

The Gateway fine arts

simony rampart at all saints

... "If it was for the audience, we would still be playing 'round the mulberry bush... The taste of the public has to be upgraded. We have to make them musically literate."

"And yet, in the choosing of a program, to a certain extent we do take into consideration the audience; you pretty well have to meet them half-way."

So said Simon Preston to me before his organ recital at All Saints' Cathedral last Friday: educate them, but meet them half-way. So he did, and no audience could have asked for a more imaginative or varied program.

To begin with, "Ricercar cromatic post il Credo" by Frescobaldi was particularly appropriate, for it is a surprisingly romantic work, very easy to listen to, with passages of subtle counterpoint that even a novice audience could not fail to appreciate.

Except for some initial technical difficulty and a slight fuzziness of tone, it was well played and prepared the audience for the best.

And the best did come. The Hindemith, "Phantasie from Sonata No. 1" proved to be a real eye opener to disdainers of Hindemith. It had a beauty and power few recognize Hindemith as being capable of, and Mr. Preston handled the difficult technique with a skill and vigour that almost made it look easy.

Any complete organ recital must of course include a work by Bach, and this master of the Baroque was well represented in his "Prelude and Fugue in E Minor".

This might well have been the highlight of the evening, for the work is quite extensive, and contains the best that Bach has to offer; however, while adequately played, it proved to be a disappointment.

The Prelude was too slow, and dragged in parts, lacking the crisp firmness with which a Bach Prelude should be handled.

The Fugue, while better than the Prelude, seemed at times to lose itself in the gentler passages. Mr. Preston's counterpoint, however, while retaining a subdued soft tone, had a distinct clarity.

The Liszt "Prelude and Fugue on B.A.C.H." was undoubtedly the success of the evening. Described as "very piano-ish" by Mr. Preston, one could visualize its suitability for piano, but no piano could ever convey a majestic force as did the organ.

Both the Prelude and Fugue carried through the theme on B.A.C.H., adding variations that ranged from brilliant forte to a very delicate pianissimo. This surprising range lent itself well to contrast. Though well performed, Mr. Preston was once more weakish in the gentler passages.

The last half of the program was highlighted by the Purcell "Voluntary in G", the Howells "Rhapsody in C sharp minor", and the Messiaen "Dieu parmi nous".

The Purcell was a return to the comparatively conventional classic style of composition. The

piece being well played, it was not difficult to sense from the audience the general satisfaction that this type of music still brings. It is clear, logical, and easy to understand.

The Howells was the most romantic work on the program, and modernistic in technique and outlook. It utilized more fully the capabilities of the organ, and displayed some very unique devices of harmony. This, along with the fine themes and melodies, made it highly delightful.

The final work of the night, by Messiaen, is probably the closest one will come to jazz on the organ.

This piece, while perhaps hard to follow because of its extreme modernism, displayed in a final grand crescendo the skill of the organist; his ability to control his instrument both technically and artistically.

This then, must be the main contribution of this work to the recital: it left no doubt as to the marvellous abilities of Simon Preston.

—N. Riebeck

art stomping at the wampum

Wampum Gallery opened its fall season with a collection of oil-paintings by famous European artists. Montmartre is big this year, as are alpine landscapes. The collection also included endearing portraits of starving children. Other popular items included a copper-tooled reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper", and the Mona Lisa in shell-craft.

On opening night each lady guest was presented with a plastic rose.

Due to an increased demand, the Wampum is devoting one-half of the main floor to the ever-popular stag-and-waterfall oil prints.

The Canadian collection will be moved to the boiler-room. The permanent sculpture collection of plastic flamingos will then be moved to the front lawn.

If you wish to see this stimulating show—and it is a must—drop by the Wampum Gallery between ten and three. Asked to comment on these rather unusual hours, Smiling Director replied, "They coincide with banking hours."

This is in keeping with the gallery's policy, "Man's cash should exceed his taste/or what's a gallery for?"

(Copies of this statement on synthetic parchment in plastic frames may be obtained for a nominal fee at the door.)

—Jackie Foord



—Scarth photo

A CONFRONTATION OF POETS—Dr. Eli Mandel and Marshall Laub. The first of Mr. Laub's biweekly programs of poetry-readings (including Dr. Mandel reading his own verse) was held at the Yardbird Suite Tuesday night.

music opera almost as it should be

Puccini really was quite a shameless composer. He knew his effects and how to use them to greatest advantage, and this propensity in him is nowhere more evident than in "La Boheme".

Just look at the last act: all of the gay, carefree (but they really aren't) bohemians are engaged in a sort of bacchanalia with mock-duels and pillow-fights, they are having a riproaring good time and so is the music, when (!!)—in staggers the fatally-ill Mimi (consumption again).

The gaiety comes to a crashing halt in loud minor chords in the orchestra, fortissimo. The contrast is rather contrived but wonderfully effective. Dying, Mimi is laid on the rude little pallet in the suddenly bleak garret, and then the pathetic fireworks begin.

In order to buy medicine for Mimi, Musetta sells her earrings and Colline his old coat. Mimi is given a white fur muff to warm her cold hands (to the music of Rodolfo's first act aria, "Your little hand is frozen...").

The final blow comes when Mimi dies without Rodolfo realizing it, and the librettist has him express hopes for her recovery when we know that it is really too late. Throughout the whole scene

Puccini has been utilizing love-music from the first act, to bring home the contrast between those days of ecstatic happiness and the present tragedy.

One would think that most people would resent this playing on our emotions. Yet Puccini is one of the most popular of opera composers, and his works have garnered a good deal of critical esteem.

The fact is that Puccini is a great composer; not of the highest order, to be sure, yet great nevertheless.

His genius lies primarily in the fields of melody and orchestration.

Puccini's melodies are sweepingly romantic and surefire. They lie mainly in the arias and duets, and these are strung together within his operas by a skillfully-contrived, though not always interesting, hodge-podge.

But whatever the merit of the music, it is always presented in an original and effective orchestral setting. And since Puccini usually managed to find good libretti, and to take advantage of their dramatic situations, he produced operas worthy of attention. So much for Puccini as a composer. Now on to what took place in the Odeon Theatre last week.

The idea of using cinema as a medium for the presentation of opera is intriguing. There are advantages and disadvantages to this type of approach, but I think the pros outweigh the cons.

There are two major drawbacks to opera movies: firstly, the benefits of live performance are removed completely, and secondly, there is a problem with sound in

most movie theatres.

This second point was especially brought home last week in the Odeon Theatre. The sound was flat during most of the performance, especially in the first act where the bohemians are gathered around in their little garret.

But the great advantages of the medium are even more apparent.

A sense of intimacy can be gained by means of cinema technique which is not possible in a vast opera house. More important still, a near-perfect performance is more easily achieved, since excellent personnel can easily be obtained for a mass medium like the cinema.

But the real clincher is the fact that opera movies are at present the only means of presenting really first-rate opera productions here in Edmonton.

And the "Boheme" production we were shown was indeed first-rate. Conductor Herbert von Karajan made each dramatic point forcefully and kept things moving along nicely; Franco Zeffirelli's direction was unflinchingly imaginative and interesting.

I could find no fault with any of the cast. Mirella Freni (Mimi) has a beautiful, limpid voice that can rise to the dramatic moments as well as the lyrical ones, and Gianni Raimondi's voice is just right for Rodolfo.

All of the bohemian crowd were excellent both vocally and dramatically. The icing on the cake was provided by the La Scala orchestra and chorus.

As a matter of fact, the production was so good that it made one wonder why more opera movies aren't made.

—Bill Beard