again. Barney recorded it. If it [a fictional narrator] works, it’s a lot of fun.

“3 Al Purdys” was like that, once I thought of the guy. The first thing that came was the line: “I’ll give you three Al Purdys for a twenty-dollar bill.” And I wondered, who would say that? Immediately, this older guy with long white hair and a beard, his coattails flapping in the wind, on the street ranting came to mind. Although he takes exception to the term “ranting” in the song, but that is basically what he is doing. He wants everyone to hear Al Purdy’s poetry, and he has his hat out.

MD: That song has one of my favourite lines of all time: “They love the little guy until they get a better offer / with the dollar getting smaller, they can fit more in their coffers.” That line encapsulates some of the major problems with our economy.

BC: Yeah. Our economy is greed-based. Of course, it’s going to do what it’s doing. Unless you have checks and balances on that greed, and we’re in a place now where people don’t seem to want to limit it. We’re taking our chances with the rich assholes...

That’s also my 7-year-old daughter’s favourite song on the album because of the line, “Porkers in the counting house, counting out their bacon...” She guffaws every time she hears that line.

MD: Off that same album, “Looking and Waiting” reminds me of Rilke. I don’t know if I am reading too much into it.

BC: Huh. Well, I read Rilke a long time ago. I couldn’t quote any of it at you, but I couldn’t say it’s not an influence either. It is a God song. He is a beautiful poet.

MD: Do you have a sense of the objective “I” of the poet-speaker in your more autobiographical songs? To what degree is that really you in the songs?

BC: It’s the slightly whitewashed version of me. It’s the me I am willing to show people. It’s generally me. Where there is not an obvious character, it is me.

MD: So, in the song “The Charity of Night” [from the album *The Charity of Night*, 1997) the speaker points a gun at the sexual predator harassing him. Did you have a gun when you trekked around Europe as a young man?

BC: I’m not sure what I should give away here. I want people to keep on thinking.

MD: Okay. Moving on...

**READING ABOUT A NAZI’S MYSTIC /
THIS CONVERSATION’S OBLIGATORY
TRUMP REFERENCE / THE COMING
DISASTER**

MD: What are you reading these days?

BC: I’m reading a book called *Hitler’s Priestess* by Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (NYU Press, 2000). It’s the biography of a woman—and I’m not very far into it, so I can’t tell you much about her—named Savitri Devi. She was a French-Greek woman who reached adulthood in the late ’20s/early ’30s. She became an ardent supporter of the Aryan myth, in fact is responsible for it to some extent. I don’t know if she was brought up as a Christian or not. She grows up not appreciating the standard religions of Europe, and doesn’t like Arabs, doesn’t like Jews, doesn’t like Christians, and comes to the conclusion that Hinduism is that last repository of the real Aryan mythology, with multiple gods and the culture of belief that went with that. In Europe, it had been suppressed. So, she gets involved in creating a campaign to promote Hindu nationalism.

She goes to India, where she gets that name. She is an admirer of Hitler, reads *Mein Kampf* and thinks it’s pretty cool, seeing a link between the Nazi mythology and her vision of Hindu mythology. After the Second World War, she gets involved with George Lincoln Rockwell and all the post-war Nazis in America. It seems to suggest that she is a kind of heroine for the Neo-Nazis today.

MD: Timely. Is the current age living up to the dystopic fiction you’ve read?

BC: It’s pretty close. Certainly, you can imagine it heading there. It isn’t as dystopic as some of that stuff gets.

It's definitely on a downward slope. Whether we'll recover in some timely manner, I don't know. But it doesn't look great.

MD: I just read that a few hundred thousand New Yorkers have signed a petition to have Fifth Avenue, where the Trump Tower is, renamed after Obama.

BC: That is really good! It's so petty, but everything is so petty right now.

MD: Who knew Donald Trump was such as asshole, except anyone who has been paying attention since the 1980s?

BC: Well, yeah. How could they have thought otherwise? How can they still think otherwise? It's just astounding to me. The people he clearly does not love or care for at all admire him so much, and of course he basks in the glory. That part he cares about.

Bigger than that is the way in which his policies and pronouncements have metastasized into the whole culture of the United States. It's now a culture of anger and hostility. Those sentiments were never not there but it wasn't dominant in my lifetime. Even in the Vietnam era, where it got very livid, it still wasn't where it's at now. It's in all the structures: the court system, the environmental concern. He's done a good job of infecting everything. How we can ever recover from that, I don't know.

