Bash!, Ching!

by Steven Trussoni

Contemporary Percussion music can allow a maximum amount of freedom of expression for the performer. But, it can also demand precise and detailed attention to the composer's score. These two extremes were encountered in The CBC-Dalhousie Festival concert by Nexus last week at the Cohn.

Careful not to play any of the Paul Horn back-ups or ragtime marimba pieces for which they are well known, the 5 member group warmed up with **Music For Pieces of Wood** (claves) by Steve Reich, in which two performers began a continuous rhythmic texture. As soon as one became aware of what each was doing, another performer began in similar fashion until all 5 members were playing. The repeated effect, though sometimes confusing, was frequently filled with beauty.

Lahara, by group member Bob Becker, mimicked the sound of an Indian tabla through use of a tom-tom played with drumsticks, combined with the drone of the tambura reproduced by the vibraphone and a marimba accompaniment. The vibraphonists sound had a hypnotic and sometimes dulling effect which, when combined with the marimba player's endless playing of a blues scale, began to sound like a throwback to **In A Godda Da Vida**.

But composer-player Becker shone throughout with a tintal, the most common rhythmic cycle of Indian music. Little here had much real impact on this listener except for the occasional feeling of surprise when I heard some of the rhythmic cycle repeated throughout the piece.

In his introduction, host Don Tremaine described **Lahara** as "the ham in the musical sandwich", but the real meat on this half of the concert was **Third Construction** by John Cage. Linked by a continuous rhythmic thread while playing tin cans, toneblocks, a conch shell and other exotic percussive paraphenalia, the group performed very securely, each member moving smoothly between varied instruments, producing an integrated sound.

With a greater influx of instruments at their disposal in the final piece, this integrated sound was again apparent. While enjoying the color and duration of each sound in **Improvisation**, one could actually see the performers wondering which set of bells (or drums) to play next as they moved through different dynamic levels, creating their own soundscapes as they went. With this concert, Nexus gave me a new lease on the pleasure of listening.

Due to a misunderstanding between Steve Trussoni and the people who edited his story on the String Quartet last week the original meaning of certain passages were somewhat altered.

Gypsy Baron handicapped

Dal Chorale performed Strauss' "Gypsy Baron" Thursday night under a limiting handicap. It was not the choir itself which provided infrequent harmonies behind the soloists. Nor was it the soloists who were on occasion muffled by the orchestra but persevered admirably. The orchestra too gave a competent though somewhat listless accompaniment after only one rehearsal with the Chorale.

The handicap was rather the "Gypsy Baron" itself. One of Strauss' lesser known operettas, it was not especially exciting or compelling except for the overture, a lighthearted waltz. It was an interesting experiment in doing an operetta choir style. Usually an opera is acted in costume with a stage setting and much smaller group o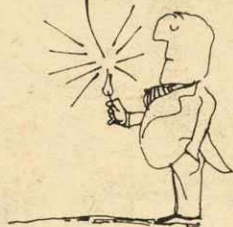f singers than the hundred or so who sang last Thursday. The orchestra would not be on stage as they were put in the pit.

The performance which was well attended was taped by CBC. Don Treman as MC introduced the soloists and gave an on-going story line with his quota of clichés. A story line was needed actually because it was harder to hear the soloists than the choir.

This large chorale made up of community members from business men to voice majors must have felt somewhat left out. They have been practising the piece once a week for the last three months under the direction of Walter Kemp, the chairman of the Music Department. Nevertheless, it was obvious that they all had a lot of fun and pleasure as did all the relatives and friends who came to hear them.