

[HARDCOVER: US]

'A-Rod' rehashes Yankee clunker's string of gaffes

A doper, a cheater, a spectacular power hitter and a jerk — that's what we already know about Alex Rodriguez. In her new book, Selena Roberts repeats all this and adds a few new accusations

BY DAVID M. SHRIBMAN
BLOOMBERG

Hanging around with Madonna is no one's idea of a good influence on a family man. Juicing your body may not be unusual in baseball, but it isn't particularly admirable.

And that's before we add dropping into Vegas casinos, hanging out at strip clubs, and the capper: sharing pitch signals with opposing batters in return for the same favor down the line.

A-Rod is one confused guy. He's an accident that has already happened.

New York Yankee Alex Rodriguez is in the news again. Major League Baseball, which isn't having a good 21st century, is investigating what performance-enhancing drugs he took and when he started taking them. Then there's Selena Roberts, the *Sports Illustrated* writer who is the bane of the New York Yankee's existence for having broken the news earlier this year that he took such drugs. She has published a book, *A-Rod: The Many Lives of Alex Rodriguez*.

In truth, none of those lives is particularly mysterious anymore, or appealing, or even all that interesting. We've already heard that Rodriguez is a doper, a cheater, a spectacular power hitter and a big jerk. Roberts repeats all that and adds some new accusations, suggesting (but not proving) that A-Rod's use of performance-enhancing substances was deeper and longer than what we already suspected.

This is the investigative equivalent of finishing 32 games out of first place instead of 27. You're still a bottom-dweller.

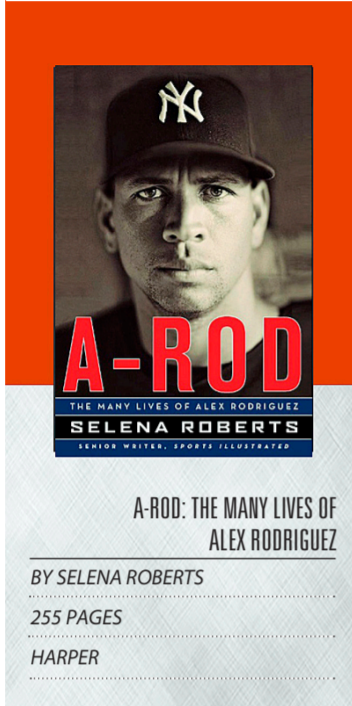
The Roberts book will be mined for its titillating details about the way Rodriguez played the field for the Seattle Mariners, the Texas Rangers and the Yankees as well as how he played the field after hours, and how he performed in both categories.

In these pages there is special emphasis on human-growth hormones and a mysterious substance — no one quite knows what it is — called boli.

The value of this volume is less in the all-important "gotcha" category than it is in how accurately Roberts got into Rodriguez's head, and how well she understands this man, who is trying to be portrayed as misunderstood rather than the methead he is. And in this she is merciless.

Try this: "Alex liked thinking of himself as an enigma. It made him feel more dramatic and alluring and worthy of attention." Or this: "Alex searched for meaning

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constantly as if the right catchphrase from a self-help book could ground him in a normalcy he at once longed for and feared." Plus this: "The arc that traces Alex Rodriguez's rise to superstardom neatly parallels the one tracking the abuse of steroids in baseball." She knows her guy.

One of the most shocking elements of this book — and I suppose it is refreshing that scandal-wracked sports fans still can be shocked — is Roberts's claim that during his time with the Texas Rangers, Rodriguez conspired with opposing batters to provide them with advance notice of whether the pitcher was planning a curveball or a slider and where the pitch was headed.

This vital information was provided with the understanding that these rival players — middle infield players like himself in a position to see the catcher's signals — would return the favor.

Such moves would come late in a lopsided game where the outcome was no longer much in doubt, but still it is cheating, of course. It is also selfishness — and a shocking betrayal of his teammates in the hope that his own batting performance might be enhanced.

