

Books

**Jewish Winnipeg lawyer offers hilarious, readable murder mystery**

First-time novel a look at Winnipeg's seedier side

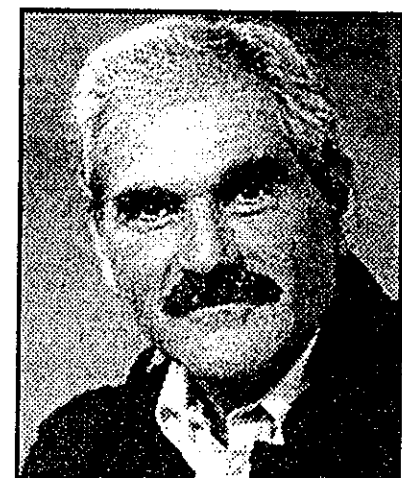
*Christmas Eve Can Kill You.* By Bill Marantz. Virgin Books, 586 Waverley Street, Winnipeg, Man. R3M3L5. 2000. 286 pages. Softcover.

Review by MATT BELLAN

Bill Marantz is described on the inside cover of this humorous murder mystery as a man who's worn many hats.

**POST & NEWS BOOK REVIEW**

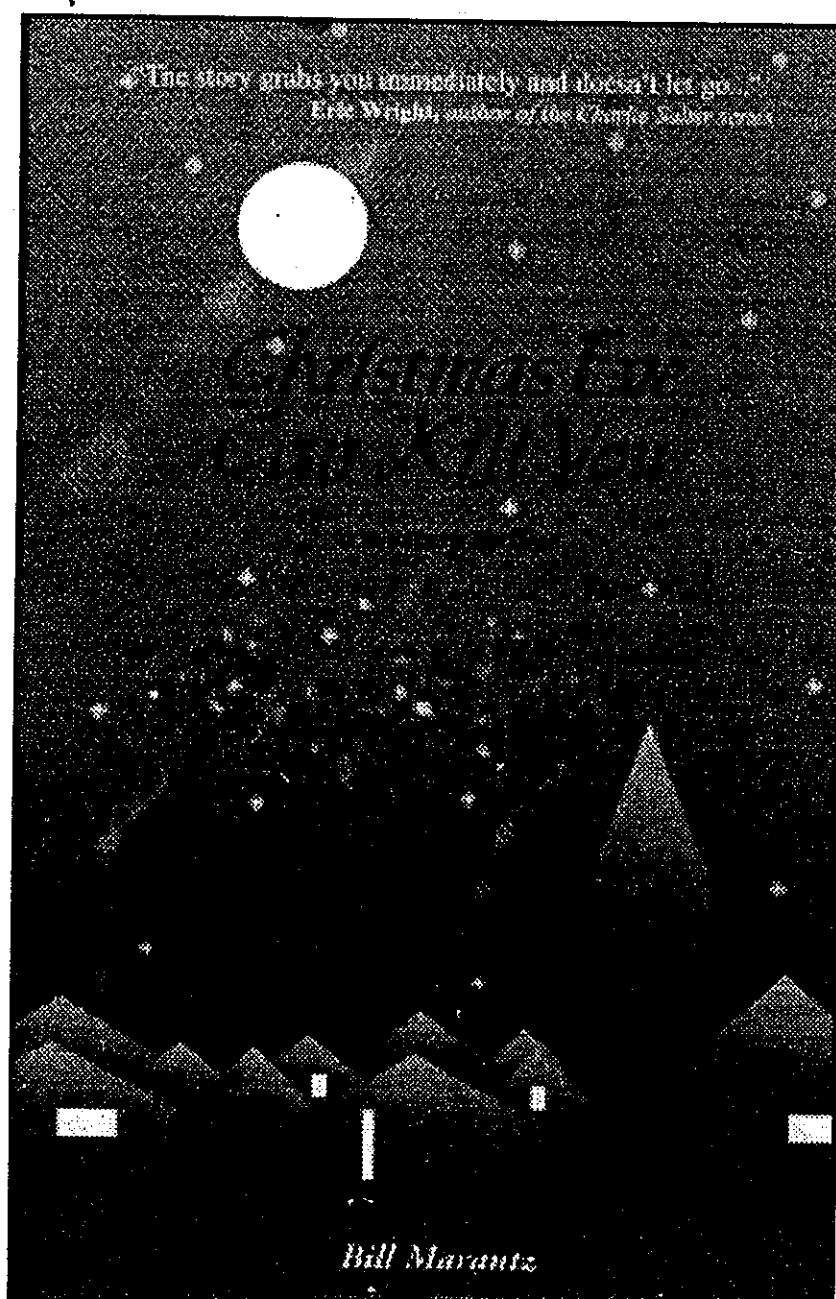
He's been a "lawyer, part-time judge, freelance broadcaster, film critic, movie actor," and "award-winning



**BILL MARANTZ:** An insider's look at police detectives' lines of questioning, and how criminals operate.

radio and television scriptwriter".