MD: It's going to be fascinating and terrifying to see if the environmental pressures we are about to experience in

North America bring people together or make them crazier.

BC: It's hard to say. People will become more desperate than they are now. Think of the gap between the North and the South, which has never recovered from the Civil War, that gap is becoming evident as the current events unfold. And as the South heats up, physically, it's going to become more difficult for people to live there.

WHERE IS HERE? / THE POWER OF PLACE

MD: You have a practice of documenting in album liner notes where a song was written: Is that where you were when you wrote the lyric or where it came together as a song?

BC: It's where the lyrics are first born. Sometimes, it's the idea and the lyrics get worked on later. It might be partly written in the first place and then get amended or added to later. But, yes, it's about the lyrics.

MD: Do you believe in Sacred Places, genius loci; that some places are more powerful?

BC: Not sure I would use the word "sacred," but there certainly are places where the spirit, or a spirit, seem to be present. And I've been a few places like that in my life. There is this notion of "spirit of place."

When I was in Mali [for the documentary *River of Sand* (1997)], the

village we filmed in had a spring, which was rare in that part of the world. As a result, they were able to do better than any of their neighbouring communities. The spring had a spirit attached to it. The Dogon people I met were predominantly Islamic in belief. I asked the chief, who was very welcoming to us, about the spirit of the spring. He said, "Oh, yeah. We used to sacrifice a black goat to it every year. But now we have the faith, and we don't do that anymore. We just sacrifice a chicken."

MD: The spirit's cutting down on red meat, I guess.

BC: It was cute, but the spring had a real presence about it. Almost like, I hate to use this example, but it is what's coming to mind. It was almost like a *Lord of the Rings* kind of a thing. I mean, not like it felt like being in the *Lord of the Rings* type of thing, but the sense of a presence attached to a place could have been written about in *Lord of the Rings*. I remember being up in the Yukon and standing near a waterfall that had a presence about it. I've been in forests that felt like that too. Like some semi-conscious, at least, some kind of a consciousness that notices the intruder or the bystander, and you feel that. People talk about power places like Machu Picchu and the pyramids and all that, but I don't have much of a sense of it.

I was at a Nazi monument in Germany that was the worst place I have ever been. It just felt utterly evil. And it wasn't only the association with

the Nazis, it was something even deeper. I don't know, other people would go to the same place and feel nothing. So, it's a subjective take on it.

MD: There must be a reason that churches are built over temples and temples built over groves.

BC: There are a lot of churches in malls now. I don't know what that means.

ON WRITING

MD: You've said that most of your lyrics are written separately from the music and later almost scored like a film with the guitar. Do you have a sense of these components happening simultaneously and subconsciously? Like the lyrics you've written match a guitar piece you've been working on?

BC: It's not likely to be a fully developed piece, but it does happen. When I am writing lyrics, I generally have a rhythm in mind to hang the words on. It doesn't generally end up being the rhythm of the song, but there is a sense of it. Sometimes it happens that there is a guitar riff that has been waiting for lyrics and can become the basis of a song.

MD: You've said that you don't write every day but wait for the lyrics to come. As a creative writing teacher, I hate to hear this practice being so successful.

BC: There is a good argument for exercising the muscles. I tried writing daily

for a year, and I gave it up. I wouldn't recommend waiting to everyone. I think you can develop the flow of ideas by using your brain and translating it into the physical by writing it down, or typing it. I used to find, too, that typing—I am not a typist, I have no typing skills whatsoever, I'm a hunt-and-peck, two index fingers type of guy—but used to find that typing brought out a whole different set of ideas than writing with a pen.

MD: Some novelists will use typewriters for dialogue and longhand for narrative or descriptive passages.

BC: Interesting. Manual typewriters are harder on the fingers, and harder on the fingernails if you're a guitar player, but more satisfying than the computer keyboard. I don't know if it is a kind of conceit, but the retro aspect and the physicality of the manual typewriter is appealing to me. I have an old typewriter, an old portable. I haven't used it in a while, but I used to type letters on it.

INFLUENCES/ART AND POLITICS/THE GOOD AND THE DRIVEL

MD: When we spoke a couple of years ago, you identified Carolyn Forché as a poet whose work you've admired. I wasn't familiar with her then but now see some interesting parallels between some of her writing and some of yours, thematically and as a response to injustice. You both often adopt the stance of the artist as witness and documentarian.

