

Houston **Breakthrough** Where Women Are News

Vol. III, No.7

September 1978



MUSICA NORTENA

PERFORMER
LYDIA MENDOZA



Houston Breakthrough

Where Women Are News

Dear *Breakthrough* Subscribers:

The efforts of our dedicated committee members have measurably increased our subscription rate and our number of volunteers and should soon pay off in higher revenues for the paper.

Our fund-raising campaign has now passed the planning stage. The business prospectus detailing our philosophy and projecting our plans for growth has been drafted and will be presented to potential financial backers within the month. The money raised will enable us to hire a full-time editor and a business manager. We will resume full publication at that point.

With this issue we are announcing a particularly exciting project. The Houston premiere of *Summer Paradise*, a film directed by Gunnel Lindblom and produced by Ingmar Bergman, will be a gala benefit for *Breakthrough* with a party to follow the screening. Dolores Tarlton and Diane Smith served as advisers for this fundraiser. Mark the date, November 10, on your calendar and read critic Molly Haskell's review in this newsletter.

Also, Dr. Nanette Bruckner is hosting a picnic at her home on Dickinson Bayou. Many of Houston's feminist therapists will be the guests of honor, with the proceeds going to *Breakthrough*. Look for details on the enclosed flyer and in our *Network* section.

We've compiled an encouraging list of volunteer workers from the calls and letters that followed the "want ads" in our June newsletter. One subscriber wrote, "I may not have the time or patience to articulate feminist philosophy . . . but I can damn well see that it's grammatical!"

A misunderstanding occurred in a few cases. Some applicants thought the ads were for paid positions. At present, the rewards of working at *Breakthrough* do not include money. We apologize for not making that clear.

We still need people to staff the office and talk to our many interesting callers. If you have any free time during weekdays, please call. Those of you who have already generously offered your time and talents will be contacted soon with details of how you can help.

The telephone committee's success in prompting subscription renewals has been gratifying. Patsy Dozier reports that 90% of those contacted have pledged to renew and our circulation has begun to grow accordingly. During a recent two-week period we received over 100 new or renewed subscriptions. The next step in substantially increasing *Breakthrough's* circulation will be a direct mail campaign to attract new subscribers. A brochure is being designed for this purpose. Readers with ideas about groups of women to add to our mailing list are urged to call. If we can maintain our volume of renewals while reaching more of the Houston women and men who have not yet discovered us, *Breakthrough's* future is assured.

From the *Breakthrough* Staff

La Alondra de la Frontera

Marilyn Marshall Jones



by Barbara Karkabi

Lydia Mendoza, *La Alondra de la Frontera* (the lark of the border), has been called the major interpreter of the traditional music of the Rio Grande Valley *Musica Nortenas*. The 62-year old woman lives with her husband in a simple home in the Heights, not far from where she and her seven brothers and sisters were born.

As Mendoza explains it, *Musica Nortenas* evolved at the turn of the century when the Spanish-speaking people of the Texas-Mexican border region came into contact with the music of the Bohemians and Germans who settled there in the late 1800's.

Mendoza learned these old Mexican *rancheros*, *boleros* and ballads from her mother, in the age-old oral tradition. To this day she cannot read music and has never received a formal education of any kind. "Girls just didn't go to school in those days," she says, "but it was acceptable for me to sing and play the guitar."

Mendoza was allowed to develop her talents largely because of her mother's persistence. "My mother encouraged all of her children to do what she had never been allowed to do. She was the teacher of all of us."

Her mother could have been a great artist, Mendoza believes, but she grew up in Mexico where she was not allowed to develop her talents fully. Life became easier for her after she married Mendoza's father, who was also musically involved. They would sit around the house for hours, playing the guitar and singing. "There was always music in my house," Mendoza remembers.

Although Mendoza modestly refuses to acknowledge that she is a natural talent, she does admit that her career started at the age of four. By seven she was playing the guitar and at nine, she had perfected her skills. In later years, she learned to play the violin and the mandolin.

The same modesty Mendoza uses when discussing her talents extends to what has been called the "unique Mendoza sound," produced by her 12-string guitar. "It was really accidental," she recalls, "when my father bought me my first guitar from a pawn shop, I rearranged the strings myself. I just preferred the sound and it has stuck with me all my life."

Her first performance was at the age of 12 and even though it was before a group of friends gathered for her father's birthday, she remembers feeling extremely shy. "But, somehow I knew that performing

Mal Hombre was the first of many hits for Lydia Mendoza and from that point on, her fame grew rapidly. "I always knew I was going to be an artist, but I never imagined I would reach such a level of fame and I'm happy about it."

