

Classical vaudeville

by Cate Young

Classical music braved yet another attack on its dignity last Friday at the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium, with the appearance of "Intimate P.D.Q. Bach" which was under the direction of Prof. Peter Schickele. The show, supposedly concerning J.S. Bach's unwanted son, was most uneven in presentation - sparkling at some points, while extremely sloppy and boring at others.

The show began with the appearance of the lethargic stage manager informing the packed house that the Professor could not perform that night. At that moment, Professor Schickele literally slid onto the stage and grabbed the mike. After many adjustments of the mike stand and many disappearances from the stage (which rapidly grew tedious), he was ready to start the music.

Clad in a parody of the traditional classical musician's costume: tails, white tie and pit boots - all in crumpled disarray, Schickele began to play selections from "The Notebook of Betty-Sue Bach", P.D.Q.'s illicit girlfriend. For the reviewer, this was the most musically satisfying part of the program. "Allemand Left", the first tune, began as a structured Bach-like study, then disintegrated into a crazy combination of ascending and descending scales, jazzy accidentals. The next piece, "Au Courante", began the same way - but ended up having some really wild boogie-woogie passages in the left hand. "Corrate", supposedly a Japanese form of music picked up by P.D.Q., consisted of a normal song punctuated by ear-shattering screams and karate chops to the piano. This section of the program was very quickly over.

The next part of the program was the "Erotica Variations" "for banned instruments and piano". In this section, Schickele played such instruments as the windbreaker (four poster tubes glued together),

balloons, a bell, a bicycle horn, slide whistle, kazoo, and lasso d'amore (a suggestive length of plastic tubing). David Oei, on piano, accompanied the professor's strange music produced by these instruments. This part was enjoyable, but you could increasingly guess the spots in the program which were to be interrupted by such instruments as the klaxon.

The next item on the program was The "Toot Suite", for calliope-four hands. (It was very enjoyable to see this ornate old circus instrument resurrected on the stage). Both Schickele and Oei played the calliope. They played "Prelude", and then "O.K. Chorale", into which they somehow wove "Onward, Christian Soldiers" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot". In the "fuga vulgaris", they incorporated "The Volga Boatmen" into what seemed to be a Bach fugue; this was very funny. Once again, the performers wandered on and off the stage, much to the consternation and boredom of audience members.

The next part of the program, "Diverse Ayres on Sundrie Notions", was a group of three singing commercials (an art form allegedly invented by P.D.Q.), as sung by John Ferrante, "bargain counter-tenor". The commercials were made funnier by the unusual male alto voice of Mr. Ferrante. However, his strange voice showed great range and control. (The counter-tenor is always subject to derision because of his freaky, womanish vocal range).

"P.D.Q. Bach: His Life and Times" took the form of a lecture with illustrative slides. Retold jokes about P.D.Q.'s chronic drinking problem, his laziness and strained relations with his dad began to pale at this point in the evening. The quality of the slide presentation proved to be almost as entrancing as are Uncle Fred's home movies of Fred Jr. to a non-relative.

Next came "the piece of



P.D.Q. BACH: HIS LIFE AND TIMES

resistance" (as Schickele called it), "Hansel and Gretel and Ted and Alice". In this "opera in one unnatural act", the performers thoroughly showed their vocal and instrumental proficiency. The humor in this sketch was much more successful, as it was faster and more dependent on clever sight-gags and quick costume changes. This sketch has just Ferrante and Schickele playing all four principals. This won the greatest audience response of the evening.

All in all, there proved to be too little music and too many vaudeville routines of the "Take my wife... please" calibre. What was lacking (except in the final selection) was the necessary energy and enthusiasm. The reason people like Spike Jones succeeded in mangling the classics (with love) was their ingenuity and almost maniacal drive. One senses that a bit of adrenaline (or a revised script) would be in order here.

Jelly Roll jazz

They called him Mr. Jelly Lord. He was playing piano when the century was new...raggy notes with funky horns blowing over the French Quarter in New Orleans. The music ran through him and with his two perfect hands he added the riffs, the breaks, the Spanish tinge and haunting chords to create a new kind of music. They called it jazz. Jelly said he invented it and he may have been right. He was the genius who took ragtime and made it hot. Bob Greene's WORLD OF JELLY ROLL MORTON is a recreation of Jelly Roll Morton's famous Red Hot Peppers band. Jazz fans

are in for a rare treat when Bob Greene's World of Jelly Roll Morton comes to the Rebecca Cohn stage on Saturday, February 7, at 8:30 p.m.

Mr. Greene had been a close student of Morton's music for many years and received wide acclaim for his interpretations of Jelly's piano music. When his re-formed Red Hot Peppers Band appeared for the first time at the Newport Festival in New York in 1972, it was an instant and ecstatic success. Sell-out concerts followed at New York's Lincoln Center and R.C.A. recorded the band.

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