BC: Yeah. Her stuff from the '70s is so visceral and intense. She has a memoir out now about that period, I have it but haven't got to it yet. I heard her interviewed on NPR and went out and got it. Those poems jump off the page. Her later stuff is a bit more difficult, I find. It's heavy poetry.

MD: Did her book about El Salvador, *The Country Between Us* (Harper Perennial, 1982) inform your work in Central America?

BC: Sure it did. Absolutely. Not sure what happened in what order, but that book was one of the things my brother directed me to.

My brother Don was involved with solidarity work with the Salvadoran rebel movement, and he kept feeding me stuff about Nicaragua and El Salvador including poems by Ernesto Cardenal and Carolyn Forché, especially *The Country Between Us*. I think I had read some of both of those poets before I actually went to Central America for the first time. With reference to my songs about Central America, before *Stealing Fire* (1984), on *The Trouble With Normal* (1983) there is a song called "Tropic Moon" that was definitely influenced by Carolyn Forché. The songs I wrote on *Stealing Fire* owe more to Ernesto Cardenal than to Forché because I was steeped in Nicaragua. Two of his earlier books contain more of what he describes as documentary poems. That approach of writing was on my mind during *Stealing Fire*.

When I think of Carolyn Forché, I think of Allen Ginsburg too. More of the late '60s and '70s Ginsburg, like *The Fall of America* and that period. It's also documentary, a different style and way of using language, but a similar spirit: this is what happened, this is what I see. And it's very concrete. Those three poets figure prominently in my understanding of writing.

MD: You have said you were taught that art and politics should be separate concerns and that you struggled to bring the political into your art. Did these writers help with that process?

BC: I think they did, actually. It was part of a process. It wasn't entirely down to them. A big part of that development came about when I went to Chile, the same year I went to Nicaragua for the first time, and Pinochet's dictatorship was thriving. There was all this poetic energy, which the fascist authorities were going well out of their way to suppress. Like they suppressed Neruda. Well, they may have poisoned him. It's not clear how he died. There's some mystery surrounding his death. But they understood that poetry was a threat,

that poetry addressed events and the spirit of people. You could see that, it was so graphic. I was already on my way of losing the bias I had grown up with, the idea that art should be separate from poetry, but Chile really clinched it. In Nicaragua, Somoza jailed the poets. And so many poets supported the revolution. All through

**I was already
on my way of
losing the bias
I had grown up
with, the idea
that art should
be separate from
poetry, but Chile
really clinched
it. In Nicaragua,
Somoza jailed
the poets. And
so many poets
supported the
revolution.**

Latin America, there is no distinction like that Victorian distinction I'd grown up with. It was perfectly fine for poems to be about what we would call political topics.

What it comes down to is trying to talk truth to people, which is some of what poetry is supposed to do. You can't avoid the political because it's part of life. You put people together, and you have politics. Even if the people gathered are only the very limited readership of a particular poet, there is still a political element there.

MD: These concerns seem to come together in your song "Gavin's Woodpile" from the album *In the Falling Dark* (1976). Like the spiritual elements of your work, and concerns for social justice and the environment all came together in that song.

BC: The political is the last thing to come together in the grouping of that thematic material. Once you start thinking about social justice, or the environment, you immediately come up against the political because you can't change anything otherwise. You can't even get people to talk about it without getting involved with the political world. Even if it is only just to get a whole bunch of people to talk and then drawing heat from the political powers that be, you're going to be confronted with it at some point. It's especially true if you're trying to do anything concrete like address an environmental issue where there are economic interests involved, which there always are. The economic interests are in conflict with the environment, then you are suddenly in the realm of politics.

MD: You have said that your goal is to write a good song, not to champion a cause. How do you know if it's a good song? Have you ever written, or do you still write, bad songs?

BC: There are songs that live on the bottom shelf in the storehouse of my brain that don't get looked at too often because I don't feel too excited by them, but when I am forced to hear them I usually realize that they aren't that bad. There might be an embarrassing line here or there—in fact, there definitely are—but sometimes the lyrics are okay but the music doesn't work as well.

The stuff I wrote in the '60s, when I was just starting to write songs, I mean I wrote a lot of drivel. So, if that is the

baseline, everything else looks pretty good.

MD: As you become more experienced, do you find the things you write are more useable now, that you don't have to work through so much bad stuff?