For the first part of her career, Mendoza sang and travelled primarily with her family. *Lydia Mendoza y Familia* became a household name to many Mexicans. But, after her mother died and her sisters married, she was on her own and it was by herself that she achieved her greatest triumphs.

Mendoza never really cared about the money. She did what she most loved to do, and was happy that people like it. "I came from a poor family and I've had my good times and my bad times, but my life has been happy. God has given me everything I ever asked for. All I want now is to see my daughters and my grandchildren grow up."

Admitting that she is a romantic, Mendoza says the old Mexican love songs remain her favorite pieces, but she sings whatever the audiences request. Recently they have been asking for *corridos*, songs connected to history and based on particular wars or heroes. Mendoza is not politically active, believing that an artist should be above politics and also that "everybody is treated the way they behave." But one of her favorite *corridos* is the classic *Joaquin Murieta*, which tells the story of a Mexican in the California gold rush days who cannot prospect or farm in peace because of harassment from a group of Anglo vigilantes. He becomes a widely feared bandit, gathering a gang of 70, but he is eventually betrayed, captured and killed. *Murieta's* legend has become the subject of scholarly works, a play and this popular classic *corrida*.

Lydia Mendoza's career has spanned 44 years during which she has recorded 50 albums and countless singles and appeared in a documentary film, *Chulas Fronteras*. At an age when most people think of retiring, Mendoza is planning more performances and talking about her album of original recordings that will be released soon. As part of *Hispanic Arts Month* in Houston, Mendoza will sing at Dudley Recital Hall, University of Houston, on September 15, 7-10 P.M.

She smiles gently when retirement is mentioned, "I just can't stop singing. I love music so much that I will never stop singing until I die."

Special thanks to interpreter
Nabila Cronfel

"Girls just didn't go to school in those days, but it was acceptable for me to sing and play the guitar."

was going to be my life, so I tried to forget my fears and imagine that I was singing before a great audience."

It was years before Mendoza lost this shyness. Even after she became famous she would put her head down while singing and not look at the audience. She laughs when she remembers the rumors, started years ago by a journalist, that she was blind.

Nowadays, although she has gotten over her fears and laughs and jokes with her audiences, she still holds her head close to the guitar, often laying her cheek on it while she sings. "I do this because I feel very close to my guitar. I want to speak to it and let my voice penetrate it."

In 1931 the Mendoza family moved to San Antonio, where Lydia's career really began. She started to sing at festivals and in 1933, at the age of 17, won several talent contests, which led to her cutting, at 18, her first record, *Mal Hombre*.

Mendoza has performed in every city in the United States that has a Mexican-American population. But there are two performances over the years that she remembers with special fondness. The first was in 1937 when her performance at the Mason Opera Theatre in Los Angeles broke all attendance records. The crowds that came to hear her sing literally overflowed the four-story theatre, she remembers.

The second date was in 1950 when she travelled to Chihuahua, Mexico. She remembers that the people lined the streets cheering and throwing flowers at her. "I had never been greeted like that. For the first time I felt like a public person."

Although she has been famous most of her life, Mendoza's fame has brought her very little money. It wasn't until 1962 that she began to get royalties from her albums. She remembers one three-day performance for which she earned \$1500 but actually received only \$500 from her agent.

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Cover photograph by Marilyn Marshall Jones.

Second-class postage paid at Houston, Texas.

Houston Breakthrough is published monthly (except for the bi-monthly issues of July-August and December-January) by the Breakthrough Publishing Company, 1708 Rosewood, Houston, TX 77004; P.O. Box 88072, Houston, TX 77004; Tel. 713/526-6686. Subscriptions are \$7 per year, newsstand 75 cents per copy. This publication is on file at the International Women's History Archive in the Special Collections Library, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 60201.

Mal Hombre

Era yo una chiquilla todavia
 Cuando tu casualmente me encontraste
 Y a merced de tus artes de mundano
 De mi honra el perfume te llevaste.

I was still a young girl
 When, by chance, you found me,
 And with your worldly charm
 You took away my innocence.

Luego hiciste conmigo lo que todos,
 Los que son como tu con las mujeres
 Por lo tanto no extranes que yo ahora
 En tu cara te diga lo que eres.

It was then that you did to me
 What all of your kind do to women
 So don't be surprised now
 If I tell you to your face what you really
 are.

*Mal hombre,
 Tan ruin es tu alma
 Que no tiene nombre
 Eres un canalla.
 Eres un malvado
 Eres un mal hombre.

