

Fernandez guitarist extradornaire

by Paul Tyndall

Halifax is very fortunate lately. In this last concert season we have seen Narciso Ypes, Maureen Forrester, the Oxford String Quartet, and Stephene Grapell. Upon the merits of his concert last week the Uruguayan guitarist Eduardo Fernandez may be added to the list.

This concert began with three fantasies from Spain's XVIIIth century. The first was a Fantasy on the fourth tone by Luys Milan, Spain's most famous vihuelist (predecessor of the 6 string guitar). This, and his interpretation of a fantasy by Miguel de Fuenllana and another by Luys de Narvaez, were perhaps the most interesting pieces of the concert. It is not easy to create on a cold night in Halifax the air of regency that inspired this music in the royal courts of Spain. Fernandez captured this stateliness and brought life to the music.

Fernandez then turned to England and the music of lutenist John Dowland. Sir John Lanton's Pavin and My Lady Hundson's Puffe were played with the same faithfulness to its origins as the

Spanish music that preceded it. There is little to say about English music except that it as English as the tales Coppard or Jacobs. It sings of the same pastorelle beauty.

German music is also well within Fernandez' scope. With the music of Silvius L. Weiss and J.S. Bach the guitarist gave an aggressive interpretation that was well-controlled and a nice change. So many people play Bach as if he were an undertaker who wrote dirges on the side that it is a relief to see a musician who performs his music with life. And to close the first half of the concert, Fernandez returned to Spain and two sonatas by Domenico Scarlatti. Although Scarlatti was himself an Italian harpsichordist, he spent most of his later life in Spain and Portugal and the music he wrote (over 500 harpsichord sonatas) are very well suited to the guitar. Both sonatas are as fascinating to watch as they are to hear because of their technical difficulties. And Fernandez was certainly entertaining on both counts. He played the pieces perfectly.

Unfortunately, the rest of

the concert was not so captivating. Benjamin Britten's Nocturnal after John Dowland was an exception, however. This piece is haunting in the sense that it forever leads to the development of a melodious phrase and continually falls into an atonal ambience. There is a sense of expectation, of a question that is oddly resolved in the closing passages of pastorelle English quietude. This piece is a tribute to Dowland and the closing passages express the respect Britten had for his music.

With the music by Manuel De Falla and Federico Moreno Torroba there seemed a disheartening return to convention. I do not mean to insult de Falla's *The Miller's Dance* or the sonatina by Torroba. They had their moments of animation and Fernandez was still honest in his performance. The music throughout the evening was marked with his sincerity and technically he is very much in control of his instrument. However, I still cannot help but feel that the cadence of Britten's Nocturnal should have closed the evening.



Ibsen 'not entertaining'

by Frank McGinn

At the risk of appearing obtuse I have to admit that I did not get extremely much out of Neptune Theatre's production of Ibsen's "The Master Builder". When I read the play I had trouble staying awake, so vague and lifeless did I find it. It was obvious that Ibsen had great themes on his mind, what with the master builder's success and

his fears and his trolls, but I couldn't make any dramatic sense out of it. I was counting on Neptune to mine the nuggets from this tepid masterpiece for me, and Tony Randall has certainly animated the text beyond my wildest dreams. But the story was still not illuminating, or very interesting.

It tells of a master builder, which means famous archi-

tect, who has made it to the top through a happy combination of amorality and good fortune. He is introduced against a background of some of the victims of his climb. We are shown an old rival whom he long ago drove out of business; a young colleague whom he subjugates in jealous fear; and his wife, a barren wreck. And we are given to understand that he feels lonely and guilty, but not sufficiently so to change his ways. "Don't ask me to do what I cannot," he pleads whenever it is a question of putting someone else's needs above his own.

Then a beautiful young woman mysteriously and fatefully arrives at his door. She has come either in response to an old promise given or, more likely, as a fulfillment of his dreams granted him by trolls. The trolls are agents of destiny in the air around us. Some men can summon and command them, and these they serve at whatever terrible price. Halverd Solness has learned that he gets what he wants, often just by thinking about it, and he alternately praises and damns this gift. He likes the power it conveys but cannot handle the responsibility.

The beautiful girl, as bright as a brownie, worships the master builder for the height and majesty of his profession. Her pure and demanding adulation rekindles the life-force within him and, after much soul-searching and explanations, it inspires him to a glorious doom. He dies achiev-

ing a romantic goal but, if I read the director's notes in my program correctly, he dies by finally becoming himself, and that's what living means.

The trouble with all this, for me, was that I couldn't think of any reason for my being there during it. None of the characters interested me as persons, a minimum requirement for suspension of disbelief. Their speeches were so abstract and not about anything that they were above conversation. It was as if they were reciting rather than speaking, and I also found the language and imagery dull. Ibsen's characters who are really ideas, or mouthpieces for ideas, do not measure up to by basic, dramatic criterion, which is to make me curious about them.

I attribute most of my response to Ibsen himself. As I said, when taken alone he acts on me like a vallium. His high and moody, moral quandries do not seem to engage me. Neptune and Tony Randall added some strange vibrations of their own, however.

John Neville, looking splendidly heroic in a pearl grey frock coat and a precise, jutting beard, played mainly to the galleries and to himself. His Harverd Solness is an aristocrat of the theatre, with his agonized groans and his mad, wild laughter, and his blah tragedy. Neville can portray a wonderful nobility and hidden depth of character, but in a vacuum you merely notice and credit his skills. He sure can act, boy, but who

wants to watch somebody play a great game of solitaire?

Not that the other acting is stupid or sloopy, he hastens to add in defence of his outrageous theories. These are professionals who do what they are told and they have been told, wrongly I submit, to play it for a certain amount of laughs. Any line with the slightest degree of sexual innuendo is delivered with knowing sarcasm. Solness and his young ladies are constantly springing apart with guilty starts, as if in a French farce. And the female lead, an enigmatic woman who is possibly a troll, is made blood-curdlingly cheerful and charming, like Pollyanna doing a Pepsi commercial.

Looking for the chuckles in Ibsen is like looking for non-celebrities at Studio 54. You might find a few but you're missing the whole point of the exercise. Ibsen is dark and solemn and thoughtful. Tony Randall has him confused with Checkov, in whose "The Sea Gull" he appeared last year at Neptune. Checkov is a comic ironist who lightly and deftly whips together the light and the dark sides of life. Ibsen, the master baker, specializes in good, solid, plain fare. The attempt to find subtle humor in this play sidetracks the actors, interferes with the flow of the action and cruelly misleads the audience.

Perhaps Tony Randall should give us another comedy instead. I hate to typecast him

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