BC: I weed it as I go. That is partly because I have already said quite a lot and feel pretty much the same about things. There's no point in repeating it, unless you can think of something new to bring to a concept, or you have some twist in the writing that is new. There is no point in just going over the same old ground. It's harder to find new things to write about, or new ways of writing about the old things. Because I've done so much, it takes longer to come up with ideas that are useable. And I am fussier now. I don't think I have ever made an album of perfect songs. I am not sure if I have ever made a perfect song.

MD: Some would disagree with you, Mr. Cockburn.

BC: They are welcome to. The more the better.

INTERPRETATIONS

MD: You've said that a fan once scolded you for the song "Pacing the Cage," saying it sounds like a suicide note. Are you often surprised by how people interpret your songs and the way your songs have functioned in their lives?

BC: The first time I became aware of that was with a song called “Dialogue with the Devil” [from the album *Sunwheel Dance*, 1972] when a journalist said it was about reconciling the devil within us. And I was horrified. Because the devil in that song is a jerk. Get him away! It’s a reflection of all the bullshit: money and fame and the seduction of the devil. I was associating the devil with the biblical image, but it’s not even biblical, it’s John Milton, that version of the devil. For that journalist it meant something different. But that happens across the board. You write something and you put it out there, and I know what I mean by it. Once in a while, I get an indication that someone got what I thought I was putting into it. But you can never assume that. People perceive everything through their own filters. You have no control over that. The best you can do is to try to be as clear as possible with what you are saying.

MD: Does doubt play a role in faith?

BC: It does for me. Not by design. It is stimulated by ideas and cogent observations by people who don’t share the same faith. If someone asks a good question, I can’t ignore it. You can’t just write it off. A lot of people have thought deeply about faith and their questions can incite doubt.

LANGUAGES

MD: “Mon Chemin” from *Bone on Bone* was inspired by Guillaume

Apollinaire’s poem “Victoire.” Do you read in any languages, other than French and English?

BC: No. I can hack my way through Spanish, but I need the bilingual editions. Then, I check the “translation” with a dictionary. Some languages seem to flow into English without impediment. Other languages don’t. Like Russian, I have only found one really good translation of a Russian writer, Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita*. Even Yevtushenko’s poetry for instance, and he’s a contemporary with the Beat generation, has such laboured sounding and dry translations in English. He couldn’t have become an important poet and be like that in his original language. The translations are helpful to know what he’s saying, but it just doesn’t work.

On the other hand, Japanese poetry from almost any era in translation flows really well in English. If you’re familiar with a language, as I am with French to some degree, you can see how literal the translation is. And, if it isn’t literal, is it really saying what the poet was saying? Apollinaire’s stuff uses French grammar atypically, but less so than someone like Blaise Cendrars, who was Apollinaire’s direct descendant in a way. I find it helpful to translate.

MD: How does it benefit a writer to read in a variety of languages?

BC: I just like to know what they are really saying if I like the poem. You read the translations, and it’s okay. I

don't remember the English translation of the Apollinaire poem, but the two lines in English are "Who knows where my road would be?" The lines hit me, and I knew I could make a song from that. It had been a long time since I'd written a French song. I wasn't sure it worked, but we got a good response in Quebec from that song. So, I guess it didn't suck.

MEETING THE SHAMAN KING AND DANCING IN THE DRAGON'S JAWS

MD: In your song "Mystery" from the album *Life Short Call Now* (2006) you sing about seeing "star-strewn space" in the shaman's eyes and in *Rumours of Glory* you reveal that Norval Morrisseau was the shaman. What was it like to hang out with him?

BC: I didn't hang out with him for long, and it was only once. He was very interesting, I thought. He had a big ego, but he also was gracious and kind of intentionally mysterious. But he was exactly that, he was shamanic. It was really clear. The painting we used on the *Dancing in the Dragon's Jaws* album represented something he'd experienced in the astral plane, according to him. Those little figures on the back of the dragon, or whatever it is, are human spirits travelling in the astral plane.

