

# Taking it from the top in the music department

interview by John Charles

Manilla folders cover the floor of Dr. Alfred Fisher's office.

"I've got to work out a better system for finding things," Fisher smiles, as we walk across them to his desk. "I pulled these out of the drawers to straighten them out as soon as I can find the time."

Fisher became chairman of U of A's Music Department last summer, and he's immersed in reorganization of many kinds — from his own office to the future of the whole department.

A composer, and professor of composition, Fisher thought long and hard before accepting the chairmanship.

"In the music business people who want to be administrators are invariably bad ones," Fisher said. "The ones who resist it most are the ones most needed."

Fisher, who joined the department in 1978, feels it's important that the administrator still be actively engaged in the art of music, not just be doing desk work and overseeing everybody else's business. In his case, composing is almost a physical need, and he continues to compose and constantly think about future works.

Composing comes slowly to Fisher, 44, because his "musical metabolism" is a bit ponderous.

"I struggle and rework — it's almost like working in stone," he laments. "I chip away and chip away, and find the emerging shape is not what I saw initially."

"I knew there'd be compromises in my life — risks taken — if I became the chairman," Fisher said, "but I've never been a part of anything that was unimpeachably superb, and this department could become so."



Checora

Chairman and Composer

Wouldn't it be great to try it, and be a part of it?"

Fisher sees two major aspects to a strong music department. The first is fostering a rich, intense performing life for faculty and students through concerts, which translate the raw material of music into a living experience. The second is the study of this raw material, using the tools of music theory and musicology, to dig below the surface of the musical materials. Performers need to be concerned with research, and scholars must

be concerned with performance, Fisher says.

"It's impossible to become cynical about the demands of administration because we're already starting to move a bit in the right direction," Fisher says enthusiastically, perched on the edge of his desk.

The department is slowly gaining a higher concert profile. The Encounters chamber music series, which imaginatively combine unusual contemporary works with major works from the past is in its second year and has proved popular as well as educational — which, Fisher insists, is the mandate for such concerts.

"Our concerts must be challenging, and of real artistic value. Our performers should be seen and heard, and the public has the right to have high expectations," he said.

At the same time the department must expand on its complement of scholars. Fisher will soon be advertising for another professor in music theory, as well as seeking growth in other areas. Ethnomusicology, (the study of world music, particularly that from minority cultures), is the fastest growing field in music these days, and Fisher is concerned about offering more courses, resulting in a whole program which could be of particular

value to such disciplines as sociology and comparative literature.

Another major concern as chairman of music is dispelling the idea that the department is entrenched in a narrow, rigid worldview.

"I meet people from other departments who regard us as providing a place for people to come and play the piano, or where composers sit about waiting for the bird of inspiration to chirp in their ear," Fisher comments. "That's misguided. Music goes back a long, long way as a humanistic study in the tradition of universities. People forget the first Ph.D. outside theology and law was in music."

Fisher feels passionately the only responsibility in any university department is for the training of minds which think, consume ideas, learn to process them and wrest meaning from them, and never shy away from reflection.

"A good musician needs those qualities as much as a successful social scientist," he emphasized. "I love what a university is, but the various disciplines must come together and share things more, so that our lives will be nourished. That's what music is all about."

Several of Alfred Fisher's works are being performed in the next weeks.

Tomorrow night, at Convocation Hall, pianist Joachim Segger will include Fisher's Fantasypieces (1984) in a concert that also features the complete Chopin Ballades. Monday, March 2, at Con Hall, the Garneau String Trio will play Fisher's Small Worlds, and Fisher will join them at the keyboard — for the first time in many years — in a Mozart piano quartet.

Sunday, March 15, a recent work of Fisher's Cry Wolf, will be performed in the final Encounters concert, also at Con Hall. That same night, CBC's national program Two New Hours will premiere Fisher's large-scaled Parables and Canons for Viola and Piano.

## Canada vs. U.S. Films

by Dean Bennett

Trying to make independent Canadian films and videos a burgeoning and financially viable enterprise sometimes feels like using a broom to stem the proverbial tide, but Rick Gustavsen, co-ordinator of the Film and Video Arts Society of Alberta (FAVA) has not given up the fight.

"The real problem in Canada is with foreign (read American) programming. (About 98 per cent drama on Canadian broadcasting (is foreign)," he said. "The cost of drama productions is enormous. We don't have a resource pool of money like the United States does. What happens is the U.S. producers have the money to finance projects and they have the markets. They can sell programming to broadcasters for low costs, about one-tenth of the cost to produce it. Broadcasters obviously prefer to buy than to produce. For example, it would cost the CBC about \$5,000 to buy a program or \$50,000 to produce one."

