POZ Picks—May 1997

May 1, 1997 By James Ireland Baker

Music

Living in the Bonus Round
Steve Schalchlin and Friends
(Bonus Round Records)

Two years ago, after AIDS complications brought him to the verge of death, Steve Schalchlin decided to devote his life to the composition of *The Last Session,* an autobiographical musical. With a book by Schalchlin's life partner, Jim Brochu, *Session* hones in on Gideon (Schalchlin), the son of a parson and a nurse, as he struggles with morality and mortality. This CD is composed of the often-thrilling, never-less-than-moving music from the show, all of which deals explicitly with issues and emotions faced daily by people with HIV. The song "Connected," for instance, begins as a collapsing Gideon is brought to a hospital and connected to a life-supporting "meter"; it ends with his connection to toher human beings. "Somebody's Friend" casts a skeptical eye on rampant rumors of possible cures: "Somebody's friend got cure of HIV/When I asked if I could meet somebody's friend, they'd say, it's not my friend, it's the friend of somebody's friend." To order, call 818.506.6331.

Books

Gossip
Christopher Bram
(Dutton)

"Don't you find it odd? That of the hundreds of thousands of people who've died of AIDS none has committed a political assassination?" says a character in this dark farce about the relationship between governmental maneuvering and lowbrow humor. Ralph, a breezy New Yorker, begins a tryst with Bill, a young Republican journalist who "just happens" to be gay. Ralph is encouraged in this fling by his HIV positive friend Peter, but Peter's lover, Nick (Ralph's ex), blasts gay Republicans for their hypocrisy, bemoaning the fact that "tragedy has become cozy." These interpersonal dynamics explode when Bill publishes a scathing Washington tell-all that attacks, among others, Ralph's best friend, Nancy (a political speech writer with a secret unrequited passion for her female boss). Angered by the betrayal, Ralph promptly dumps Bill, who is later found murdered, with the suspicion resting firmly on Ralph. Whew! Wry and entertaining, *Gossip* bravely takes on the politics of AIDS and proves that, whether we like it or not, the personal is

indeed the political.

--Erik Jackson

Positive Cooking
Lisa McMillan, Jill Jarvie, Janet Brauer
(Avery Publishing Group)

This book represents a quantum leap in the quality of nutritional recommendations that mainstream dieticians have been making for people living with HIV. It wasn't unusual, even two years ago, to come across suggestions like: "Add two tablespoons of sugar to your Coke. Eat Haagen-Dazs for breakfast." You won't find any such advice in this book; The emphasis has finally swung from keeping weight on at all costs to eating foods that maintain lean body mass and support immunity for the long term. The book hits all the key points: The connection between balanced nutrition and immunity, tips about vitamin and mineral supplementation, food and water safety, and nutritional strategies for common symptoms of HIV (like diarrhea, fatigue, nausea). The simple recipes, which use easily available ingredients, place an emphasis on high-quality carbohydrates, protein, vegetables and fruits; and downplay immune-suppressive fats and sweets. People with limited energy will appreciate the quick recipes, and vegetarians will find many choices. It's possible to go much further, but *Positive Cooking* is an excellent introduction for the novice.

--Patrick Donnelly

Sean's Legacy
Robert Hopkins
(Triumph Books)

In 1985, 21-year-old Sean Hopkins arrived home from school with a sore throat, chills, cramps, watery eyes and a fever of 103. Though he was initially diagnosed with mononucleosis, a blood test later revealed HIV. Hopkins' father, Robert, the author of this memoir, writes about his son with great love and thoughtfullness. Particularly touching is his description of Sean's HIV positive friends (many of whom were abandoned by their families) whom Hopkins and his wife began to nurture not long after the death of their son. Indeed, the couple began preaching tolerance and love for people affected by HIV to members of the clergy, political leaders and medical professionals. "In the years before Sean was born, Brenda and I had shared a full life together," Hopkins writes. "We could do that again, with the added responsibility and satisfaction of helping people with AIDS and encouraging others to be compassionate toward them and their caretakers...They are all Sean's legacy to us."

Film and Video

Life and Death on the A-List
Directed by Jay Corcoran
(WaterBearer Films)

What happens when a man whose life is based on his own beauty becomes sick and, consequently, "undesirable"? That's the question posed by Jay Corcoran's brilliant documentary about Tom McBride, a

handsome actor whose career, despite early success in commercials, never quite took off. But if McBride didn't achieve much professional attention, he made up for it in his personal life as an ongoing member of Manhattan's so-called gay A-list (a group of extremely attractive young gay men). "When I started working out seriously, and I had a decent body, and then people realized I had a nice hair chest pattern (sic), that's when I got onto the A-list," McBride says. McBride's attractiveness is so essential to his self-image that, when his face and body become ravaged by AIDS, he feels he is "becoming invisible." This documentary is an indelibly relevant portrait of--and commentary on--our culture's exaggerated, often destructive emphasis on youth and beauty. To order, call 800.551.8304.

Theater

A Question of Mercy
David Rabe
(New York Theatre Workshop)

"I had great energy all my life--a vitality that I could count on," says Anthony, a PWA in the new David Rabe play, *A Question of Mercy.* Because he no longer has this vitality (he can barely stand up), Anthony decides to kill himself. He finds a doctor willing to provide the necessary dosage of barbiturates, but soon discovers that he possesses no true control over his death (or his life). Though suicide may seem like a simple answer to overwhelming problems, suicide itself can be problematic and difficult--logistically as well as morally. Inspired by an essay by Dr. Richard Seltzer in *The New York Times Magazine* in 1991, this play (by the author of *Hurlyburly* and *Streamers)* is not merely about doctor-assisted suicide, but about how the enjoyment and appreciation of life is often based on our illusory sense of control.

PICK OF THE LITTER

Who says beauty is only skin-deep? You can look beautiful--and be abeautiful person--when you're wearing MAC Viva Glam lipstick. Everycent of the retail selling price of Viva Glam goes to the MAC AIDSFund, which provides monetary support for AIDS education, preventionand home care. To date, sales of the lipstick have raised more than $5million. Beautiful!

CYBER *POZ*

Mouse of the Beholder

Artistic responses to AIDS on the Web are bursting with beauty--celebrating life as a wonderful counterbalance to the disease. Though some of the expressions are filled with anger or pain, all attempt to recapture what has been lost.

The Body has an excellent listing of artists and arts organizations that attempt to make sense of the epidemic by experiencing its human and spiritual dimensions.

AngelWeb's A-R-K (Aids Reality Killers) is a fascinating collection of haiku-like poems that focus on the disease. The Web page for the **AIDS Memorial Quilt** opens to a bird's eye view of the quily on the Mall in Washington, DC.

Among the most beautiful tributes are those found in **A Day Without Art**. The homepage has a sample poem from each year of the commemoration. One of these poems is “Plum Tree,” which reads, in part: “Early this morning I noticed the first buds small, white, fragile. The plum tree awakens to spring, I thought. This moment is too short, I thought. Tomorrow or the next day the white will carpet the ground, decay and be lost, but for now, this moment is mine.”

AIDS Memorial Quilt www.aidsquilt.org

A Day Without Art
www.iceflow.com/onezeroone/Death/DayArt/aidsawareness.html

AngelWeb www.a-r-k.com/angelweb

The Body www.thebody.com/aidsart.html

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