*Christmas Eve Can Kill You* is his first novel. And although the book's numerous typographical errors



Book cover.

might irritate some readers, this first novel makes clear that Marantz is one heck of a good storyteller.

The book is set in contemporary Winnipeg; it has some colorful Jewish characters, and plenty of Yiddish expressions and references to Jewish culture.

It opens with Finkleman, a Holocaust survivor turned professional burglar, break-

ing into the office of his former sponsor, a Jewish lawyer named Rodney Feldman, to steal money from his safe. Feldman enters the office unexpectedly, and Finkleman kills him, and flees the building.

In the next chapter, the focus shifts to "Val Virgo", a popular, hardboiled radio talk show host whose real name is Izzy Miller. Virgo, the book's central character, is a sec-

ond-rate country and western singer now hosting a talk show at the Dominion Broadcasting Company - a not-so-veiled allusion to the CBC.

Virgo witnesses Fritz Finkleman being tried and sent to jail for murder. Meanwhile, the media have been carrying stories about a "Judge Brown" being killed by a mail bomb; a terrorist "aboriginal" group reportedly takes credit for that murder, and for a second bomb that goes off in the bag of mail carrier Leon Coleman.

The rest of the plot focuses on Virgo trying to get to the bottom of Brown's murder, and becoming even more determined to solve the mystery after narrowly escaping a bombing and a second attempt on his life.

Marantz, who's in his mid-60s, has clearly put his years in the courtroom to good use in this novel. He offers convincing details about everything from how a cat burglar breaks into a safe to the lines of questioning a police detective uses, as he interrogates suspects and tries to figure out who's behind the bombings.

Meanwhile, this first-time novelist also pro-

vides an often hilarious parody of life behind the scenes at the politically correct CBC; a female producer at the Dominion Broadcasting Company tries to keep the rebellious, non-conformist Virgo in check, threatening to fire him unless he obeys her orders.

"The Corporation has a mandate to produce thought-provoking programming, not cater to the lowest common denominator," she huffs at him, disapproving of the calls he's taking on his show.

Marantz also has an eye for gritty Winnipeg detail - whether he's describing life in a hotel near Main Street's skid row, or having the sarcastic, cynical Virgo describe this Prairie city at Christmas time.

"As far as the eye could see, the city was blanketed in a sheath of multi-colored lights that twinkled up at me like sequins on a black-velvet gown: a flat-chested country chick trying to pass herself off as a sophisticated lady. She was all dressed up, with no place to go."

The novel's references to aboriginals are also interesting. Marantz makes references to an Elijah Harper-like character who's been killed in a police chase. And Jews will enjoy Virgo's often-humorous descriptions of Jewish culture and cooking.

"You could have used my mother's (Chanukah latkes) as curling stones," he tells girlfriend Abby Brown.

Marantz keeps you turning the pages as Virgo continues his search for the Christmas Eve killer. The ending is a bit depressing, but the writer does leave Virgo alive. Who knows? Maybe this talented Winnipeg lawyer-storyteller has a Val Virgo murder mystery sequel up his sleeve.

**Chai sends message of hope with 2001 concert**

By KATHERINA DUECK

As Israel continues to welcome thousands of new citizens back to their homeland, the cultural face of the country has grown immensely. This year, the Chai Folk Ensemble celebrates immigration and cultural diversity in the first half of their annual performance.

Entitled *Gates of Jerusalem*, the show features pieces that are representative of Jewish Moroccans, Russians, Ethiopians, and Middle Eastern communities. The evening's opening piece - choreographed by Israeli dance teacher and choreographer Shai Gottesman (who last worked with Chai and Finjan for the 2000 concert) - explores the emotions of passing through the Gates of Jerusalem and returning home. Later, during the piece "Chasida" (choreographed by Sharon Mizrahi of Mexico City), the song tells the story of Operations Moses, Joshua, and - most importantly - Solomon, the latter of which saw a total of 14,324 Ethiopian Jews rescued from exile and resettled in Israel.

"Chasida means stork," explained Chai's Co-Artistic Director Tracy Kasner. "This song carries the message of the stork rescuing the Ethiopians by taking them to Israel. Of course, it was actually a plane, but the message remains the same."

The fact that traditional Israeli culture also thrives in a climate of change is not overlooked by Chai, and the second half of the evening's show pays tribute to the past while looking to the future. Included in this segment is "Hashirim Hamischakim," a piece that is choreographed by renowned Venezuelan choreographer Alberto Zirlinger (who last



tacular evening ends with hope. The finale first addresses the desire for a Middle East peace treaty with the piece "Tikvah" ("Hope") and the song "Y'hiye Tov" ("It Will Be Good") before moving into "Kahn," a dance and song celebrating life and the development of Israel. To close the performance, the Chai Folk Ensemble will once again be joined by the children - the hope and future of Israel.

Gates of Jerusalem takes place on Tuesday, February 20 at the Centennial Concert Hall. Show time is 8:00 p.m. and tickets are available by calling TicketMaster.

Sarah Sommer

# Chai Folk Ensemble

**Gates of Jerusalem**

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