

The Gateway fine arts

symphony lowering the brow

Having perused the program for the Edmonton Symphony concerts of last weekend (entitled "Invitation to the Dance"), I went to the Jubilee Auditorium Sunday afternoon with the horrible conviction that the presentation would be an utter dud.

It wasn't, but it certainly was the least interesting concert of the ESO season so far.

Mr. Priestman referred to the program as "our most light-hearted effort of the year." Now I am not an advocate of that school of musical torture which seeks to crush an audience into submission by interminably subjecting them to music totally unrelieved by any hint of wit, grace or frivolity.

But I do think that a symphony orchestra operating in a city whose cultural resources are as limited as Edmonton's are has an obligation to its public: an obligation to play as much great music as it possibly can.

The whole attitude of the Symphony Society about last Sunday's concert seems to have been: "Well, you deserve a rest, public. All that Brahms, Liszt, Franck, and Sibelius must have tried your minds terribly, so here's a potpourri of mediocre-to-good music, all of it anything but trying. We hope we've allowed no greatness to sneak in."

The Symphony accomplished its task pretty well if this was its aim.

The Chabrier, Borodin, Weber and Copland pieces fitted nicely into the category, but there was a slip-up in the Rossini and the Falla. Mind you, one can understand why Rossini's Overture to "The Italian Girl in Algiers" was played; it is gay, witty, infectious, and popular. But the Falla! Ladies and gentlemen, this is great music. But I suppose you were fooled by the fact that it too is gay, witty, infectious and popular.

My point is more or less proven, when you look at the Little Symphony programs. The most recent concert consisted of two Serenades for Winds, one by Mozart and one by Dvorak, and Stravinsky's "A Soldier's Tale." Why, this program borders on the esoteric! The thoughts of a comparable program done in the Main Series boggles the mind.

But the Little Symphony can get away with it because it appeals to a more limited audience (music-lovers and the Idle Rich, who are grateful for another opportunity to pay high prices for tickets, and to be seen at a cultural event), and because it is held in the Macdonald Hotel (an intimate atmosphere, with the additional allurements of a couple of shots of rye).

Nevertheless, the ESO concert was not by any means a dead loss. Even mediocre performances of Rossini are rare in Edmonton, and as such, Sunday's mediocre performance of Rossini was welcome. (I am quite baffled by the presence of a Rossini overture in an officially all-ballet program.)

The performance of Copland's "Appalachian Spring" Suite, like the music itself, had its moments, but was on the whole slightly disorganized.

About Chabrier's "Joyeuse

Marche" (or, if you prefer, "Marche Joyeuse"), Mr. Priestman made no bones. He went roaring through it with immense amounts of gusto, and when the last crashing chord had sounded, dived energetically off the podium and into the wings to great applause. As a matter of fact, it was the best-played piece of the concert.

Weber's "Invitation for the Dance" was slightly spoiled for me because I have heard it dozens of times, and because as music it verges on the banal. The only thing that makes it at all interesting is that Berlioz thought it worth taking the time to orchestrate.

But it was done with much vigor and a good grasp of Old Viennese style, although the audience embarrassed itself by wildly applauding at that point in the score where old Weber fooled them into thinking that the piece was over. I played it safe and didn't applaud at all.

But the orchestra's performance of Falla's Dances from "The Three-Cornered Hat" made the whole afternoon worth while. I will manfully resist spilling clichés over it, and simply say that Mr. Priestman gave a superb reading of a superb score, and that the orchestra was up to scratch all the way through.

(It was in referring to this work that the program distributed for the concert reached those heights of eloquence which are fast becoming a landmark on the Edmonton musical-literary scene.

For example: "The Corregidor (Governor)—the official with the three-cornered hat—orders the miller's arrest so that he may partake of a flirtation with the wife." Lines such as these are surely deserving of immortality.)

The highlight of the afternoon was supposed to be Borodin's "Polovtsian Dances," from the opera "Prince Igor," with the Edmonton Ballet Company dancing in all its glory. The "Polovtsian Dances" are another of those mixtures of the magnificent and the banal; in this case luckily the magnificent predominates.