The Rodriguez that emerges from this slim volume sure isn't enhanced. Number 13 swinging the bat provides, as Roberts says, "a split-second gala of force and grace and confidence." It reminds us how much we, and Rodriguez himself, have lost from the old days when, as she puts it, "there was a genuine, lovable core in Alex." The core is gone and the thrill is gone, too.

about this translation is that the historical detail is a lot more interesting than the story itself. Not only is the varied cavalcade presented with great vividness, but in addition the reader learns a lot about Hong Kong's social history. Opium, gold and plague all feature prominently in the early chapters and, as if that wasn't enough, you also learn a lot about the kind of brothels that existed and how they were furnished.

This book, then, is both popular in tone and well-informed. But there are some apparent errors. That snow covers Hong Kong's Mount Taiping (Victoria Peak) "every winter" is certainly not the case. The British would have played snooker, not "pool," and the Anglican cathedral of St John's wouldn't say "mass." "Mid-Levels," describing the residential area half-way up Hong Kong Island, is always used in the plural, not in the singular as here. And it's untrue that HSBC ("Wayfoong Bank," 匯豐銀行) had the exclusive right to issue Hong Kong's banknotes

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There's an enormous amount of period detail. You learn that the Chinese rang bells to scare away demons in times of plague, that there was a 10pm curfew at a certain period, that Sikhs were regularly used as security guards, that prisoners were beaten in Victoria Prison in Central, and that termite was a routine problem, as were water shortages.

You're treated to depictions of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 and the acquisition of the



Spanish tenor Jose Carreras performs on stage during his concert in the Domplatz, Magdeburg, Germany on 23 Aug. 2008. PHOTO: EPA

I didn't believe in specialized singers — 'This is a Verdi tenor, this is a Puccini soprano'; I believe in singing well or singing bad.

— Jose Carreras, tenor

Not quite the final curtain

Surviving leukemia, creating the Three Tenors, and a disc of Andrew Lloyd Webber songs ... Jose Carreras talks career highs and lows

BY STEPHEN MOSS
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

I am a little uneasy about this: an audience with the great Spanish-born tenor Jose Carreras at his leukemia research foundation in Barcelona, sandwiched between the man from the *London Times* and a journalist from a music magazine, all of us here to celebrate the lifetime achievement award he will be given at the Classical Brits on Thursday, and to discreetly plug his new disc, unenterprisingly titled *The Jose Carreras Collection*.

In some ways, the meeting is a polite fiction. Take the photograph on the front of the disc — an impossibly handsome thirtysomething with narrowed eyes and immaculate designer stubble. The picture is history, as are the disc's curious collection of operatic standards and modernish songs, most of which were recorded a decade or more ago.

Even though he retired from the operatic stage in 2002, Carreras insists his career is far from over. "I'm still fully active," he says. "I'm doing 50 or 60 concerts a year, both orchestral concerts and recitals. I carry on singing because I love it. The closer you are to the end, the more you understand how important it is." Now 62, he recognizes that the end is approaching — "Next year is going to be 40 years that I am professionally singing, so it may be time" — but he refuses to put a date on when he will quit. He says he will know when the moment comes.

Carreras' operatic career was shorter than the two other tenors with whom he will forever be linked — Luciano Pavarotti, who was commanding the stage at major opera houses into his mid-60s, and Placido Domingo, who is still taking on new roles at 68. That is because in 1987, Carreras was diagnosed with acute leukemia. Thereafter he had to husband his physical and vocal resources and restrict his appearances. He says the voice was still strong after chemotherapy and a couple of years off, but the body less so. "For an artist in any field, it is important to know what are your limits, which is why I sang less opera afterwards," he explains.

And now? "I don't have the strength I had 25 years ago. If I could do tomorrow *Carmen*, or *Boheme*, or *Andrea Chenier*, or *Il Trovatore*, I wouldn't sing it like 25 years ago. I would be comparing myself

with the way I was then and this is not good." Does he mourn the decline of that instrument? "The voice is like a man, like ourselves: we all feel melancholic about what we have lost, the things we could do when we were young. But having the possibility to still perform is wonderful. The voice loses elasticity as you age, but on the other hand maybe you are more mature as an interpreter, maybe your approach to singing deepens."

