

Entertainment

JOHN CLEESE'S JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY

Comedian serious about mental health

by WENDY McCANN
CP Television Writer

Basil Fawly, British television's madcap hotelier, could have been a poster boy for mental instability.

The waiter-bashing, wife-hating innkeeper who presided over the Fawly Towers guest house was a mean-spirited, morally superior boor who drove his guests to distraction.

"He's actually an absolutely fearful person," comedian John Cleese, 53, says of the character he created and portrayed for syndicated TV in the mid-1970s.

"He is completely unself-aware and absolutely the worst snob you could come across. He's rather an ignorant man, although he thinks he is well educated. And he's obviously depressive."

Cleese is qualified to offer this considered diagnosis because of the many hours he spends in the company of shrink.

His third wife, Alyce Faye Cleese, is a psychoanalyst.

And Cleese, 53, has spent considerable time in the last 20 years being psychoanalysed or talking about psychoanalysis in books written with his psychiatrist, Robin Skynner.

Families and How to Survive Them, a fairly serious examination of what makes some families tick, was published in 1983 and initially raised the eyebrows of fans who couldn't imagine Cleese being anything but silly.

But the book has become generally accepted as a worthwhile piece of armchair psychology and is selling about 800 copies a week worldwide in some 10 languages.

Life and How to Survive It, the sequel released in Canada last month by Reed Books of Canada, is more of the same: fairly serious-minded banter between Cleese and Skynner about the benefits of a healthy mind.

Cleese, in a telephone conversation from his home in London's Holland Park, is, for a celebrity, strangely at home talking about his mental breakdown.

At age 36, with his days as Monty Python's Minister of Funny Walks behind him, Cleese says he turned his attention to Basil Fawly's screwed up life and was left to ponder his own.

His marriage to Connie Booth, who played housekeeper Polly Sherman on Fawly Towers, was on the rocks.

And Cleese says he found himself suffering "a kind of early mid-life crisis."

A doctor, meanwhile, suggested symptoms of a lingering flu were possibly psychosomatic and recommended he get psychological help.

Although skeptical and reluctant to discuss his feelings with strangers, Cleese joined Skynner's group therapy and spent the next three years on a healing journey of self-discovery.

"I was simply confronted with a series of problems — most of

them to do with matters of quite deep significance, like what did I do with my life, what kind of a relationship did I want with my wife.

"I mean, they were really quite deep questions which in my experience, very frequently, start to bother people just about the time they get to 35 because on some level we know that's halfway: three score and 10."

Cleese says therapy has changed his life.

He and Booth enjoyed "an extremely friendly separation" that ended in divorce in 1978. He married Barbara Trentham in 1981; a decade later, the couple's two-year trial separation "had gone so well we decided to make it permanent."

Married to Alyce Faye since January, Cleese says he is finally content. He is the man at the helm of Video Arts, a profitable and acclaimed series of business training videos, and is in the process of writing a sequel to his enormously successful movie A Fish Called Wanda. ("We're calling it Death Fish II at the moment.")

Says Cleese: "All things being equal, I can't imagine anything short of a kind of Bosnian situation in Holland Park that's really going to make me very miserable. I have a very good life now."

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Pop Top 10

Here are the week's Top 10 pop albums and singles in Canada based on sales, as compiled by the national music trade source, The Record. Bracketed figures indicate position the previous week.

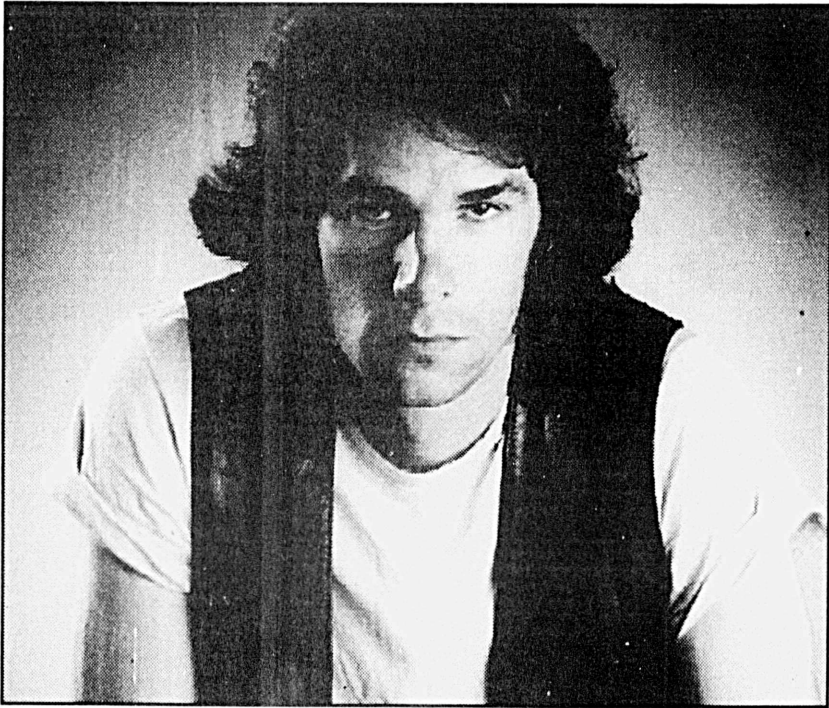
- ALBUMS**
- (1) Janet — Janet Jackson
 - (3) Unplugged and Seated — Rod Stewart
 - (2) Pocket Full of Kryptonite — Spin Doctors
 - (4) Are You Gonna Go My Way — Lenny Kravitz
 - (6) Get a Grip — Aerosmith
 - (5) Unplugged — Eric Clapton
 - (8) Fare Thee Well Love — Rankin Family
 - (7) The Bodyguard — Soundtrack
 - (9) 12 Inches of Snow — Snow
 - (10) Ten Summoner's Tales — Sting
- SINGLES**
- (1) That's the Way Love Goes — Janet Jackson
 - (2) Oh Carolina — Shaggy
 - (7) Show Me Love — Robin S
 - (3) Have I Told You Lately — Rod Stewart
 - (12) Can't Help Falling in Love — UB40
 - (4) Sleeping Satellite — Tashmin Archer
 - (6) Regret — New Order
 - (8) Come Undone — Duran Duran
 - (9) Looking Through Patient Eyes — PM Dawn
 - (11) In These Arms — Bon Jovi

Country Top 10

- Here are the week's top country songs in Canada based on radio play, as compiled by the national music trade source, The Record. Bracketed figures indicate position the previous week.
- (4) That Summer — Garth Brooks
 - (1) Blame It On Your Heart — Patty Loveless
 - (12) Money in the Bank — John Anderson
 - (3) Trouble On The Line — Sawyer Brown
 - (2) Tell Me Why — Wynonna Judd
 - (6) Hometown Honeymoon — Alabama
 - (7) Oh Me Oh My Sweet Baby — Diamond Rio
 - (10) Blank Pages — Patricia Conroy
 - (13) Somebody Else's Moon — Collin Raye
 - (8) Honky Tonk Attitude — Joe Diffie

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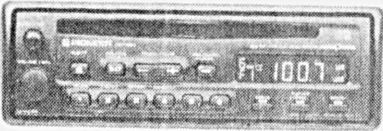
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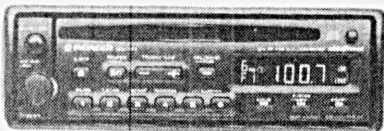
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