[HARDCOVER: UK]

Manu Chao's Colombian tour

Forget flak jackets, when singer Manu Chao toured Columbia by train he took fire-breathing dragons, an ice museum and his journalist father to record it all

BY DUNCAN CAMPBELL

Few musicians would allow a journalist to accompany their band through one of the world's most dangerous countries. Even fewer, one suspects, would be happy about their father being that journalist. But Manu Chao is not just any musician, and his father, Ramon, is not just any journalist — so perhaps it should surprise no one that they ended up together on a legendary 1993 tour of Colombia by train, carrying not just musicians, acrobats and tattooists, but a fireeating dragon and an ice museum

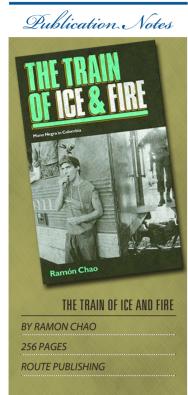
as well. Ramon's account of that journey, The Train of Ice and Fire is published in English on Feb. 9. For Manu's growing army of admirers, the book provides a magical-realist insight into how his music has developed. For the tour, Manu and his then band, Mano Negra, took a special train across the country, performing free at stations for people unable to afford the concerts. A 50-strong Colombian-French team constructed the train out of a functioning locomotive and decommissioned carriages and off they went, ignoring all warnings of kidnappings and worse.

Part of the plan was to pay homage to Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, by taking a slab of ice to Aracataca, the town on which the novel is based. Ice is a key theme in the book, from the opening sentence: "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice." Clearly, the journey needed someone to write it down.

"What you write must be accessible to everyone," Manu told Ramon. "You mustn't use too many literary references. Your last novel was too ornate. I couldn't finish it."

The train traveled through territory contested by FARC guerrillas and the army, attracting the curiosity of both — plus spectators in their thousands, and stowaways. Manu was impressed by the resilience of his audience. In the book, he recounts spending time with Bogota's street children: "Life's hell for them. But despite everything, they're more cheerful than you or me. They're 12 years old, drugged to the gills and not one of them's a virgin. When they go to sleep at night, they don't know if they're going to wake up — a plastic bag over the head, in the boot of a car, over the mountain and, pow, a bullet in the head.

Ramon was stunned by what they saw of the country during the tour. "It is hard to believe that there is so much violence in such a friendly, affectionate people," he says, on a recent visit

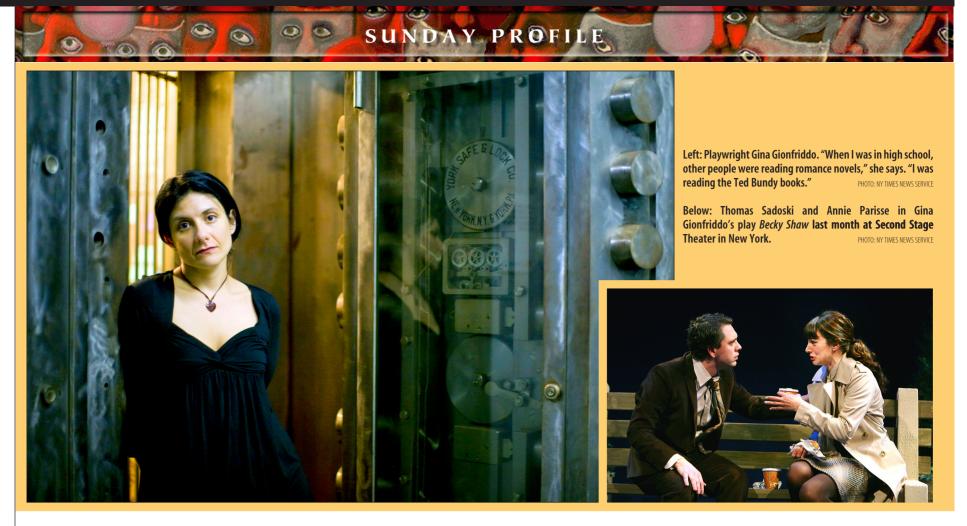


to London. To judge by the book, the father, now 73, seems to have indulged in more rock 'n' roll behavior than the son. Although he had never taken drugs and did not even smoke cigarettes, he could not resist some marijuana cake on offer on Christmas Eve. "I was in the clouds and totally out of it for two days. Manu said, 'Honestly, Papa, I can't leave you anywhere.' On another occasion, when I got a tattoo, his reaction was the same. But I think he really liked the fact that I came."

