

Mayer Speaks

interview by Mike Spindloe

For the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra and their Music Director, Maestro Uri Mayer, the 1989-90 season is already well underway. Dubbed "The Adventure Continues" after last season's "The Classic Adventure," the program line-up for this year juxtaposes familiar settings with a new choral series.

All in all, the ESO will perform over 60 concerts in Edmonton alone in the next eight months, plus dates in various centres around the northern half of the province. At the centre of all this activity is veteran conductor Uri Mayer, whose contract with the orchestra has three years to run.

Asked what is new and exciting in ESO-land this season, Mayer immediately and enthusiastically points to "A Choral Celebration," the orchestra's new series in co-operation with Pro Coro Canada. "I felt that there was a shortage of first rate choral music being performed here, so we're hoping that this series will be well attended and will help to fill that gap," states Mayer.

The choral series concerts, with the exception of the ESO's traditional Christmas performances of Handel's *Messiah* at the Jubilee Auditorium, are being held in St. Joseph's Cathedral downtown, something Mayer is excited about. "The atmosphere, the resonance and the intimate atmosphere of a church is something special," says Mayer. "We'll be performing music that was originally intended to be played in churches. This is a great chance to hear these works as they were intended to be heard."

The first concert in this series takes place on October 14, and features Mozart's "Solemn Vespers" as well as Puccini's "Gloria." In February, the ESO teams up with the Richard Eaton Singers to present Haydn's "Creation," featuring guest conductor Leonard Ratzlaff. "These are challenging works,

but extremely gratifying musically for both the public and the performers," adds Mayer.

Looking ahead to the first half of the season in the ESO's other series, Mayer mentions several Magnificent Masters Series concerts which are sure to be highlights. These include Angela Cheng's performances of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 with the orchestra on October 6 and 7, and the ESO's first female guest conductor, Gisele Ben-Dor, recently promoted to resident conductor with the Houston Symphony Orchestra, on October 20 and 21.

Mayer isn't quite sure why this is a first, but notes that "this is a field which has been dominated by men. In the orchestra, though, there is parity, almost an equal number of male and female players."

The orchestra itself has changed somewhat over the summer. Two new players, including Alberta native David Quinn (assistant principal clarinet) have joined the orchestra permanently, while a bassoonist has been on leave temporarily, and a vacancy remains in the viola section.

The violin chair was filled after a vacancy of almost two years. Mayer notes that "there seems to be a shortage of string players at the level that this orchestra requires. It's no longer true, as it used to be, that there is an abundance of good string players in Europe. Their orchestras are suffering from shortages as well."

This brings up some valuable advice for aspiring young musicians: "There are about three string players for every wind player in the orchestra. We have ten first violins and two flutes. Young people aren't prepared to devote the time anymore to learn a string instrument; they are after more immediate rewards, which is why they choose winds."

Mayer continues, "No one has the right to



Maestro Uri Mayer looks forward to an adventurous season.

force kids to play anything, but they should be exposed to the art form. The pity is that probably somewhere in every system are very gifted kids who we never find, and who miss the experience let alone the opportunity to join the profession."

For the Rumanian born Mayer, this was never a problem. Trained on violin and piano as a child, he moved to viola and

conducting, eventually graduating from the Juilliard School of Music in New York. After working as a violinist and eventually associate conductor of the Montreal Symphony, Mayer came to Edmonton in 1981 to assume his duties with the ESO.

This season Mayer is again also the conductor of Orchestra London (Ontario), which

MAYER — p 9

A Midsummer Night's Bondage at the Citadel

A Midsummer Night's Dream
Shoctor Mainstage
In repertory through November 12

by Teresa Pires

William Shakespeare probably wouldn't be too impressed. It's safe to assume that the original fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* weren't leaping through Athenian forests (no matter how magical) in black leather and silver studs, looking more like they belonged in a Michael Jackson video than in one of Shakespeare's comedies. However, neither the director, Robin Phillips, nor the audience at the opening of the Citadel's 25th Anniversary season seemed too worried about this.

