

# Guest cellist coordinates ESO

by Brian Campbell

The symphony program last weekend was a study in late 19th century melancholy, and it was, sad to say, a success.

*Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg* is a comic opera, the only one Wagner ever wrote, and the Prelude makes great use of a march motif built around the triumphal entry of the Mastersingers, which is later burlesqued by the winds. The other themes developed in the piece are the wooing of Eva by Walter, and Walter's Prize Song which wins him Eva's hand.

If we expect simplicity in the handling of this material, if we expect a light comic piece, we just aren't up on our Wagner. There is no simple triumph, no simple comedy here. The Agony of Hans Sachs and his renunciation motif in the horn section does not find its way into the overture, but his whole experience in the opera broods in a minor key everywhere we look. Wagner is an elegaic comedian, if such a thing exists, and the Prelude is triumph and comedy in a minor key.

And I must say it was well-handled by Lawrence Leonard and the trusty orchestra. There was just the right touch of vitality in the opening as they moved off at the exact prescribed Wagnerian tempo. (Wagner was quite specific about how his stuff should be played, and if we look at his manuscripts we can see how he despotically laid down every detail.)

There is sweep and majesty in the opening and the symphony captured it well. There was, unfortunately, some tentativeness in the violin section's handling of the Prize Song, but it was momentary and soon forgotten. On the other hand I thought the wood winds were especially superb in their burlesque of the main theme.

Elgar is a composer I have never had much sympathy for; probably because I have a healthy liberal dislike of anything as fascist as *Pomp and Circumstance*. But the *Concerto in E Minor for Cello and Orchestra* is another matter. It shares in Wagnerian

melancholy despite the fact it was written in 1919. It is not the most difficult concerto, but it requires control and intonation (I would have said dynamics, but I'm growing tired of the word). I'm sure the absence of Mstislav Rostropovich overshadowed for many of the audience the great performance of Leonard Rose, who is no mean cellist himself. I particularly appreciated Mr. Rose's expert bowing in the first movement and the general co-operation between soloist and symphony throughout the piece. This is a concerto which creates a unified mood—the soloist is not pitted against the symphony as he is in some Romantic concertos. There were some break-downs, however, especially when the orchestra was repeating cello phrases. The orchestra over-stressed the lines and gave them a sentimental melodramatic character. The orchestra redeemed itself by matching Mr. Rose's remarkable handling of the pizzicato passages with a matching virtuosity.

*Brahms Symphony No. 4 in E Minor* was a good choice to close the evening. Elgar and Wagner are personal and internal, Brahms is more humane and outgoing in his sympathies. Unlike the other he sorrows for something wider than himself. With Elgar and Wagner we look on at a personal spectacle presented for us and we can choose to take part if we wish; with Brahms there is a feeling that he is reaching out and including us. We can hear this particularly in the second movement, which was carefully played Saturday night.

The ESO gave the symphony a generally capable performance, although I thought the first movement was confused and disorganized. The fourth movement was the triumph of the evening. The rather long trombone part was well done and the strings distinguished themselves in their key passage.

It was a performance of quality, and although some of my friends felt it was "unvaried", I hope that Mr. Leonard will stick to this kind of programming and give us more systematic investigations at the symphony.

## What's new this week

Beginning this week in SUB Art Gallery is an intriguing exhibition of sculpture and industrial design created by Jeremy Moore. At the Edmonton Art Gallery, the Washington 10 (reviewed this week) reveals the recent history of art in America's capital.

FRIDAY: Student Cinema presents a chronicle of teenage loves and mores, *Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush*, a low budget film of several years ago.

MONDAY: Edmonton Film Society screens *Au Hasard Balthazar*, Bresson's 1966 film about the life and times of a donkey and the people who won him—sort of an artsy *Yellow Rolls-Royce*.

TUESDAY: The Edmonton Symphony's mid-week series presents soprano Gloria Richards singing some of the arias that made her a television success overnight. Jubilee Auditorium at 8 p.m.

## records

HAVE A LITTLE TALK WITH MYSELF: Ray Stevens

On his latest album, Ray Stevens plays the part of lead singer, all the chorus members, arranger, one of the producers, a song writer, pianist, organist, sound effects man, and trumpet soloist. His arrangements range from fair to good, although some of them seem to substitute quantity for quality; i.e. the chorus (consisting of Stevens' voice re-recorded several times) is so often overpowering and some of his orchestration suffers from an excess of gimmickery. Otherwise, however, it's a very enjoyable album.

Most of the selections are well-known. Bob Dylan's *I'll Be Your Baby Tonight*, *Aquarius*, *Spinning Wheel*, *Help*, and *Games People Play* are performed exceptionally well. *The Fool on the Hill* is probably the only real disappointment on the album. His two most recent hits, *Have a Little Talk With Myself* (one of Ray's own compositions) and *Sunday Morning Comin' Down* show Ray Stevens at his best.

THESE THINGS TOO: Pearls Before Swine

Tom Rapp, writer and singer for a group known as Pearls Before Swine writes poetry that compares favorably with the best works of Bob Dylan, Jimmy Webb, Joni Mitchell, Laura Nyro, Randy Newman, and Leonard Cohen. The theme of this album (the group's second) is that of everlasting change.

His poetry is simple but meaningful, and his melodies and arrangements are consistent with the polished simplicity of the lyrics. Some of his tunes, as *Sail Away* and *Man in the Tree* are hauntingly beautiful.

SHADY GROVE: Quicksilver Messenger Service

Shady Grove is so radically different from *Happy Trails*, their previous album, that it is hard to believe that it's the same group.

I found the album to be somewhat boring: the impressionistic quality and dynamism of *Happy Trails* is gone. The instrumental innovations by all the members have been replaced with an emphasis on their bland vocal harmonies and Nicky Hopkins' piano. Hopkins' technique is best displayed in *Edward (The Shirt Grinder)* and shows some flashes of creativity in *Flashing Lonesome*. The creativity, however, instead of being developed becomes a meaningless conglomeration of sounds toward the end of the song.

STAND UP: Jethro Tull

Jethro Tull is the brainchild of Ian Anderson, and *Stand Up* is the second of two terrific albums. Their humorous interpretation of a Bach *Bouree* is a classic. *Back to the Family* and *A New Day Yesterday* are proof that lyricism and hard rock are not necessarily incompatible. The most outstanding aspect of Jethro Tull's sound is their weird use of the flute—sometimes it sounds as if it were being used more as a rhythm or percussion instrument than a solo instrument. Another outstanding feature is their complex but polished rhythm variations.

—Larry Saidman

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