Music runs in the family.
Ramon was a child prodigy, a classically trained pianist who left Spain to study at the Conservatoire in Paris. "My father thought I would be the next Mozart but I wanted to be Cervantes," he says. Did he inspire Manu? "When I was 10 or 11, he tried to make me play the piano but I preferred football," says Manu.

The 1993 tour did, in the end, split the band, some of whom departed before the final concerts. Manu returned to Paris disheartened, and went on to form his new band, Radio Bemba. He nearly recruited a new band member in Colombia — a street kid, Rondelle, who could sing and dance brilliantly.

The Latin-American connection continues. Manu's new single, La Vida Tombola. is featured in Maradona, a documentary about the Argentine footballer, about to be released on digital download. Father and son have an enduring involvement in Radio La Colifata, which translates as "Radio Loony," and broadcasts live from a mental hospital in Buenos Aires. Manu will be appearing on the radio station again this year, perhaps recounting the tale of that train of ice and fire.



Onstage, talking about ambition and crime

Playwright Gina Gionfriddo, who also writes for television's 'Law & Order,' considers herself 'an absolute encyclopedia of true crime'

BY PATRICIA COHEN

erial killers are really not that interesting," Gina Gionfriddo remarked matter-of-factly. She was picking at a salad in the back of a Midtown restaurant about a block away from Second Stage Theater, where she has just come from a rehearsal for her new play, *Becky Shaw*.

Gionfriddo considers herself "an absolute encyclopedia of true crime" — a handy characteristic for someone who writes for television's *Law & Order* — and in her experienced eye, crimes motivated by money, power and status are the most compelling and transgressive.

"I feel we're so squeamish about class in this country," she said. "It's more taboo than sexuality." In her new work there is a crime — a robbery — but social ambition provides the engine and the theme.

For readers of Victorian literature, the name Becky Shaw brings to mind another famous social climber: Thackeray's Becky Sharp. There are lots of Becky Sharp-like characters in 19th-century literature, Gionfriddo says, and for the most part they are vilified and punished for refusing to stay in their place. Thackeray's Sharp is described as "monstrous" and "serpentine." "There's a need for women to be put in their place" for being too aggressive, Gionfriddo said.

"People like Becky Sharp and Hedda Gabler are boldly out there, aggressively trying to get stuff," she continued. Though they were a product of their era ("Today they would have been Anna Wintour," she said), even now "I do think we recoil from people who do that."

In Gionfriddo's play, which opened on Thursday, there are no consummate villains or heroes. "I wanted my Becky to be a figure that is out of her class and trying to break in," she said. "I didn't want her to be a viper, just someone who at 35 made a lot of mistakes and didn't have many options."

In the play the seemingly forlorn Becky (Annie Parisse) is brought into a muddle of family relations when she is set up on

a blind date by a well-meaning co-worker, Andrew (Thomas Sadoski). The date is with Max (David Wilson Barnes), the acerbic adopted brother of Andrew's new wife, Suzanna (Emily Bergl).

Writing about the debut of *Becky Shaw* this spring at the Humana Festival of New American Plays at the Actors Theater of Louisville, Charles Isherwood of the *New York Times* called it "a thoroughly enjoyable play, suspenseful, witty and infused with an unsettling sense of the potential for psychic disaster inherent in almost any close relationship."

At a recent rehearsal the cast had gathered in the third-floor studio at Second Stage to go over Max and Becky's awkward first encounter in the newlyweds' apartment. Peter Dubois, the director, waved a list, compiled by Gionfriddo, of 19th-century novels about women trying to push their way into a new class or position. He wanted the entire cast to have a copy of the list.

