

Music professor likes to surprise

interview by John Charles

Michael Bowie has just one complaint about the Encounters concert series: "It's extremely difficult to come on stage, give your all, and then leave."

Bowie, a Music Department professor at the University and violist, is used to performing traditional concerts, which are structured so that the biggest, toughest work comes last when the musicians are thoroughly warmed up and their rapport with the audience is established.

But the whole point of the Encounters concerts is to get away from that fixed format, in which a string quartet or brass quintet plays the whole program. Instead, Encounters present music for various combinations and from wide-ranging epochs, thus allowing the audience to encounter music they might not seek out.

"It was the same Beethoven symphonies and concertos over and over. I needed a change."

The success of this series, now in its third year, has shown that audiences like surprises so long as they're pleasant. And people who might not go to an all-modern concert find that hearing some far-out music is intriguing — if they also get their dollop of Beethoven or Brahms.

Last Sunday, at this year's opening Encounters concert, Bowie played in two works: Ravel's *Introduction And Allegro*, a work for harp and six accompanying instruments, and Brahms' *Second Piano Quartet*, for string trio and piano. At the third Encounters, January

30, he'll play Schubert's popular *Trout Piano Quintet*.

"Our audiences often come to hear a favorite work, then stay to hear others, so a mixed bag seems to be attractive to our public," Bowie said in his office.

"The audiences have grown each concert, and it's a good platform for faculty and colleagues to demonstrate their abilities. And it's important for music students to have live music experiences."

Of the thirty faculty members in the music department, about one-third are performers, and they're asked by the Encounters program committee for suggestions of works they'd like to perform. Programs are made up from those suggestions.

Of particular importance this year is the presence of works by University of Alberta composers on three of the four programs. Dr. Malcolm Forsyth, Dr. George Arasimowicz, and department chairman Dr. Alfred Fisher will all present new pieces. Fisher, a considerable pianist as well as a composer, will play two colourful works by Liszt on March 5.

Bowie, who hails from England, was a founding member of the renowned chamber orchestra Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in the late 1950s, as well as assistant principal violist in the London Symphony Orchestra.

He moved to Canada in 1961 for two reasons. The repetitious repertoire of the orchestra was beginning to pall. "It was the same Beethoven symphonies and concertos over and over," he recalled. "I needed a change."

At the same time, he had just married a woman from Vancouver, and was "bitten" by the beauty of that city and its atmosphere. Bowie became a member of the Vancouver Symphony and the CBC-Vancouver Orches-

tra, which gave a lot of performances.

The musician came to the University of Alberta in 1969, after several years of teaching at University of Saskatchewan. Perhaps his most important assignments are teaching string technique, coaching chamber music, and a studio course in chamber music for viola.

"The string department is alive and well,

"Our audiences often come to hear a favorite work, then stay to hear others, so a mixed bag seems to be attractive to our public."

but it needs bolstering," Bowie said. "We need more students. At one time there were a lot of Edmonton string teachers who sent their students here, but many have retired or died. We're waiting for the next crop of Suzuki viola students, and they're just going into high school now."

Bowie says that many professors these days tend to think in hand-to-mouth terms, having been brainwashed by serious cutbacks and the economic situation in general. "We've still got our ideals, though," he said. "We'd like to see the opera program built up again, from workshops to fully staged productions, as they used to be."

The Academy Strings, a chamber orchestra, will be giving concerts this season, joined by wind players. But the St. Cecilia Orchestra has folded due to a lack of players.

"Strings are the main experience in the department's orchestral program right now," Bowie concluded.

ACTION CALENDAR

Friday 25

EVENTS

HOCKEY Bears, Molson invitational, Varsity Arena 7:30pm.

SOCER Bears vs. UBC, Faculte St.Jean 4pm.

HOCKEY Oilers vs. Toronto, Coliseum 7:30, \$6.50 rush seats.

EXHIBITIONS

STRUCTURED PARADISE see Sept22.

FIGURATIVE SCULPTURE see Sept22.

LOOKING THROUGH THE GLASS see Sept22.

APILLERAS see Sept22.

FILM

WITCHES OF EASTWICK SUB theatre 8pm, \$1.

LA TRICHE NFT, Victor Lanoux plays a married bisexual police inspector drawn into blackmail and murder, Edm Art Gallery, 8pm, \$4.

REAR WINDOW Hitchcock, Princess, 7pm.

Saturday 26

EVENTS

BEAR COUNTRY beerfest, bands: *Pursuit of Happiness*, *Slippin' Lizards*, UofA students only - ID required, Butterdome 7:30, \$12 door.

