

U Troupe brings classic to life

Threepenny Opera
Studio Theatre (Corbett Hall)
till Feb. 14



review by Jens Andersen

Mr. Peachum is a seedy small-time operator, organizing street beggars to work for him on a commission basis.

"Human pity is business," he tells the audience matter-of-factly, squinting and chomping his cigar. "And business is terrible."

Yes, Mr. Peachum has his problems. Not only is it difficult to wring sympathy and dollars from the public, but to make things worse, his daughter Polly has just run off with Mack the Knife, the notorious murderer, rapist, thief and man-about-town.

Thus begins Bertolt Brecht's famed *Threepenny Opera*. Its performance by the Studio Theatre, happy to say, is lively, professional, and a joy to behold.

The characters, for example, are perfect, down to the last twitch and grimace: MacHeath, the very epitome of a

dapper and dissipated Victorian cad; Polly Peachum, simpering sweetly like some vacuous engineering princess; the obscenely gaping and leering beggars; and of course, Jenny, the whore with a heart of galvanized steel.

The singing and accompaniment were also tight and together throughout the 3½ hour play.

Who could listen to the frowzy, sneering Mrs. Peachum singing *The Ballad of Sexual Slavery* without suddenly recalling Napoleon's pleading letters to Josephine, or H.L. Mencken, that staunch agnostic, being pussy-whipped by a mere snippet of a Christian Scientist, or some other ludicrous instance of male subjugation.

And who could listen to the *Army Song* without thinking of the Rosslyn Hotel on a Friday night in the good old days when the Airborne Regiment was still stationed in Edmonton:

*And if we're feeling down
we wander into town
and if the population
should greet us with indignation
we chuckle to bits
because we like our hamburger
RAAAWWWWW!!!!*

And, who, finally, could fail to feel a touch of apprehension during the stupendous *How to Survive* when the whole cast, momentarily discarding their buffooneries, advance darkly and ominously toward the audience.

Then there are the witty lines:

"You got married, you immoral girl!"
"You have to keep running to keep your legs from getting stolen out from under you."

"What is the robbing of a bank, compared to the founding of a bank?"

"The greatest men in history always trip themselves up on the windowsills of whorehouses."



MacHeath takes his ease while Jenny bewails the loss of his marketing skills.

The play seems to be unexpurgated, too. The song often billed as *Tango-Ballad* is forthrightly called *Ballad of Pimping* here. As well there are lyrics about horniness in the *Ballad of Sexual Slavery* which do not appear on the MGM soundtrack in which the song is discreetly called the *Ballad of Dependence*; and Mack, "every cutie's promised man" in the soundtrack, becomes "every chippy's promised man" in the Studio Theatre production.

One final note: if you decide to brighten some evening by attending the play, don't let the British accents fool you into thinking this is some high-toned English troupe. In fact, Studio Theatre seems to be comprised of Fine Arts people (as I learned to my surprise when I discovered two former classmates on the bill).

Maybe a university education isn't fraudulent after all.

Bowers rouses crowd to sing loudly

Bryan Bowers
Edmonton Folk Music Festival
at the Centennial Library Theatre
Feb. 6, 1981

review by Simone Gareau

When Bryan Bowers ended his 1½ hour concert Friday night in the Centennial Library Theatre, he said to his audience: "Thank you all for coming out — my pleasure!" Judging from the overwhelming response of the concert, it had also been the audience's pleasure. It was like the ideal party where everyone enjoys themselves and the host, in this case Bryan Bowers, not only makes it fun but has fun himself.

Although the beauty and quality of his music shows Bowers to be an artist and accomplished performer, his genuine desire to communicate his knowledge and love of music predominates in the concert situation.

Bryan Bowers is an autoharp player and fully realizes that many of his listeners, enthralled with the sounds, do not know the workings of the instrument. After an introduction to the different kinds of music in his repertoire including some old Carter Family tunes, the song *Rights of Man* and *Fisberman's Hornpipe*, Bryan Bowers gave a detailed explanation on playing the multi-stringed instrument.

It was only after this explanation, having satisfied himself that the audience knew what he was doing, that Bowers earnestly began to sing and play.

Saying that he always starts with something silly, "not some heavy duty horseshit", Bowers launched into some children pig songs. The first one, done a cappella, was *An Old Sow Who Had Three Little Piggies*. It came from Virginia where the musician was born and raised; the second was a modern pig song, *Four Wet Pigs*, written by Greg Brown, and was performed accompanied on the autoharp.

