

Arts & Entertainment

Brauss has passion for Beethoven

interview by Mike Spindloe

For U of A music professor and performer Helmut Brauss, the music of Ludwig van Beethoven has been a lifelong passion. "It has always been Beethoven," he says, "ever since my youth. Of course, I've played a lot of other things, but as I get older I find myself coming back to Beethoven more and more."

This trend will continue with Brauss's upcoming free recital at Convocation Hall this Sunday night at 8 pm. The program will be an all-Beethoven one, featuring some of the best-known and loved Sonatas in Beethoven's catalogue, including the Moonlight (Op. 27), the Pastorale (Op. 28) and the Appassionata (Op. 57). Also on the program will be a Rondo, Op. 51.

The concept of an all-Beethoven program is not a new one to Brauss. "I

"Beethoven was like a priest."

introduced myself here in 1969 with two all-Beethoven recitals, but actually I haven't performed it here too much," he adds. He has played all the pieces on the program before, "but not lately. After awhile it's new again because you have changed and your relationship with the music changes."

Asked why Beethoven in particular, Brauss proves willing to dwell on the subject at length, but the answers, fittingly, remain somewhat elusive. "These are pieces which have consistently captured the imagination of audiences all over the world because of their inherent spiritual message. Beethoven's music captured the wide range of emotions and conditions of human existence, from the dreadful to the wonderful."

Beethoven, Brauss notes, was also a revolutionary. "He identified with Napoleon and the French Revolution. He actually dedicated his third symphony ("Eroica") to Napoleon, but ripped up the dedication page in fury when Napoleon proclaimed himself emperor. Beethoven felt that all human beings were equal and all should have the same rights."

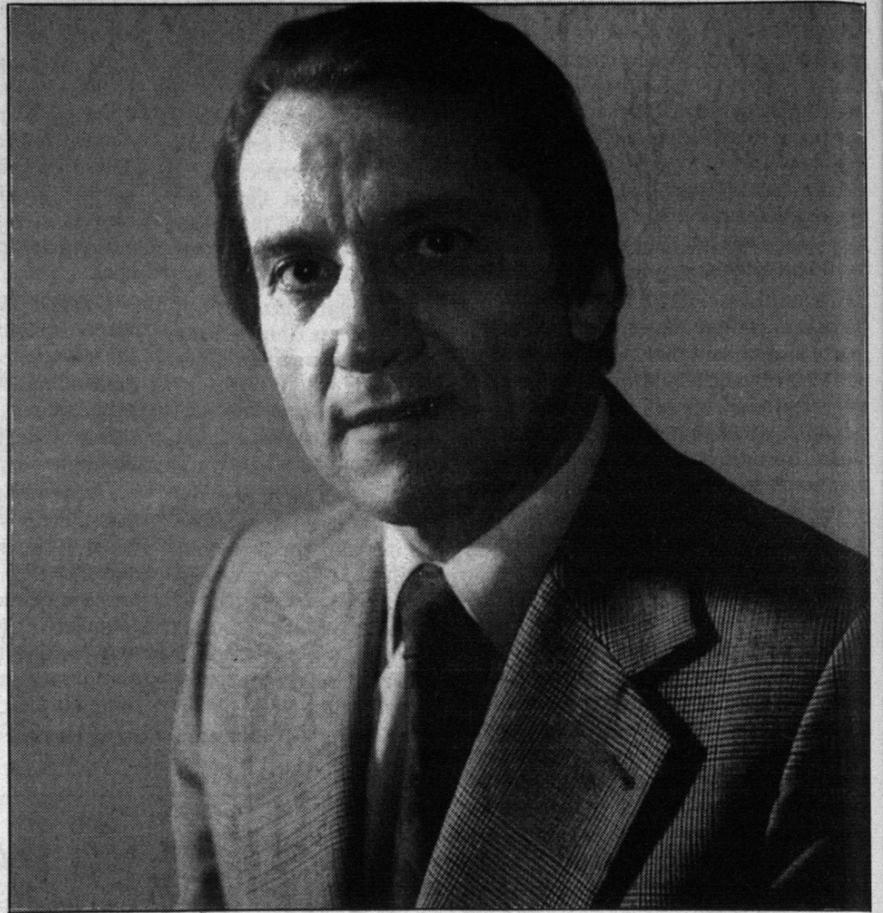
After years of performance and teaching, Brauss still finds that "to be an interpreter of music requires tremendous inner discipline; to allow your own ego to submit to the wishes of the composer. In effect you must become a medium to the composer's spiritual message. This can't be taught; it's a lifelong process that should be brought to people's attention early on in their musical lives."