Cold-hearted man,
 Your soul is so vile
 It has no name.
 You are despicable.
 You are evil.
 You are a cold-hearted man.

A mi triste destino abandonada
 Entable fiero lucha con la vida.
 Ella recia y cruel me torturaba.
 Yo mas debil al fin cai vencida.

Abandoned to a sad fate
 I fiercely fought with my life,
 Suffering its harshness and cruelty
 But being weaker, I was defeated.

Tu supiste a tiempo mi derrota,
 Mi espantoso calvario conociste.
 Te dijeron algunos ve a salvarle
 Y probando quien eres tu reiste.

In time you learned of my downfall,
 Of my personal suffering
 Our friends asked you to say you were
 sorry.
 And you, being what you are, just
 laughed.

Hispanic Arts Month in Houston

September-October 8:
 Blaffer Gallery, University of Houston
 "Raices Antiguas/Visiones Nuevas, Ancient Roots/New Visions,"
 an exhibition of painting, drawing, sculpture and assemblage.

September-October 8:
 Sanchez Center, 204 Clifton
 An exhibition of barrio posters, photography, video and film.

September 15:
 Dudley Recital Hall, University of Houston
 Lydia Mendoza and Casa de Amigos Teatro Bilingue on stage
 at 7:00 p.m.

September 17:
 Moody Park, beginning at 1 p.m.
 Felicidad, musical group from Pharr, Texas; Baile Folklorico;
 Teatro Bilingue; film festival including *The Nationalist* and
Tijerina.

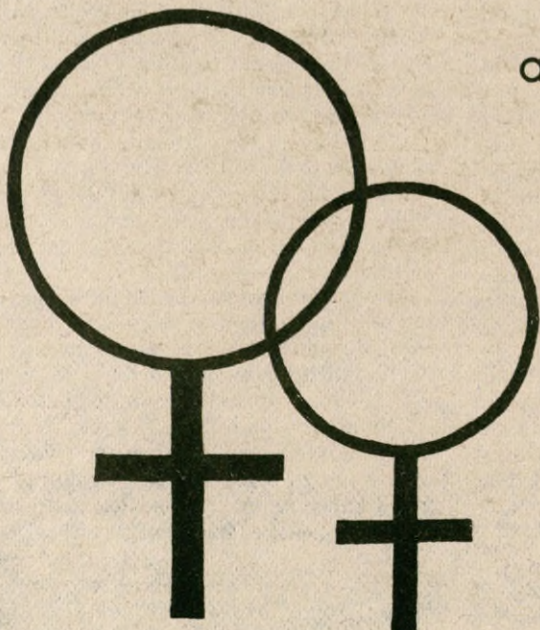
September 24:
 Settegast Park, beginning at 1 p.m.
 "Los Charros," musical group from Corpus Christi; Los Gallitos,
 Miriachis; Teatro Lagrimas y Risas de AAMA; films on
 Pre-Columbian heritage and Frida Kahlo.

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Dinner guests, left to right:

Lynda Benglis, Helen Frankenthaler, June Wayne, Alma Thomas, Lee Krasner, Nancy Graves, Georgia O'Keeffe, Elaine DeKooning, Louise Nevelson, M. C. Richards, Louise Bourgeois, Lila Katzen, Yoko Ono

SOME LIVING AMERICAN WOMEN ARTISTS, by Mary Beth Edelson

The Joy Of Recognition

by Anita Freeman Davidson

WOMEN ARTISTS, Recognition and Reappraisal From the Early Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century
Karen Petersen & J. J. Wilson
Harper & Row (1976)
212 pages, \$5.95

Karen Petersen and J. J. Wilson do not consider themselves art historians; they are academically trained in comparative literature. *WOMEN ARTISTS* had its beginnings in a women's literature class at California State College, Sonoma, in the summer of 1971 when Petersen and Wilson were doing research on unknown (or ignored) women writers and philosophers. Petersen chose as a parallel project to research unknown women artists; Wilson became interested because the collection of over 1300 slides provided for humanities teachers contained only eight works by women. She hoped the college would photograph works turned up by Petersen's research.

The search for color plates of women's works was painfully slow. Research methods varied from the "dogged perusal of indexes of artists' names," to the discovery that if they looked up the family names of well-known male artists—Diego Rivera, Jean Honore Fragonard, Marcel Duchamp, for example—they often found some account of a wife/lover/sister/mother/daughter who was also an artist.

As the slide collection grew, it was shown to classes and community groups. The response was good. "The particular combination of women's biography and art seemed to reach a wide variety of people on a deep level." Translating the slide show into print was a natural next step.