"Books about ruin coming to women for jumping their class have been written for 200 years," Dubois explained. Later he said, "I think there's something really amazing to get a sense that this story that we're telling has a long literary history."

He then talked to the actors about the scene. "Fighting is a healthy, living impulse," he said. "Suzanna and Max share that, whereas Andrew sees it as unhealthy." Gionfriddo pointed to one of Suzanna's lines about her mother: "If she fights with me, she's OK."

Every night Dubois and Gionfriddo, who met in graduate school, get together over drinks to discuss the day's work and possible revisions.

The playwright Adam Rapp, a friend of Gionfriddo's, considers her work to have both edge and insight. "She certainly writes about savagery and the way we co-opt each other and destroy each other and pretend to love each other. She does that so well," he said. Yet, he added, "Her characters still root their feet on the ground no matter how

wacky her premise might be."

The two met at the O'Neill Playwrights Conference at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Connecticut, which staged a workshop production of her first play, *After Ashley*, in 2003, and presented Rapp's *Finer Noble Gases*. "Hers was by far my favorite play there," he said.

Gionfriddo first became interested in theater at Georgetown Day School in Washington, where she ended up after a "loathsome" stint in Catholic school. Even then the stories that fascinated her were about crime.

"When I was in high school, other people were reading romance novels; I was reading the Ted Bundy books," she said.

"I've never been sure if it was the anxiety that violence would be done to me or that I would do violence," she added, noting that the very thought of being locked up in prison could start her hyperventilating.

"That's the sophisticated explanation," she added. "I may just be a ghoul."

By the time she went to Barnard College in New York, she had settled on acting as a career.

New York offered a welcome if harsh dose of reality. In an acting class the students were lined up and the professors went down the row, declaring what sort of parts each person could play. "I wasn't the ingenue," Gionfriddo recalled. "I could play the ethnic teenager."

A job at Primary Stages gave her another view of how directors analyzed actors, often dismissing or choosing someone for vague, indefinable reasons.

"I figured out very quickly that I didn't have what it takes," she said about acting. But she was intrigued by the process of getting a play into shape.

After graduating from college, she worked as an off-off Broadway general manager and met the playwright Mac Wellman. He read some of her work and urged her to go back to school to study playwriting. She did, attending Brown,

where the Pulitzer Prize winner Paula Vogel teaches.

Is playwriting something anyone can learn? "I think things like structure you can learn," she said. "If you have a tin ear for dialogue, though, it's tough."

It is Gionfriddo's feel for dialogue that has gotten her noticed. Rene Balcer, the head writer and executive producer of *Law & Order* and its spinoff *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, hired Gionfriddo after reading *After Ashley*.

"She really has an ear for the dialogue of everyday Americans and the quirkiness of everyday Americans," Balcer said, "the kind of people you see being interviewed on Nancy Grace." As it turns out, Balcer has hired a number of playwrights, many of them women. "I think women write crime better than men do," he said. "Men tend to play it safe, relying on an old-boys' network. Women feel freer. They swing for the bleachers."

If her gender has been a boon on television crime dramas, it hasn't helped in the New York theater world, in Gionfriddo's view. She, along with dozens of other female playwrights, recently protested the relatively small number of plays by women that are produced in New York. Producers, directors and perhaps audiences, she said, seem much more willing to accept unappealing male characters than unappealing women.

In *Becky Shaw* there are plenty of unappealing characteristics to go around. Gionfriddo remembers the varying ways audience members at Humana reacted to the characters. Is Becky a victim or a manipulator? Is Andrew nurturing or annoying? Is Max brutally honest or just brutal? Gionfriddo found that often viewers' romantic history was a guide to whom they considered good or bad.

The play is "a journey of moral discovery," she said, and the characters are "people who are wrestling with their best and worst selves, and who keep lapsing into something they don't want to be."

[PAPERBACK: US]

Bedroom reading: How to have sex after having kids

Columnist Heidi Raykeil and sex therapist Ian Kerner discuss why sparks fade from bedrooms of new parents and offer practical tips for what to do about it

Publication Notes

BY **PAUL NYHAN**

NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, SEATTLE

It's a cliche, a running joke, and
yet a reality for many parents that
once a baby is born a couple's sex
life starts dying.