He was staying at a furnished high-rise in Cabbage Town in Toronto. Bernie [Finkelstein, Cockburn's long-time manager] had made contact with Morrisseau's dealer. He was expecting us. We knocked on the door, and

a young Native guy invited us in and said Norval was meditating in the back bedroom. We waited for him in the living room for some time. The apartment was a short-term rental, like an Airbnb. It was pretty sterile except in one corner there was a tree stump with a collection of lichen and moss burning on it, producing clouds of acrid smoke. This was before there were smoke detectors, so you could do this kind of thing. It functioned as incense, and it was a pleasant enough smell, but it was heavy smoke. We sat in that for a while. It wasn't a drug of any sort. After about twenty minutes, he greeted us and offered us tea. As he handed me a cup, he said, "It is the King who serves." With a twinkle in his eye. When we made eye contact, it was just like I describe in the song. Instead of his eyes, there were windows into intergalactic space. It was spooky. A really dislocating kind of moment. It was over very quickly. He saw me see that, and his grin changed to one of acknowledgement, like: "Yeah. That's what's going on here."

MD: We have the album jacket of *Dancing in the Dragon's Jaws* framed on our kitchen wall, partially because you signed it, but also because the image is so striking.

BC: Bernie has the original. That was part of the deal. Buy the painting and you can use it on your album cover.

MD: Maybe you've noticed this, but when you look at it from the side it appears to be three dimensional the way

the three panels of colour strobe against each other.

BC: It was a triptych. So, it really is three separate panels. That is interesting. I guess I haven't looked at it enough to respond to that. But it is an incredible painting. We were calling the album *Dancing in the Dragon's Jaws* and there was this painting that seemed like a match made in heaven.

MD: An incredible painting for an incredible album, that's for sure.

MEET & GREET, BUT PLEASE STOP GIVING HIM STUFF

MD: We are getting close to the end. I hope I'm not taking up too much of your time.

BC: No. It's okay.

MD: It's very impressive that you still do a meet and greet after shows. Many people in your position would just sit on the bus while the crew packs up, saying, "The show is enough." You're still open like that. What do you get from it?

BC: I didn't do it for many years. And long after it became a trend for musicians to do that, because it encourages audiences to buy merchandise, I still didn't do it. Everybody was doing it, and I wasn't because it just seemed like a horrible idea. But I finally thought I would try it to see what I thought, and I really enjoyed it because I get to see the people. If you're looking at an audience,

you're mostly looking at a black, empty space with voices and human sounds, and the sense of a presence, because you can feel the audience there, but you can't really see them. Sometimes people want to talk too long, but more often they just say whatever's on their minds, and it's quite interesting to hear it. I really enjoy meeting people. It does get tiring. I do feel that the show was what it was really all about.

MD: People must lay heavy stuff on you?

BC: People give me lots of *stuff*. And what can I do with it all? Sometimes I can't even get them home, if it's a piece of art or something. It's not going to survive being on the plane, or on the tour bus. That part gets uncomfortable. Lots of books, and books are heavy. You end up with a box of books and have to pay extra to get them home.

NO BEATS/NO BOOK

MD: Are there any remnants of the Beat poets in present-day San Francisco?

BC: Oh, there is a kind of tourist presence. I don't know if any of the young tech generation who is sort of in charge here now is aware of any of that. I don't know that most of them read. It'll come back around. Maybe they will write poetry in emojis.

MD: Do you see young people making new art in San Francisco?

BC: No. I don't. I'm not sure they are not here, but I don't know how they

could afford to be here. What I witnessed was them all leaving. The art scene that was evident even ten years ago, when I first got here, is gone. There is certainly an art scene here though. The symphony is a good one. On the established, professional level there is a scene. There are good jazz players and good opera and that stuff. But for people up and coming in the pop scene, I don't know who is out there. People make albums in their bedrooms, and they circulate them online. I don't look there, so I don't know. There are few venues. The famous old ones are going bit by bit. It's hard to say how anyone gets started with nowhere to play.

MD: That's cyclical too, I guess.

BC: For sure. When the shit hits the fan, and there is no electricity, there will be lots of live music.

MD: "False River" is a poem you wrote for Victoria poet laureate Yvonne

Blomer's environmental anthology *Refugium: Poems for the Pacific* (Caitlin Press, 2017) and which you later turned into a song for the *Bone on Bone* album. Was this your first published poem?

BC: No. There was a little magazine called *Weed* (1966-67, edited by Nelson Ball) that published four poems of mine. It was [Ottawa poet and mentor to Cockburn] Bill Hawkins who brought them to Victor Coleman, I think, and they were published there.

MD: Have you considered publishing a book of your poems?

BC: I have not. It's questionable to me whether I would even publish a book of lyrics. I don't think what I write is intended for the page. Certainly, you can read the song lyrics and they can work. If I were writing for the page, there would be fewer words and not as much need for rhyme and rhythm.