"We all know there is another story to be told," Adrienne Rich reminds us. *WOMEN ARTISTS* is intended as an overview of the "other" story of art, concentrating on what Judy Chicago calls "a new kind of art history, one that searched out women's work for women's point of

view." The quantity of reproductions is a feast. Never before have so many been gathered in one place from such a wide time spectrum. An effort was made to choose works that were not included in the Harris and Nochlin exhibition catalogue, *Women Artists 1550-1950*, so that as many different works as possible would be made visible. Unfortunately, there are no color plates; however, 35mm slide sets are available from the publisher. The text focuses largely on the lives of the artists and the political climate in which they lived and worked.

The works of women need exposure; they need sharing with their largest possible audience to develop a special vocabulary of appreciation and the same joy of recognition that men's art has received over the centuries. It is not conducive to creativity to be denied an audience. Tillie Olsen, in her essay Silences, warns us of the terrible toll that being ignored can take. People are not just silent; they are silenced.

The silence of the past is broken, and the myth of the historical anonymity of women is laid to rest by the reproductions of manuscript pages by nuns of the early Middle Ages. Guda not only signed her name to a homeliary that she illuminated, but included a self-portrait as well; Claricia signed her manuscript and drew a playful portrait of herself exercising on the initial "Q"; and Maria Ormani included with her signature a self-portrait and an inscription revealing the pride she took in her work.

Women of the late Middle Ages were subject to an all-pervasive discrimination that incorporated such rules as those of the 14th-century guild on tapestry making which forbade pregnant or menstruating women from working on the big tapestry looms. Such prohibitions are part of a pattern that repeats itself wherever an industry is begun by women: Women

work in or close by their homes, producing on a small scale, perfecting technique and developing their product to a high level of attractiveness and proven marketability, only to have male workers gradually replace them while so-called protective laws exclude them from all but the most menial aspects of the production.

Nor did the Age of Enlightenment improve the position of women. Ironically, most women lost ground; the humanistic ideals and individual freedom of the Renaissance did not apply to women. Women slaves, witch-burnings, an increase in prostitution and the practice of looting convents and ousting the nuns left women no options. Without the protection of her family and/or an early marriage, a woman could find no respectable place in Renaissance society. Women artists who survived in this period were invariably either the daughter or the wife of a male artist. One notable exception was Sofonisba Anguissola who had the good fortune to be born one of the six daughters of Amilcare Anguissola, a widower who applied to all his children the humanist ideals of the Renaissance. He provided a full range of educational opportunities for all his children. Three of Sofonisba's sisters died young, but Anna and Elena were both working artists, though little of their work survives. Sofonisba's recognition began when Michelangelo praised and encouraged her in her work. She was invited to the court of Phillip II of Spain where she remained for twenty years. Her achievements cover a wide range, and scholars are currently reattributing many works to her.

Another myth dispelled by *WOMEN ARTISTS* is that of the woman artist as dilettante. These were serious artists who supported themselves with their works, and many were the sole support of their families. In Bologna, that oasis of oppor-

tunity and education for women, Lavinia Fontana was appointed one of the official painters of the Papal court. In 17th-century England, Mary Beale earned her family's livelihood with her much sought-after portraits—she painted 83 in the year 1677. Her husband kept records of her commissions, ordered supplies for her studio and attended to domestic details.

The Eighteenth Century introduced institutionalization. Academies were founded and membership became essential to obtaining commissions. The number of members was strictly limited; if women were accepted at all, only a token number were allowed. Many women did rise to prominence, however, and an important advance was made when women artists were asked to teach young women art students. Major teaching studios were operated by both Elisabeth Vigee-Lebrun and Adelaide Labille-Guiard in prerevolutionary France.

With the turn of the century, more and more women were gaining entrance to schools and "pressure was building to provided them with something other than a cow to model." Access to schools and live models would be only a partial victory; the struggle for more women instructors would continue to the present day.

In France, women found a more agreeable climate for both work and study. The independent Mary Cassatt left a legacy of bold, experimental work, and also "furthered, in fact almost created, an interest in French impressionism...."

Berthe Morisot succeeded in "saying in oil what can only be said in watercolour." And Suzanne Valadon, abandoned as a child, taught herself to paint and achieved an affluence which she celebrated in "conspicuous consumption, such as feeding her cherished cats caviar every Friday." The body of work that she produced is remarkably innovative and leads directly into the artistic adventures of the 20th century.