The familiar song *Satisfied Mind* was rendered powerfully but in contrast to the preceding songs, was very slow and meditative.

The list of songs and accompanying anecdotes goes on and on. Bowers played a single 90 minute set without a break. During that time he sang a cappella, performed accompanied songs and played

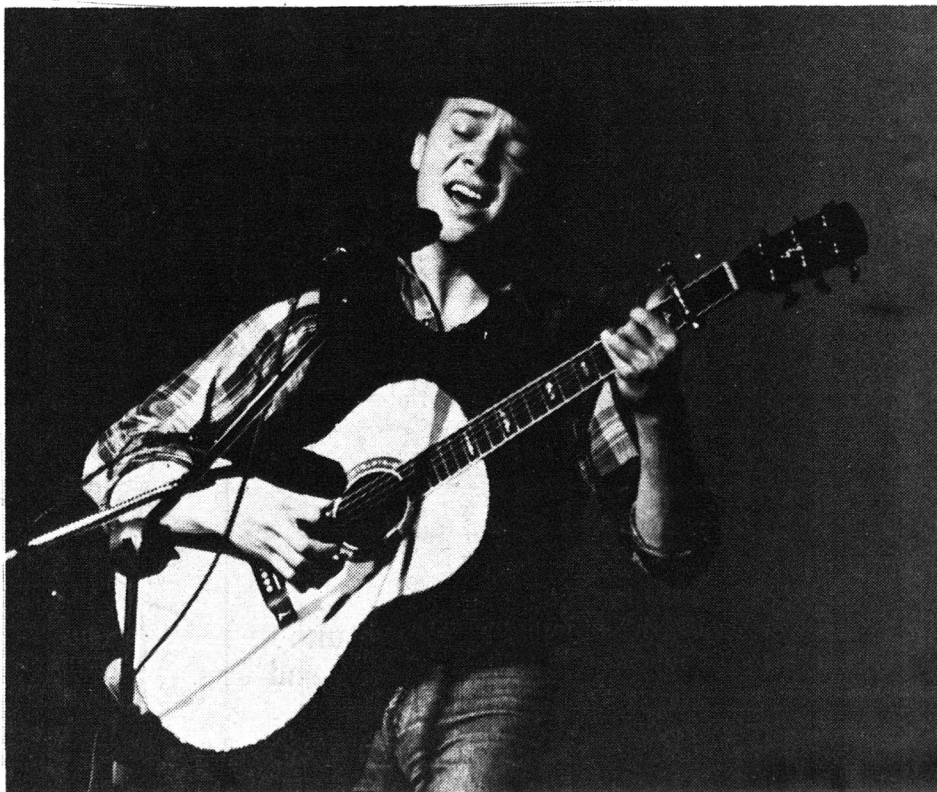
instrumentals, ranging from Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* to a Seattle (his hometown) love song to call and answer field chants and school chants to gospel songs.

Fond of the call and answer songs, Bowers would teach the audience the song before starting it. The audience participation clearly showed the audience's enjoyment. After the first participation song,

the audience needed no prompting, especially on the gospel songs, with well-known lyrics. In the school chants, Bowers amazingly had people clapping double time.

Ultimate highlights of an evening filled with highlights were *View From Home*, *The World Outside Don't Want to*
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Synergy was something to savor



John Shonborn sings of his home, Vancouver Island at *Synergy* in Centennial Library Theatre Thursday night.

It started out as a rotten day. I overslept, blew a test, and got stood up for *Synergy*, "an evening of poetry and music."

Despite missing my bus, I arrived at the theatre to see *Synergy* albeit 20 minutes late, sans tickets and out of breath. The people at the door let me in anyways, the show had just started and I felt like curling up and having a good fantasy.

I didn't need to. I entered the room and was enveloped by the warm atmosphere of the small crowd and the comforting sound of classical guitar.

Synergy was a unique combination of 11 artists each performing in their own genre: poets, guitarists, folk singers, and a dancer.

Each person introduced themselves in a down-to-earth fashion, as if they were among friends, no false stage personalities. I felt like a welcome visitor at a small private party.

I won't criticize individual acts because each person was on stage for what seemed like a few magic moments. But from that magic evening, some pieces still reverberate in my mind: the poetry of Glenn Deer, the songs of John Shonborn, and the enchanting music of Lyall Steel.

I left the theatre in a daze, feeling high, hoping something like that could happen again.