HOCKEY Bears, see Sept25.

SOCER Bears vs. U Vic Faculte St.Jean 2pm.

SOCER Pandas vs. Edm Angels, 10am.

MOTOR MANIA Coliseum 8pm, info: 471-7373.

LA TRAVIATA see Sept24.

EXHIBITS

FIGURATIVE SCULPTURE see Sept22.

LOOKING THROUGH THE GLASS see Sept22.

APILLERAS see Sept22.

FILM

TOP GUN SUB theatre 8pm, \$1.

LA TRICHE see Sept25.

Sunday 27

EVENTS

HOCKEY Bears vs. Calgary, Varsity Arena 2pm.

FALL FOLIAGE BIKE TOUR bike rentals on-site (\$5), River Valley Outdoor Centre (see Sept23) 1pm.

TRUMPET RECITAL Fordyce Pier, CON Hall 8pm, free.

MOTOR MANIA see Sept26.

EXHIBITS

STRUCTURED PARADISE see Sept22.

APILLERAS see Sept22.

LOOKING THROUGH THE GLASS see Sept22.

FILM

THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURES OF MR. WEST IN THE LAND OF THE BOLSHEVIKS NFB, Kuleshov's funny and stylistic film, Edm Art Gallery 8pm, \$4.

A MAN & A WOMAN: 20 yrs later Princess 9pm.

LIST YOUR EVENT IN THE ACTION CALENDAR.

SUBMIT ENTRIES TO THE GATEWAY

ROOM 282 SUB.

ALL ENTRIES

SUBJECT TO

EDITING.

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Photo Dave Young

Piano quartets, African xylophones, and harp music featured in eclectic concert.

Encounters of the musical kind

**Encounters Series
U of A Music Department**

review by John Charles

Brahms' *Piano Quartet No. 2, Op. 26* ended the opening Encounters concert with a real triumph. This was the most satisfying performance of a major Romantic chamber work since the Encounters series began three seasons ago.

With Helmut Brauss, piano, Norman Nelson, violin, Michael Bowie, viola, and Tanya Prochazka, cello, the audience heard a sweeping, passionate performance that had just about everything.

The strings were unusually well-matched, and the new ingredient is Prochazka, who moved to Edmonton last year and is a considerable cellist with a big, singing tone. Her artistry seemed to challenge Nelson, who played with more fire than is sometimes the case, while Bowie's lovely mediation between the two proved fully successful.

It was 50 minutes of musical ideas — dramatic, tender, meditative, and in the gypsy dance finale, sparkling.

The evening's most important event was the world premiere of Dr. Malcolm Forsyth's *Tre*

Toccate Per Pianoforte, commissioned by CBC for Helmut Brauss, who premiered Forsyth's powerful piano concerto several years back.

A toccata is a rapid instrumental piece which shows off the "touch", or striking quality of the player. In modern times these tend to be virtuoso works with a percussive quality, and Forsyth's is no exception.

"It was 50 minutes of musical ideas — dramatic, tender, meditative, and in the gypsy dance finale, sparkling."

A single 22-minute work, which falls into three sections, it provided a real workout for Brauss, who had been working on it for three months, but proved disappointing for this listener. A bold fanfare motif in the opening movement was one of Forsyth's most engaging ideas, but the connecting tissue between fanfares seemed insubstantial. The slow movement conveyed a stark, on-the-beach-at-night mood, in its ripples of sound and notes that died away into silence. Whether the music is really deep or just portentous only repeated hearings will tell.

The final movement evokes Forsyth's African origins by drawing upon the xylophone orchestras of the Copi tribe, in which up to twenty players each play a different rhythm. In Forsyth's version as many as seven cross-rhythms were played simultaneously by Brauss. Usually Forsyth's use of African devices creates an emotional release, but here it seemed oppressive, as the rhythms became relentless, indistinguishable, even brutal. This is one of several ideas in the *Toccate* which really needs an orchestra to be fully grasped. However, Brauss' performance was exhilarating, though perhaps more cool and percussive than Forsyth intended, and much of the audience appeared to enjoy the work thoroughly.

Two works featuring harp rounded out the program. Ravel's delicate, shimmering *Introduction And Allegro* for harp and six instruments received a strong, slightly overblown performance, but Nora Bumanis' harp playing was fine, especially in the mesmerizing cadenza. And Bumanis' solo piece *Sarabande E Toccata*, by Nino Rota (an Italian composer who wrote most of Fellini's film scores) proved delightful — just the sort of unexpected encounter one looks for at these imaginative concerts.