The turn-of-the-century mysteries—Gwen John, Romaine Brooks, Florine Stettheimer and Seraphine de Senlis, are

"These were serious artists who supported themselves with their works."

"They held to their own visions at all costs."

dealt with as the "deliberate dilettantes," not for any lack of sincerity in their work, but for "their eccentricities, their reluctance to exhibit, and their absence of identification with any school of painting." They held to their own visions at all costs.

In the avant-garde group, the biographical sketches point up the artists' deep identification with contemporary art movements and also their relationships with male artists. Briefly sketched are the associations of Carrington and Mark Gertler, Gabriele Muntter and Wassily Kandinsky, Sonia and Robert Delauney, who together invented Orphism, and Paula Modersohn Becker and Otto Modersohn.

Kathe Kollwitz merits the title "giant of our century" with her work that sought to relate the artist to society, the personal to the political. She survived the struggle to balance the demands of her family and her art by achieving the difficult perspective that "as you, the children of my body, have been my tasks, so too are my other works." Her posters were effective tools of political education calling attention to the needs of her people. Hunger, alcoholism, abortion, the need for children's playgrounds, worker safety and aid to Russia were all issues she dealt with, producing inexpensive prints so that workers could afford them.

The contemporary section, due to the limited compass of the book, focuses on a small number of examples from Surrealism (a special treat in this section is the selection of works by Remedios Varos, reproduced for the first time in an English text), Abstraction, Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism, Photo Realism and Feminist Art.

The focus of Feminist Art is on sharing. Judy Chicago's abstract but "openly

subject-matter oriented" images make concrete political statements; Miriam Schapiro combines architectonic forms with patterned fabrics and makes her own personal statement about the interaction between feminism and art; and Mary Beth Edelson's *Blood Mysteries* seeks to involve the viewer as participant in a kind of on-going creation of the work. It is the isolation felt by women artists that gives this need to share, to reach out, its significance.

Among the 330 illustrations are twenty-seven telling self-portraits; images that are like mirrors into the past, and at the same time, reflections of ourselves. From Artemisia Gentileschi to Therese Schwartze, women painted themselves at their work. It is a source of strength to identify with these women who portray themselves, brushes in hand, working at their art, proudly proclaiming their own identity. For artists such as Kathe Kollwitz, Paula Modersohn-Becker, and Suzanne Valadon, self-portraiture was a means of self-exploration. Frida Kahlo expressed her most intimate concerns powerfully through self-portraiture, and made it her oeuvre.

An appendix recounts the achievements of women artists of China from 3000 B.C. when the legendary Yellow Emperor's consort invented and taught to the people the techniques of spinning, dyeing and weaving silk, through the lineage of great calligraphers, to the social realism of the twentieth century.

WOMEN ARTISTS does not attempt to relate the works of women to those of men in corresponding periods or to make formal analyses of the works. What Petersen and Wilson have given us is an invaluable insight into our artistic heritage and into the lives of each of these women—their strengths, their weaknesses, their human spirit.

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network

Forget your troubles! Spend a day on the bayou picnicing with leading feminist therapists. Dr. Nanette Bruckner is opening her Dickinson Bayou home to allow you to meet Lou Ann Mock Ph.D., Dale Hill, Ph.D., Virginia Davidson, M.D., and other therapists and raise funds for *Breakthrough*. Mark Sunday, September 24, 1 P.M. on your calendar and see flyer for further information.

Are you registered to vote? If not, you must register at least 30 days prior to Election Day in order to be eligible to vote November 7, 1978. Members of the League of Women Voters of Houston will be registering voters of Harris County on Saturday, September 23 from 10 A.M. to 6 P.M. at all McDonalds Restaurants in Harris County including Clear Lake and Baytown as well as the Houston area. Registration takes only a few minutes. You may also register at the office of the League of Women Voters of Houston, 1947 West Gray, Suite 202, between 9 A.M. and 3 P.M. any weekday through October 5. For more information, call 529-3171.

Meet the candidates in 19 of the contested races on the November 7th ballot. The Harris County Women's Political Caucus is sponsoring a forum for the candidates to present their ideas and answer questions on Wednesday, September 20, from 7 to 10 P.M. at the First Unitarian Church, 5210 Fannin.

Equal Rights Amendment lobbyists are four of the necessary 60 votes short of cutting off a threatened Senate filibuster against the extension of the ERA's ratification deadline. Write your senators and ask them to kill the filibuster and allow the Senate to vote on the extension.