In concert, he can sing material that suits his now more limited vocal resources — Catalan and Neapolitan songs, light opera, popular songs, those hybrid musico-religious numbers beloved of the new breed of tenor-crooners, as well as the odd heavy-duty aria. He has, in any case, always been willing to indulge in crossover — witness his much-criticized *West Side Story* with Leonard Bernstein in 1985 and his disc of Andrew Lloyd Webber songs in 1990, a step too far for *Gramophone* magazine, which refused to review it.

Why did he make such records? In the big-selling 1980s and 1990s, he admits, artists were guided by their record companies. But he also offers a more historically grounded defense of crossover. "We follow a certain legacy from important tenors — Caruso, Gigli, Di Stefano. All these singers sang the lighter music of their time; for a tenor, a Neapolitan song is almost like singing *La Boheme*. It's a very important part of the repertoire. I didn't believe in specialized singers — "This is a Verdi tenor, this is a Puccini soprano"; I believe in singing well or singing bad, and if you sing well *La Boheme* and *Tosca* and *Carmen*, for sure you

Opera tenors, from left to right, Placido Domingo, Luciano Pavarotti and Jose Carreras, also known as The Three Tenors.

have to try the Neapolitan songs, because it's another way to express yourself."

Carreras does not complain that he was struck down in his operatic prime. Indeed, he stresses how his illness enlarged his life. "Even out of severe difficulty some positive things come," he says. One, of course, is the foundation, which he set up when he realized how much research work was needed to increase leukemia sufferers' survival chances. Another, linked to his charity work, was the Three Tenors, which Carreras inspired.

"Yes, I'm sorry to say that the idea was mine," he says with a full-bodied laugh. "I was singing in Florence, and somebody said, 'Jose, we're going to do a very special concert for the final of the World Cup, and we thought about having the best 20 opera singers in the



world, like a marathon.' And I said, 'Look, don't you feel it would be much more interesting for the audience if we put three tenors together,' and the most popular ones were Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo and myself."

The concert, on the eve of the World Cup final in Rome in July 1990, was supposed to be a one-off, but its success led to the three performing together 30 times over the next 15 years, racking up vast record sales, and, some would argue, making record companies overreach themselves in both the size of contracts for classical artists and expectations of what discs might sell. This was the zenith for both artists and companies, and the subsequent decline was vertiginous.

Carreras, however, believes the Three Tenors phenomenon helped classical music. "We reached an audience that had never been interested in classical music and opera," he insists. "We received thousands of messages saying, 'Thank you, the concert was wonderful and it gave me the possibility to get to know this music.'" Were attitudes changed in the long term? "Many people who heard those concerts are now going to the opera and buying classical recordings as a result. Not all of them, of course, but a very good percentage."

Carreras recognizes that he was to some degree in the shadow of his two older colleagues, and seems to accept a pecking order of Pavarotti, Domingo and then himself. But he believes the combination was special: "There was a chemistry between us." And competition, too? "There was competition between us, but it was a sane competition."

With two grown-up children, three grandchildren, his second wife's three children, the foundation, his passion for Barcelona football club, and in the autumn of a lustrous career, Carreras seems content, that throaty laugh unforced. "I'm a very fortunate man," he says. "I have in life everything I could dream of." When you should, by all logic, have been dead at 40, your 60s are a delight, whether or not you can still hit high Cs or sing *E lucevan le stelle* at La Scala. For Carreras, the stars still shine.

