Get Classical

by Paul Campbell

The biographies of creative people are often uninteresting. Most of what happens with them occurs inside their heads, so there's not much for the biographer to draw on. Politics, business and sports are quite a different matter, since in them it is what occurs between people, that is, that which is observable, which serves to mark important events. Attempts have been made to do autobiographies of the creative process; for instance, composers have tried to keep a diary of their thought processes as they composed a work, but the very act of identifying and recording their thoughts is so disruptive to the creative process itself that the project is given up as being impossible. so very often a biography of an artist, or a composer, or a thinker, winds up being a catalogue of his output, with an attempt to explain the evolution of that output by the biographer. Interesting if you rally value the output of the subject, or if you respect the opinion of the biographer, but otherwise quite liable to be dull. If this is the case, then why do I want to write a bit of the biography of the French composer Ravel, for this column. Well, the immediate reason is that in the next week there will be performances of two of his major works on campus. The subsidiary reason is that generally the output of the creative person can only be understood in the context of the times he lived in: that is, in a sense the work itself becomes a biography of his times. I find this a fascinating thought, and I think Ravel is a reasonable example

Maurice Ravel was born into a changing world in 1875. Marx, Freud, and very soon Ravel's almost exact contemporary Albert Einstein, changed the orbit of the intellectual world. After the Napoleonic Wars of the first part of the century, France had licked its wounds, recovered, and become

a sophisticated society which was vying to be the capitol of arts and fashion. Although France had been pre-eminent in many fields before, music was

not one of them, the world having been pretty well dominated by the German, and to a lesser extent, the Italian influ-

ence. Ravel's older friends composers Erik Satie and Claude Debussy, aware of the need to escape the all pervasive influence of Wagner, spoke of the necessity of "Abandoning the 'sauerkraut' ethic."

"La belle epoque" of France started in 1885 and ended with a bang in 1914 with the start of the First World War. It was a period of intellectual and artistic expansion. France was defining herself as she wished to be defined, and national pride, which was never very deficient, was high. The Impressionists were setting the art world on its ear, French authors were being read around the world, and French music

was coming into its own. Concerts of new music were frequent, the critics were severe, and people were excited by, and became involved in, what was happening around them. Perhaps too involved: the premiere of the "Rite of Spring" by Stravinsky resulted in a riot, although no one is sure whether it was the music or the ballet's choreography by Mijinsky that caused it. For sure the combination was dynamite, and Stravinsky escaped out a basement window. Although Ravel was not a precocious student, he learned quickly and well, by his early twenties was considered a composer of considerable stature. His personality was perfect to bear the French banner: precise, aware, outwardly detached but inwardly feeling, given to witty cynicisms. His music increasingly abandoned the emotional self indulgences of the late romantic era, and returned to the pre-romantic concept of 'pure' music. This period of national well-being was also the period of his greatest creativity: the String Quartet, Dapnis and Chloe, the Trio and his great piano works Miroirs, Jeux d'eau, and Gaspard de la

nuit, among others. At the outbreak of the war he, being a patriotic Frenchman, tried to enlist, but was turned down for health reasons. He eventually made his contribution as a truck driver on the front lines, permanently damaging his health in doing so. His first work following the war was the Sonata for Violin and 'Cello, of which he wrote: "I think this sonata marks a turning point in my career.

The music is stripped to the bone. The allure of harmony is rejected and more and more there is a return of emphasis on melody." This came to characterize his later music: it is spartan, witty, brilliant, and often jazz influenced. His piano concertos, Le Tombeau de Couperin, and even Bolero, are examples of this. The later part of his life was much taken up with the traveling which seems to accompany being a celebrity. He died in 1937 from an undiagnosed debilitative disease.

The Ravel Sonata for Violin and 'Cello with be the centrepeice of my next Wednesday noon concert, when I welcome Rick Naill to the series. Rick was the 'cellist of the Brunswick String Quartet here on campus, from 1973 until '84. It will be a treat to see him back here again. He is a fine player, and the Ravel is a great work: I urge you to come. Wed. 12:30, Mem Hall (the Arts centre), Nov 28. The following Sunday we will, with Paul Stewart, be playing the Ravel Trio, but more about that concert next week.

There is another concert coming up which you will want to consider: the Messiah by Handel is being performed by the New Brunswick Chamber Orchestra and a choir of New Brunswick Choral Federation members next Friday, Nov 30, 8 pm, at Grace Memorial United Baptist Church. Tickets are available at the Playhouse Box Office, or at Westminister Books. If you haven't heard the Messiah, here's your chance. If you have, then I don't need to encourage you.

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by Chris Campbell

The term is almost over, the pressure is building, stress increases, and you find TV is much more interesting than any paper that you have to write. In fact, going to see a great movie would make you feel even better than writing a paper! Hey, maybe after you see a move you'll write a better paper because you feel better!

In keeping with the academically helpful tone of this column, I'll recommend that you check our Atom Egoyan's Family Viewing, which is playing Friday and Saturday nights at 8:00 pm in Tilley tional family (or perhaps dysfunctional people who share the same residence) and it explores the dynamics of multiple generations of a family and the way technology trivializes existence. The film was edited by Egoyan with Bruce Mac-Donald, the director of the everpopular Roadkill, who also edited Egoyan's next film, Speaking Parts. In 1987 Wim Wenders won (how's that for alliteration) the Best Picture award at Montreal's Festival des Films de Monde and gave the money to Atom Egoyan for his direction of Family Viewing. Wenders (the director of Paris, Texas and The Wings of Desire) was wowed with (alliteration again!) Egoyan's innovative use of video within a film to suggest different thematic, fa-

Don't miss this masterful, darkly humourous, postmodernist exploration of the sate of the family in a time of state-ofthe-art technology.

Speaking of technology and slipping into the world of science fiction is the Capital Film Society's Monday night screening of Andrei Tarkovsky's Solaris at 8:00 pm in the theatre of the Centre Communautaire Sainte Anne. Tarkovsky's epic follows Chris Kelvin, a cosmonaut who journeys to an outpost on the planet Solaris to discover what has happened to the crew. Those who enjoyed the elegiac beauty of Nostalghia will also love this major filmic achievement that is being presented for the first time in its original Russian language version (with English subtitles to aid in comprehension for those who do not speak Russian).

What a weekend of film as

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