Courses a la Carte at University of St. Thomas offers two courses of special interest to women:

(201) *Curing Math Anxiety*: Most individuals have been exposed to the stereotype that "men are good at math and science, women are good at English and reading." This course will help individuals fight through these myths and stereotypes to overcome anxiety about math. People will gain courage to deal with numbers!

Instructors: Lynne Mutchler and Peggy Hall, both have taught math in high school and are currently working in the math field.

Fee: \$18.

(610) *Rape Education/Prevention*: Rape is one of the most common forms of assault in American society today. In this class students will discuss how to avoid rape as well as what to do in a face to face confrontation to save your life. The medical, legal, psychological and public health aspects will also be covered.

Instructor: Linda Cryer, Administrator of the Rape Treatment, Prevention and Detection Program, City of Houston Health Dept.

Fee: \$7.

Registration for *Courses a la Carte* will be held weekdays September 18 through October 29, 1978, from 10 A.M. to 7 P.M. at the John H. Crooker University Center, 3900 Mt. Vernon, on the University of St. Thomas Campus. For more information, call 522-7914.



Distinguished Canadian filmmaker and artist Joyce Wieland will lecture and show her first feature-length narrative film, *The Far Shore*, on Thursday, September 14 at the Museum of Fine Arts. The presentation will begin at 8 P.M. in the museum's Brown Auditorium. After the museum showing, the film will run at the Greenway Theater.

Houston Area Women's Center. Three-lecture series on Current Human Relationships.

September 21: John Bradshaw will speak on the *Future of Evolution*, male and female roles in today's society.

September 28: Margie Jenkins, *Women in Transition*, the changing woman in a changing world.

October 5: Dr. Nikki Van Hightower, *Are Women Changing Men?*

All will begin at 8 P.M. at Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church. A donation of \$15 for all three lectures is requested. Proceeds will go to the fund to build a permanent facility for the Women's Center. Mail checks to H.A.W.C., P.O. Box 20186, Houston, Tx., 77025.

The long-awaited shelter for battered women and children, sponsored by the Houston Area Women's Center, opened in early June. More than sixty women and children have sought shelter from husbands, "lovers," and rapists. Volunteers are needed to fill shifts twice a month. Call WIRES at 527-0718 to donate your time, food, money, clothing, or household items. It's women helping women.

Greater Houston Chapter of Federally Employed Women, Inc. is holding a training seminar on Saturday, September 23, 1978, at the University of Houston. Workshops begin at 9 A.M. and include an assertiveness lab, job interview workshop, a film *You Pack Your Own Chute*, and a workshop on preparing the SF 171, *Federal Personal Qualifications Statement* (federal job application). Cost is \$10, lunch included. For more information, call 226-5677 or 528-1045.

Carl N. Degler, Pulitzer Prize winning historian, will speak on the topic "Women and the Demographic Transition in America," Wednesday evening, September 20. Professor Degler's latest research project has concerned the history of women in America, a subject on which he has already published. The talk will begin at 8 P.M. in Room 301, Sewall Hall, Rice University. This will be the fourth Ervin Frederick Kalb Lecture in History, and is open to the public free of charge.

The definitive reference work on the history of women artists, *Women Artists 1550-1950*, is scheduled to go out of print. The catalogue with text by Linda Nochlin and Anne Southerland Harris includes the largest collection of color plates of women's work available. A note to Knopf may help keep this important reference work in print. Write to Paul Anbinder at Alfred Knopf, 201 E. 50th St., New York, N.Y. 10020.

The YWCA is offering a five-lecture series entitled *Focus on Women* beginning September 20. Topics being featured are legal issues, credit, money management, politics, and body awareness. The lectures will be held on Wednesday evenings beginning at 7 P.M. and are free to YWCA members. For more information call 723-4752.

NEW BREAKTHROUGH FOUNDATION CLASSES STARTING SOON

Women & Money, taught by Mary McDonnell Drouin, starts Tuesday, September 19 at 7:30 and continues for three consecutive Tuesdays. Learn about money. How to create it. Enjoy it. Spend it. Invest it. Ms. Drouin is a business and educational consultant, trained in T.A. techniques, with a wealth of life experiences to share. Only \$21 for three sessions.

Effective Speech Communication, taught by the officers of Creative Speech Interests, Inc., starts Friday, September 29 at 7:30 P.M. and continues all day Saturday, from 8:30 to 5:00. Marjorie Best, Caroline Peeler and Evelyn Cox will teach you how to present your ideas clearly, assertively and in a businesslike manner. Major Houston corporations pay \$350 per person for this training. It's available to you, through Breakthrough Foundation, for only \$55. Call Ruth Barrett at 526-6686 to reserve your place. Only a few remain.

