

Concert hall buskers

by Scott Neily

For the most part, symphony orchestras try to maintain the original spirit of the music without making any major alterations, excluding thematic variations, of course. However, there are those performers today who feel the music of old does not have to be so stuffy it is only suitable for intellectuals. Therefore, they take liberties when arranging classical music for symphony performance.

Two such people are Michael Copley, flutes, and David Adam Gillespie (Dag) Ingram, accordion, collectively known as the Cambridge Buskers. Copley and Ingram, both in their late twenties, met as undergraduates at Cambridge University. Copley was studying music; Ingram, French and Russian.

Their career as buskers (a busker, by the way, is a musician who performs in a public place as a source of income) began in London when they found themselves stranded at a train station without fare back to Cambridge. Taking courage and instruments

in hand, they entertained commuters with their then extremely limited repertoire: Mozart's "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" and Joplin's "The Entertainer". Busking is illegal in London, and after three hours a London Transport official asked them to move along.

Move along they did — to Paris, where they were arrested, and then to Germany, where busking is not illegal. There, they gained recognition for their talents, and subsequently became very successful, which led to several tours, recordings, and television broadcasts. The demand for their albums was so great at one point that they held two positions simultaneously on Billboard's top ten classics.

The secret of the Buskers' appeal lies in their highly original and lighthearted arrangements of works from Handel to Joplin, and in the beguiling sound of Copley's assortment of 33 flutes, piccolos, recorders, ocarinas, and tonettes, which blend so well with Ingram's \$10 accordion. Another part of their charm is the physical presence of the two artists, especially

when Copley demonstrates his talent by playing two recorders at once. Ingram too is highly entertaining. In addition to slipping in an occasional movie theme during a concerto, his manual and facial movements are so incongruous with his music, one cannot help but laugh.

The only way to appreciate the buskers is to see them perform live. If you missed them last Friday night at the Cohn, then a comparative analogy may be necessary to understand why they are so delightful to watch. If you could imagine pop music parodist Weird Al Yankovic and Monty Pythonite John Cleese performing with any good symphony orchestra, then you would be able to form a clear idea of the charm, warmth, humour, and talent of these two very special musicians. For sheer entertainment there are few performers who are better.

(For those who missed the live show, the concert was taped and will be broadcast on CBC's *Mostly Music* (102.7 FM stereo in Halifax) on Tuesday, April 19 at 9:05 a.m.)



Dag Ingram and Michael Copley: the Weird Al and John Cleese of classical music.

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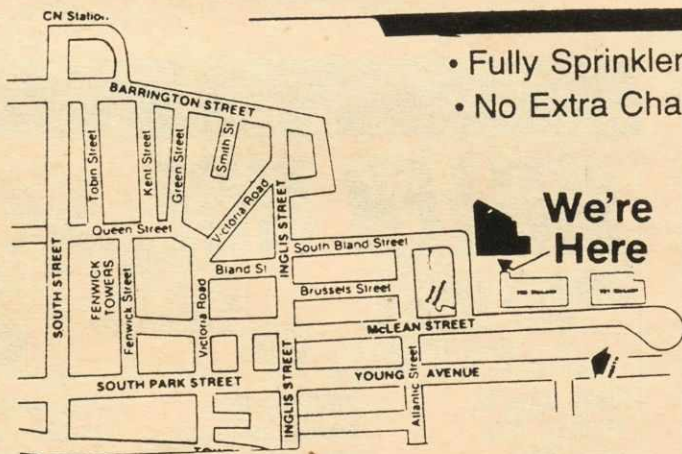
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