The opening moments of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which Hippolyta stands alone on the stage, in a soft, flowing pink gown, do not betray anything un-Shakespearean about the play. Of course, those familiar with the play automatically notice that instead of being set in an elegant,

Athenian court, the action begins on a stark, grey ship. Even when the action is set in the woods, the ship remains a permanent fixture on the set. Although I repeatedly tried to find some logical reason for the ship's presence, I failed to do so. But the gentleman sitting next to me figured that it was part of the setting for *The Crucible*. Despite the actors making fairly good use of it, the ship does not have any real place in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

When Theseus, the Duke of Athens, appears on the ship dressed in a black muscle shirt with all of his court dressed in the same manner, the audience is given a second cue that they are not going to get a standard version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. By the time the fairies appear on stage, repeatedly contorting themselves into positions appropriate for a huge fairy-orgy, most Shakespearean conventions have disappeared.

In Robin Phillips' *Dream*, sex is omnipotent. All of the fairies' actions are centered around sex. And while they are obviously not evil beings, these fairies and their obses-

sion with the gratification of their powerful sexual desires are almost sinister. Titania the Queen of the Fairies, despite looking too much like a *Solid Gold* dancer, is at times smouldering and sexy but at others (particularly during her songs), sweet and enticing. Camille Mitchell who plays Titania makes full use of her wide voice range, as does Oberon the King of the Fairies, played by Albert Schultz. As for the other fairies, they are so aggressive that they become more scary than sexy (and not just because they're wearing such trashy-looking costumes). Other than the king and queen, Robin Goodfellow (or Puck) is the only fairy with a distinct personality, but in spite of his high vitality, his pelvic thrusts get tiring after a while.

Although it is clearly the dominant force in the fairy world, sexual tension also permeates the Athenian world. Demetrius and Lysander may be speaking like courtly lovers but there is a disparity between their words and their actions. Helena tries to crawl away from Lysander but he mirrors her actions so as to remain on top of her. And Theseus speaks courteously to Hippolyta but a suggestive

sway of his hips accompanies his words to change their meaning.

Yet, for the most part, Phillips' version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* works. Phillips' best moments come with his creative additions of unexpected and sometimes incongruous images to play. These additions are practically indispensable if a modern audience is to enjoy a Shakespearean comedy, since the humor meant for an Elizabethan audience would generally be lost on spectators in the 20th century. Consequently, Phillips concentrates on visual humor. The fairies antics, such as Puck's use of a bicycle, and their mischievous jokes on the four lovers are exemplary of Phillips' effective manipulations of images.

The greatest visual success of the play is the rustics' burlesque version of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. The humour lies in the discrepancy between the tragic material of the tale and the physical characteristics of the actors. The "cast" includes a Thisbe who not only greatly outweighs Pyramus but who also has a deeper voice than he does. The more Nick Bottom (as Pyramus) takes himself seriously in this scene, the funnier he becomes. Judging from the audience's reaction, the comedy that Shakespeare probably intended for the audience in the pit strikes a chord at the Citadel.

However, the main plot of the play, the adventures of the four lovers in the woods, has some strong moments but drags along at others. Lysander (Jack Wetherall) and Demetrius (Derek Boyes) are nothing more and nothing less than stock infatuated young men. Hermia, played by Candice Elzinga, is equally harmless; however, Susan Coyne manages to create a Helena who is not self-pitying and whining. Coyne adds subtleties to the role which are all her own and which distinguish her from the other three lovers.

In the closing words of the play, Puck advises,

If we shadows have offended
Think but this, and all is mended—
That you have but slumb'ed here
While these visions did appear.

Puck's words are easily dismissed as unnecessary in this production, since it is doubtful that the audience slumbered through *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (for the most part, anyways) or that they were gravely offended by anything they saw. Who knows — maybe Shakespeare would be impressed.



Ed Ellis

The Citadel opens their 89/90 season with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on the Shoctor Mainstage.