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Attend the gala opening of *Summer Paradise*, a special screening for friends of *Breakthrough*, on Friday, November 10th at the Greenway Theater. Afterwards, discuss the film over a glass of wine and view an exhibition featuring a woman artist. Tickets for the evening will be \$15 a person. To reserve yours, send a check today.

A Breakthrough Benefit

Movies / Molly Haskell **TROUBLE IN PARADISE**

"...*Summer Paradise* is a remarkable woman's film. There is a glistening intelligence in Lindblom's insights into family life..."

Paradise Place, in *Summer Paradise*, Gunnel Lindblom's beautiful and disturbing first film, is a family vacation retreat in the Swedish archipelago that is as close to heaven as earth ever gets. The well-tended but luxuriant grounds, the sprawling family house surrounded by woods and rocks that jut into the sea, and the women and children, blond and more blessedly beautiful than the landscape itself—all combine to create the too-perfect summer Eden that, like the Lake Annecy village in Eric Rohmer's *Claire's Knee* or Fire Island in the Perrys' *Last Summer*, we recognize at once as the irresistible mark of evil—or merely Eros in a mischievous mood.

The serpent, in the case of this remarkable woman's film by a former Bergman actress, is the ills of the world that can be neither cured nor forgotten, pressing from the outside on a family that has lost the strength of its own union. It is like seeing the women in

Smiles of a Summer Night or *All These Women or Waiting Women* from a different perspective—self-sufficient but without the power to heal or reclaim their men.

The mainstay and virtual matriarch of the family is Katha, a doctor in her fifties, played with no-nonsense attractiveness by Birgitta Valberg. Though her aging parents still preside, she is the prime mover of the midsummer celebration, and is surrounded by her nephew, her young granddaughter, and her two grown daughters, Annika, also a doctor, and the exquisite Sassa, with her new lover, Kiss. The only men in attendance are those too old, too young, or too new to feel acutely their own weightlessness beside the massive strength of the women.

Later she will be joined by her chief antagonist and oldest friend, Emma (Sif Ruud), a social worker strung out on pills, cigarettes, and the woes of the world. She is as scrappy and frazzled as

Katha is self-contained. They have come almost to blows over the issue of whether or not to have the poverty-stricken Ingrid and her delinquent son King to the midsummer celebration. Friends of Sassa and Emma, they are the family's token have-nots and have come every year with disruptive consequences. Katha would like one harrier to grant her so shameful a peace.

Emma wins, and they come. The dark and brooding Ingrid and King stand at the gate to paradise like those shabby ghosts in an Ibsen drama who materialize to remind the main characters of some long-unpaid debt. The effect is almost comical, as if the mother-and-son team had been hired by Rent-a-Beggar; and quite predictably they do shatter any remaining semblance of order. But as they are every bit as uncomfortable as their hosts, one begins to feel differently about Emma's altruism, suspecting it is directed more at discomposing Katha than at bringing joy to the faces of Ingrid and King.

What is most striking in Lindblom's conception is her evenhandedness toward these two very different, half-lovable, bickering women, enabling us to see the follies and strengths of each. If Katha lacks Emma's social empathy, she has still given much more of herself within a narrower—and more profitable—range. But Lindblom's fair-mindedness is also puzzling. How should the women act? What does she, Lindblom, think?

Near the end, Emma launches into a curious, half-coherent diatribe against welfare, hospitals, poverty, abortion, and working mothers—only half of which we can endorse. And because we are never shown the horrors she invokes, her peroration begins to seem almost fatuous, and her hysterical carping a substitute for action. Or perhaps it is her way of puncturing the complacency of her hosts and assuaging her own guilt for being there. I think Lindblom means, in this most unprogrammatic of films, to suggest that all these truths and motives coexist.

Like the suicide that is the picture's muted, offscreen climax, there is an

insoluble mystery of human nature that is beyond social compassion, a private misery that even love cannot penetrate.

The malaise Lindblom captures so beautifully arises precisely because of the gap between welfare generalities and human reality. Does universal concern over the children of divorced and working mothers extend even to Sassa, child of Venus and sensual play-girl (played by the ravishing Agneta Ekman)? Any notion of Sassa's unfitness as a mother becomes irrelevant as we watch her daughter, precociously conscientious, poring over a book of anatomy, and realize with certainty that she will grow into a sturdy replica of her doctor-grandmother. And perhaps Sassa's irresponsible sensuality is her own way of charting a rebellious course against the masculine achievements of her mother and sister.