Also, because the film market in Canada is so small, most Canadian producers now look automatically to the U.S. for distribution.

"That's why you get a lot of Canadian productions that look like American ones," said Gustavsen. "Night Heat is a good example.

You can't really tell that from a U.S. production."

FAVA, a non-profit co-operative, was created to allow filmmakers to produce and exhibit their work free of commercial sponsorship or direction. Without places like FAVA independent filmmaking would be virtually impossible.

"Because films are so expensive it takes a good deal of entrepreneurial spirit (to do it on your own). So you usually go to a major sponsor like Esso and they'll give you the money. More and more, though, you're getting a smaller chunk from a wide variety of sponsors because the big corporations don't have the money anymore. This is why a co-op needs to exist because cultural type of films need freedom of thought. If there's sponsorship then it can become a pointed or political type of film. Sponsors will sponsor a film that will make them look good, although that's not always true," said Gustavsen.

FAVA, currently in its fifth year of operation, does run on a shoestring budget, but it is growing.

"In many ways we're just starting to happen," said Gustavsen. Canada Council has been supporting us with operations grants for the last two years. Alberta Culture



### TOP 10 ALBUMS

1. Holland/Moore — A Short Cut (Rogue)
2. Condition — Red Hot and Blue (Amok/CC)
3. Marshmallow Overcoat — Groovy Little Trip (Dionysus)
4. No Rebate — Dish Pig/Tape (independent/CC)
5. Ted Clark five — Born To Live... Live to Rock/-Tape (independent/CC)

supports us but that might disappear with the budget cuts . . . We're having no problem with membership. We're growing faster than we can accommodate them."

Long term plans for FAVA include joining up with a number of other film artist groups to form an even larger co-op in say a media arts center.

"Right now we're trying to find a building the city could give us," said Gustavsen. "We're looking to form a coalition of media and visual artists to share common interests, space and artistic needs. But as a co-op we're looking to be part of it, not run it."

6. E.J. Brule — Alternative Scat Singer (Transmission/CC)
7. Blue Trapeze — Mask & Marquee (independent/Pollution Control)
8. The Weathermen — Machinery/Tape (independent/CC)
9. Big Band Trio — Crazy Bout A Saxophone/-Tape (independent/CC)
10. Omnigarage — Modern Pop.../Tape (independent/CC)

### Singles, EP's & Tapes

1. Problem Children — The Future of the World Is Up To Us (Irate Faction/CC)
2. Various Artists — Dr. Death's Volume One (C'est la mort/US)
3. Honor Role — The Pretty Song (Eskimo - No Core/US)
4. Mike Stern — Upside Downside (Atlantic/US)
5. Wild Seeds — Brave, Clean and Reverent (Jungle/Pollution Control)
6. The Longshoremen — Walk the Plank (Subterranean/US)
7. Los Lobos — By the Light of the Moon (Slash/WEA)
8. Polkacide — Polkacide (Subterranean/US)
9. Concrete Blonde — Concrete Blonde (IRS/MCA)
10. Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds — Your Funeral... My Trial (Homestead/Dutch East India)

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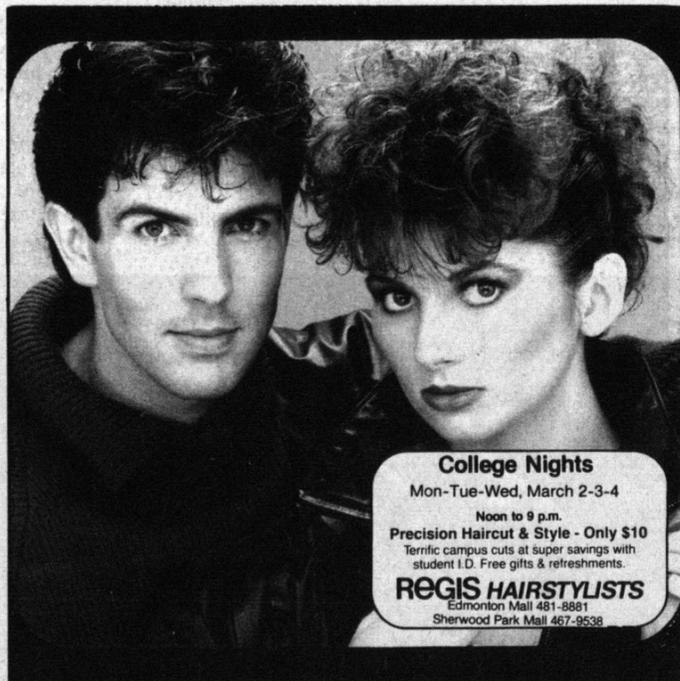
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