[SOFTCOVER: US]

'City of the Queen,' a bite-size story of Hong Kong

Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin's translation of Shih Shu-ching's book reduces the original trilogy to one volume that loses the plot toward the end

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Shih Shu-ching (施淑菁), one of Taiwan's most celebrated authors, lived in Hong Kong for 15 years, spending eight of them researching and writing *City of the Queen*, her trilogy about the former British colony. It was published in Chinese in 1993, 1995 and 1997. This English rendition, by the celebrated husband-and-wife translating team Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin, is an abbreviated version, reducing the original to one volume.

The novel tells the story of a 13-year-old girl from China, Huang Deyun (黃得云), who in 1892 is kidnapped and taken to Hong Kong to work as a prostitute. She quickly moves on, however, and ends up as a rich landowner. Fifty years of Hong Kong's history are surveyed in the process, plus another fifty, via what in this version are rather brief tales of Huang's descendants, to the territory's handover to Beijing in 1997.

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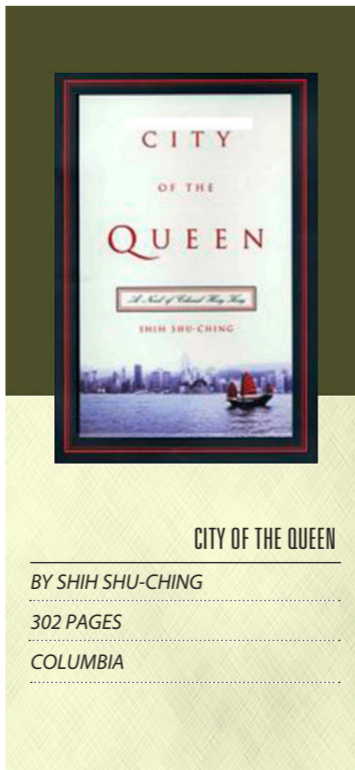
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New Territories in 1898, when the British used armed force to disperse protesting villagers. There are descriptions of the widespread disbelief that followed Darwin's theory of evolution, of the strikes of 1922, and of the Japanese occupation during World War II. It's also asserted that during Hong Kong's early days the most powerful voice in the colony was that of "the opium-dealer Jardine," followed by the Jockey Club, and only then by the governor.

There's a fascinating paragraph on ice — cut in blocks from North American rivers and lakes, then covered in sawdust and chaff to prevent it from melting, and transported to Asia in sailing ships. You also read about the firm Dent and Co, one of whose operations was transporting impoverished Chinese to be sold as laborers in South America, with sometimes as many deaths during the passage as in the better-known slave trade.

One of the reasons it's such a pity that we only have this abbreviated translation of *City*

of the Queen is that the novel inevitably invites comparison with *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* (長恨歌) by Wang Anyi (王安憶) [reviewed in *Taipei Times* on Aug. 31, 2008]. That book also looked at the history of one modern Chinese city, Shanghai, via the life of one of its female inhabitants and her lovers. I've only read this shortened version of *City of the Queen*, but I have to say that *The Song of Everlasting Sorrow* appears to be undoubtedly the finer book. But then its aims, though superficially similar, are actually different. Wang's novel is like Proust — atmospheric, sophisticated, implicitly claiming the status of literature. Shih's, by contrast, is like Zola — realistic, shocking, well-researched and aspiring to a kind of higher journalism. There's no question of influence in either direction as Wang's book was published in Chinese in 1995, at roughly the same time as Shih's trilogy.

The problem with this shortened

English edition is that the narrative falls off badly towards the end, becoming a series of largely inconsequential moments. Goldblatt and Lin note that originally Shih's third volume was narrated in the first person, but that this was changed, presumably to give the one-volume reduction a degree of uniformity. But was this really necessary?

The translators, possibly aware that they may be open to criticism, also pointedly state that Shih approved "both the editing and the translation." Even so, doubts remain. Was the balance between historical detail and fictional narrative the same, for instance, in the three-volume original as it is here, where history appears to outweigh the story line at several points?

City of the Queen now deserves a full-length translation, especially in the light of the translators' assertion that to their knowledge this novel is the only one in existence that surveys the last 100 years of Hong Kong's history from a Hong Kong resident's perspective.