This super-spectacular offering turned out to be a rather enjoyable, if not exciting, bit of dancing in alternately painful and pretty Op lighting. The performance was saved from anemia (at least when you consider Borodin's music) by the brilliant contributions of Mr. Priestman and his orchestra.

Scandalous as the programming was, I came out of the auditorium not very shaken by the enormity of it all. Still, I do wish the Symphony Society would just once take a chance, and play a concert programmed imaginatively.

In that event, I would be willing to promise the Society a full twenty minutes of applause by not less than three members of the audience.

The aforementioned Little Symphony concert was the third in a four-presentation season. The Symphony Society managed to save some little pittance by the restriction of performers to the wind section of the ESO, plus assorted string players and a percussionist for the Stravinsky.

The two Serenades were well performed, considering their rather frightful difficulties, and by the time the wind players were out of breath (i.e. intermission time), we had heard some virtuoso blowing.

But satisfying as these performances were, they were nothing to prepare us for what followed: Stravinsky's little entertainment entitled "A Soldier's Tale."

(Peroration.) Never have I

heard such brilliant work from the brass! Never has Mrs. Marzantowicz covered herself with such great amounts of glory! Never has Walter Kaasa been so competent! And never has Mr. Priestman's conducting been so dynamic and so controlled! (Saving clause.) The mysterious unnamed actor playing Old Nick was mysteriously unnamed because he is a very bad actor indeed.

As Mr. Priestman mentioned at the concert, "A Soldier's Tale" is not often performed, and it is quite unique in Edmonton musical history thus far. The Little Symphony has at least proven that performances of modern chamber works and chamber opera are feasible here. The audience's response to the work was electric. In fact, there is nothing at all standing in the way of future (i.e. next year) performances of things like Bartok's "Bluebeard's Castle" and Satie's "Parade."

Advance Promo: The Metropolitan Opera National Company will be here on March 21 and 22, doing (alack!) Puccini's "Madame Butterfly" and Bizet's "Carmen." This merry little band of singers, orchestra, and miscellaneous operatic appurtenances travels through the land (the United States and Canada) spreading daisies, sweetness, light and culture. By all reports it's a better opera company than any that has previously graced our fair city, even for a one night stand, and for popular appeal has one-time operatic fellow-traveller Rise Stevens as Managing Directress.

—Bill Beard

how was fafaf? fafafine

First Annual Fine Arts Festival. FAFAF. Good thing, of course. Chekhov and Mandel and Mathews and lots of music and paintings. Jazz and dancers. How shall we tell the dancers from the dance?

Pretty hard: both terrible. Girls not shaped for slinking trying to slink.

Otherwise nice, very nice. Too nice. Dreadful paintings in the Ed rotunda. One long frightfully bogus metaphysical treatise tacked beside a bad painting, to explain it. Set back Art billions of years. Why are the nude drawings so dull? Probably no duller than most. Too nice.

(Down at Jacox Galleries, Dennis Burton drawings of women's undergarments. Magnificent. Hardly the thing for FAFAF. Parents would object. The curfew in Girls' (did someone whisper Women's?) Residence. Whatever else, poetry is freedom. Whatever else.)

Why dissatisfied? Why prefer the teach-in, its platitudes in such desperate earnest?

The bubblegummers depress. They are so real. Real and unreached, intelligent, gaping. Not tied to any of this art.

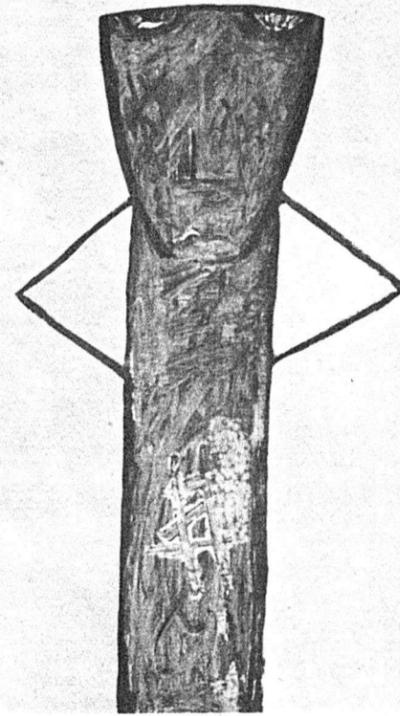
If FAFAF meant anything, if the university meant anything, if any of us meant anything, down would topple the educational system.