He continues, "technique allows you to play the machine. It can make you a piano player, but not a *pianist*. A pianist can make technical mistakes that you won't hear if his message is getting across. And for a good audience — people who want to hear it — I can play much better. You can feel it in the hall. It's always there, but in degrees."

Brauss also notes that Beethoven's music is statistically the most played in the world, including places like Japan, where "New Year's is the big celebration — Christmas there is a commercial thing mostly — and you can hear any number of symphony orchestras playing the 9th symphony."

Japan holds a special affinity for Brauss. It was while on tour there in 1982 that he met his wife, Kuniko Furuhashi, who returned to Canada with him and now also teaches music in Edmonton. He also likes the atmosphere at concerts in Japan. "The kind of euphoric response you get here, people yelling "bravo" and so on, doesn't happen. They just clap a little bit, but it doesn't make any difference to the atmosphere."

To Brauss, the atmosphere is of paramount importance; the unspoken com-



U of A music professor Helmut Brauss follows his recent performance with the ESO with an all-Beethoven recital at Convocation Hall.

munication between audience and performer that can make the difference between "the kind of concerts which you remember. There are only a few of these in a lifetime. There is a German writer who refers to these as 'star hour;' you remember what the concert did for you."

Despite the wide range and quality of

recordings of the classics available, Brauss still feels that the best place to experience music is in the concert hall. "A great concert can put you into a state of mind where you can say, 'my life is worth something.' You can leave the hall a changed human being — it's like a religion in that sense. Beethoven was like a priest."

Lovett takes offbeat approach

interview by Tracy Rowan

Lyle Lovett cannot be considered your average country music performer. His offbeat haircut, biting yet subtle writing style and substantial musical talents have stretched this Texan's credibility beyond traditional country music circles, especially over the past year.

In 1988, Lovett's second vinyl effort, *Pontiac*, was released to critical acclaim and considerable commercial success across North America. *Rolling Stone* magazine described Lovett's songwriting as being distinguished by "wicked intelligence" and by melancholy, despair and playfulness all rolled up into one "twisted, tongue-in-cheek cool" package.

"It's country" responds Lovett to my query of how he describes his music, which to this writer's ear doesn't sound at all like the kind of country most often heard on country radio stations. "I don't always get to go out with my whole band, so it sounds different from time to time, but yeah it's country."

Lovett most often appears in an acoustic trio format with the unlikely combination of a cellist and percussionist when tour budgets don't allow the up to nine members of his aptly titled 'Large Band' to accompany him. "When we started putting a band together, they were billing it as the 'Big Band' and I thought, oh my god, people are going to be expecting Benny Goodman or something so I made them change it to the Large Band."

Lovett attended Texas A & M University, graduating with a BA in Journalism in 1980. Working for the school paper allowed Lovett ample writing opportunities and served to sharpen his keen observations of ordinary people and events.

Many of his songs are uniquely visual and simple yet they unravel vivid short story images in tales of chance encounters with "redneck cowgirls", a solitary lament,

and a good-love-gone-sour situation which results in a jealous murder in a wedding chapel. "I enjoy writing and the same thing that would make you want to write a story would make you want to write a song. I just write about people," he says simply.

The very satirical edge to a lot of his material, including the treatment of the murders in the whimsical "L.A. County" may have some uninitiated listeners gasping but Lovett isn't about to alter his sense of humour to please anyone. "I write about human nature and I think a lot of times that deserves a satirical approach. My intention really is just to point out things that exist and not to be judgemental at all... you really can't worry about what people are going to think about it."

Luckily, Lovett's record company sees things in a similar vein and allows him the freedom to put his offbeat sense of humor on vinyl, which in a country-record buying market could be dangerous. "They give me so much rope I'm liable to hang myself, really," he says of MCA Records, to which he is signed. "I get to record all my own songs and really record them the way I want to. In terms of creative freedom, they give me lots of that which is real gratifying as a songwriter."

Lovett's roots are still based in Klein, Texas, where he grew up, but admittedly he doesn't get to spend a lot of time in his house there with all the demands on his schedule lately. This fall Lovett's been busy recording his new album which is due in record stores sometime in the next couple of months. Despite the ever-present extensive tour which follows a new release, Lovett expresses his earnest desire to return to Canada, adding "there have been some new country artists who have done really well lately and without guys like Dwight Yoakam and Randy Travis selling so many records, and other new artists like Steve Earle that are doing really well, guys like me wouldn't get a chance."



Singer/songwriter Lyle Lovett combines unorthodox instrumentation and the wildest haircut in country music into a winning formula.