

Note on the 'Dreadful songs' by Vera Frenkel for *The Institute*TM web site

Preliminary audio sketches and lyrics for the first three songs were written by the artist as if from various positions within *The Institute*TM. They can be accessed at <http://www.the-national-institute.org>, and will also be heard off-line as part of the exhibition.

They are:

- 1: **No One's in Charge** – buck-passing as standard corporate strategy
- 2: **It's a Job, That's All** – a lament re job-induced alienation
- 3: **Weird Language** – bureaucratic language as mystification

*The Institute*TM songs are preformed by the group **Mad Love** (sisters Wanda, Linda and Audrey vanderStoop), and arranged by Rohan Staton of Massive Music, Toronto.

'No One's in Charge', addresses the familiar institutional phenomenon of the buck never stopping anywhere within range. The second song, 'It's a Job, That's All', gives voice to staff members in the secretarial pool who see their jobs as trivial, opening the larger question of working environments that create disaffected employees. The third, 'Weird Language', addresses bureau-speak, with a chorus made up entirely of bureaucratic phrases found in letters the artist received during the production period.

The next three songs are from the perspective of people outside *The Institute*TM looking in; a politician, a sponsor and an unemployed cultural bureaucrat, respectively. The last song is in the collective voice of *The Institute*TM residents. As soon as resources permit, the plan is to complete the song cycle (seven in all) and commission full instrumentation. The approach, and the cabaret flavour, are nevertheless clear from these three samples.

Making no pretense at being a song writer or composer, Frenkel sees this aspect of *The Institute*TM as just another form of narrative; a use of grass roots folk idioms laced with cabaret irony born from the experience of working with and observing institutional practices and the prices they exact.

*The Institute*TM is a large canvas of which the dreadful songs, as she calls them, inhabit a very small corner, so Frenkel prefers not to over-emphasize their place in the whole. However, on a few occasions when they've been played in public (on *Artists in Residence*, The Arts Today, C.B.C. Radio (www.radio.cbc.ca/programs/artstoday/artontheweb); at the World Wide Video Festival, Amsterdam, 2001; and at the I.C.A. London conference on her work, March 2003) the comments and laughter that followed suggested a heartfelt response.