It's a problem that generations of moms, dads, columnists, counselors and talk-show hosts have debated. Yet questions remain about how to keep the passion once baby makes three.

Now Seattle's own chronicler of sex and marriage, Heidi Raykeil, gives her take in Love in the Time of Colic: The New Parents' Guide To Getting It on Again. Raykeil offers a refreshing twist by giving equal time to the

views of dads and moms.

In 260 pages, Raykeil and her co-author, New York sex therapist Ian Kerner, explain and debate why sparks fade from bedrooms of new parents, detail their own

struggles and tell parents what they can do about it.

Their advice is timely in an age dominated by the idea of yummy mommies and sexy celebrity parents — with full-time trainers.

Instead of simplistic New Age advice, Raykeil and Kerner offer practical tips for parents who live in the real world of dirty diapers, post-pregnancy pounds and little or no free time. They speak to dads and moms by dividing each chapter into "What Moms Want Dads To Know" and "What Dads Want Moms To Know."

This isn't necessarily a book for SNAGs (sensitive New Age guys) because Kerner and Raykeil write about typical fathers — guys who may not always share their feelings with their wives

 a group the publishing industry largely has ignored, Kerner said.
 "New dads need a place to go

that to learn about it, not just learn about the way our wives want us an age to learn about it," said Kerner, a

to learn about it," said Kerner, a married father with two sons. For example, he suggests that when dads talk about the

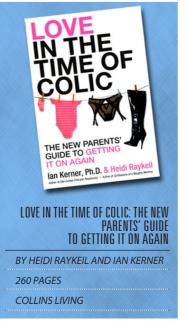
disappearance of regular romps

in the hay, they're helping — not hurting — their marriages.

"I can't help but think the guy who speaks up about the lack of sex, and tries to initiate, is really fighting to save the relationship," he said.

Raykeil counters some of Kerner's arguments in exchanges that sometimes read like radio talk show banter. But the two often are on the same page, agreeing that "sex matters ... a lot" in a marriage.

In recent years, Raykeil emerged as Seattle's modern version of Dr Ruth, a hip, witty mom dedicated to helping



parents reclaim intimacy. The one-time preschool teacher isn't a psychologist, but her first book, *Confessions of a Naughty Mommy: How I Found My Lost Libido*, resonated with parents.

It started seven years ago, when Raykeil mentioned her dying sex life during her weekly mothers group. Initially, other moms met her admission with silence, but then it sparked a spirited conversation. After that Raykeil noticed there wasn't a lot out there on the topic, so she began a column that led to her first book.

"It was completely accidental because no one else was doing it," Raykeil said.

Seattle Post-Intelligencer family reporter Paul Nyhan talked with Raykeil about why she wrote the book, which will be released on in bookstores on Jan. 27, and how it might help dads. Paul Nyhan: Conventional wisdom holds that most dads don't read parenting books. How do you get this on his bedside table?

Heidi Raykeil: I guess you get it through their wives, though you hope that their wives pick it up and leave it open on the bedside table and they pick it up out of curiosity or desperation.

PN: I like this idea [from Kerner] that a husband who asks his wife for sex is a white knight trying to save the marriage.

HR: I appreciate Ian's depiction of that, and I can see where he is coming from, and I do think it is important to fight for the relationship.

PN: My question to you guys is, "How are you initiating?"

HR: Saying it has been six days, two hours and 30 minutes since we last had sex is not the right way to initiate sex. So it doesn't

turn into fighting about not having sex — because that doesn't make us hot.

PN: Are you and your husband beyond embarrassment about your sex life? I mean you put a lot out there.

HR: You know there is actually a lot that we keep private. There are just some ... moments I will never share.

PN: Parents have little time. What one step can they take to begin reigniting their sex life?
HR: After the kids go to bed, grab

a bottle of wine and talk openly about their sex life. If you really have only one thing to

do, I would say check in.

PN: OK, you've written two books
about sex after baby. What's next?

HR: Oh, my gosh — Oprah? I don't
know. I have to take a little breath
and figure out some child care and
move on from there