Oh the system, the bubblegummers' poignant innocence!

Most valid VGW artistic exhibit: the pickled babies. Who get through even to the innocent.

We're further from a broad social (as opposed to individual) appreciation of art than we think. The value of VGW: meeting again the intelligences who will never go to a concert in their lives.

The other sort dutifully take in FAFAF (a good thing, modest but a good beginning, one or two



—Bruce Byer photo

"RED WOMAN"—Part of David Cantine's witty show of twenty-two small paintings at the Fine Arts Gallery last week, this amalgam of missile and madonna broods menacingly at Everyman. Mr. Cantine is a sessional instructor in the U of A department of fine arts.

blemishes but pretty high quality). With eagerness as terrible as their schoolmates' ignorance.

In a decent system, FAFAF would seem worthy but old hat to a child of twelve.

We are all eleven years old.

—Jenson Phrobosmoth

a perpetual state of d'amurgency

(Editor's Note: This weekend the Yardbird Suite presents a play by Isabelle Foord entitled "World Library". Miss Marcia Reed, one of the actors, gives here an impressionistic view of rehearsals, and Bud D'Amur, the Suite's director.)

Beware, beware, the bearish beast is there.

If anyone ever asks you to be in a play, or if you by your own volition want to enter into the magical world of stage pretense, by all means jump into the fray. But beware. Beware the name of Bud. Beware.

It all started so very innocently—a little note scrawled upon my telephone pad when I got home.

Please phone Isabelle Foord, she wants you in a play.

Ten words (one a four-letter word) and eight numbers for a telephone number. A cryptic message indeed.

"Hello Isabelle."

"Hello Marcia."

"I've written a play that is going to be put on at the Yardbird, and I think one of the parts is perfect for you." (Yardbird, another cryptic message. Dictionary meaning—any member of the armed forces given menial duties or restricted to the base as punishment. Punishment at the

hands of the armed forces of the theatre.)

"That sounds interesting, Isabelle, but I've never acted before. . ."

Next day at rehearsal I found myself on the stage.

I had lost my identity; I was Miss Hildegard Barren, the children's librarian. Growl. That's what I was supposed to do.

But my vocal capacities were barren. I couldn't growl. I growled under the slights—just go grr, they said, but I couldn't.

A really great career coming to a fast finale, all because of a grr? No. A change in the type casting and Miss Hildegard Barren became Miss Sniper the Typewriter.

Bud D'Amur, Bug D'Amur, Bugbear Bud. There he sat, watching our pitiful performance, loading his mind with comments, corrections, calculations.

Once upon a time there was in the play a choric ode, done in a Grecian earnest style. Dully done, he said. Action, movement. Kick right, kick left. We kicked. Foord's follies. All hail the librarians! Kick. Orderly! jump. Appointed by Zeus! Skip. Thunderstuck? We were, we were.

Type. (Another four-letter word) I was to type. abcdefg . . . No. No. Get a rhythm going, Marcia. Abcd efgh . . . or abcd ef . . . or a bcd e fgh . . . or . . .

I was also to open a door and enter the scene. Breathlessly or calmly or distracted or disdainfully or . . .

Change your character, experiment; stiff, stilted; we are here to entertain, ENTERTAIN; damn you stupid females; your face is mobile, MOVE it; image-imagination.

You've got it you know. The rain in Spain falls mainly on the plain. Oui. A torrent of ideas, a flood of ideas that gathers from little streams of ideas and assimilates, moving forward, pushing everything aside, overwhelming everything that isn't prepared, that isn't solidly footed. But a stream is always made of drops, remember.

Grr, it comes easy now.

—Marcia Reed