Watching Sassa and, to a certain extent, the more maternally voluptuous Annika (Margaretha Byström), one thinks of Lindblom herself as the memorably sensual Anna in *The Silence*, or the mute girl in *Wild Strawberries*, or the pregnant wild woman in *The Virgin Spring*. Something of what she was under Bergman carries over into her film style, sensuous in a way that encompasses the baking of bread as well as making love.

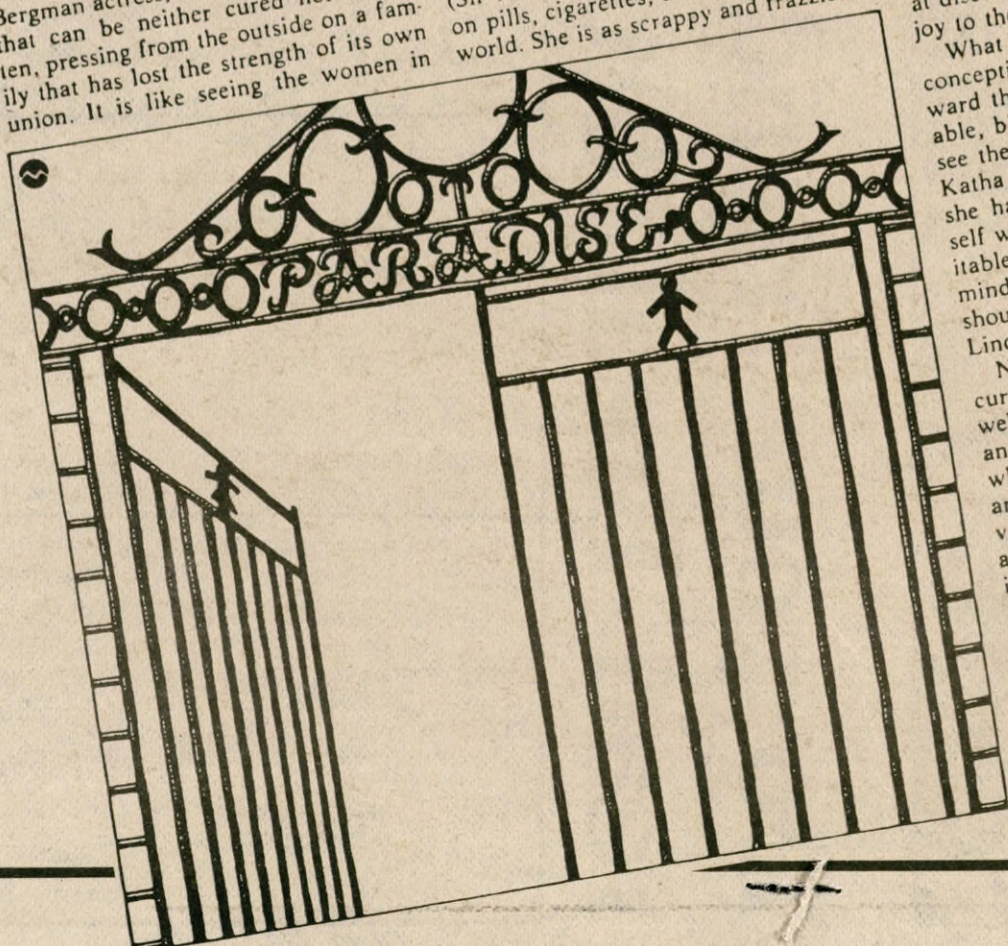
There is a glistening intelligence in her insights into family life, in the tensions among husband and wives and generations that make reunions such impossible affairs, aggravating rather than resolving old arguments.

Nothing, in fact, is ever resolved. If this is the underlying insight of Lindblom's portrait of a family, it is also what leaves us feeling a little empty at the end.

Lindblom's realism is nondramatic. It surrenders to the flow of life, refusing to check and categorize the emotions or draw a lesson from the characters, and for this sense of wholeness she pays a certain aesthetic price. Whereas Bergman's characters are all facets of his own mind, striving—likejections of the artist, neurotic pro-warring elements—toward unity, Lindblom's are closer to what we imagine typical Swedes to be. As women they are neither idealized nor externalized anima figures, but independent creatures, flying off in all directions. The film that pursues them is, by turns, untidy like Emma, upright like Katha, mercurial and erotic like Sassa.

If *Summer Paradise* raises more questions than a single work of art can even phrase properly, much less answer, it is nonetheless an exciting, richly novelistic portrait of family life and of women whose claim to our attention transcends any partisan notion of the "woman's film."

NEW YORK/MARCH 20 1978



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