



—Jim Griffin photo

## Good (no grief)!

The Edmonton Symphony Orchestra elevated its performing standard to a new plateau at this Sunday's concert. Throughout the length of a programme which made exceptional demands on the players both in technical requirements and endurance, the orchestra performed with accuracy and confidence.

From literally the opening seconds of the concert, it was clear that the music would be memorable. The opening numbers of many concerts in the past have sounded like continuations of tuning-up.

The Overture to the *Bartered Bride* by Smetana could easily be treated this way, with the orchestra making a lot of noise while late-comers take their seats. However, instead of a contrapuntal blur, the strings treated the audience to an exciting fugue in sharp focus. Each voice entry was a new delight, from the well-controlled pianissimo opening to the second violins to full chorus of strings and woodwinds; the articulation stayed clear, the tempo, steady.

A happy combination of a fine spring-like afternoon and an exuberant opening locked the audience into a state of unexpected receptivity for what followed. While the Oscar Morawetz *Piano Concerto* is in a mild idiom for a mid-twentieth-century composition, it is a giant's stride from Smetana. The piano part is well-integrated with the orchestral writing. It seems a strange choice for a guest pianist to perform such a work, since there is so little differentiation of the piano's role from the orchestra's.

One might wish that a contemporary piano concerto would show a greater exploration of the piano's potential for unusual sonorities, but the solo part is nonetheless well-handled pianistic writing. Indeed, it makes virtuosic demands, which guest pianist Anton Kuerti executed with astonishing precision, ably supported by the orchestra.

Mendelssohn's *Piano Concerto No. 1* (Op. 25) offers the pianist much more scope as a soloist. This work continued the sunny mood

of the afternoon; twenty-one-year-old Mendelssohn must not have felt the need to make every statement sound profound, which seems to be the life-purpose of most persons that age on this campus.

Even the second movement had none of the troubled mood of so many Romantic quiet movements. After a beautifully-handled lyrical piano cadenza, the violas and cellos responded in the most full-bodied soft passage this orchestra has ever produced. It is reassuring that the viola section, which has had difficulties in the past, could produce such a fine sound. Unfortunately, the result was so rich that the lyrical mood was almost vaporized momentarily.

I mention the moment not to quibble, but to show its irony—a fine sound, but an inappropriate one. At certain past concerts such a resonant moment would have been a highlight.

Mr. Kuerti continued his fine performance during the whole of this particularly accessible concerto. I hope that he comes to Edmonton again, and next time plays a work with guts as well as technical display.

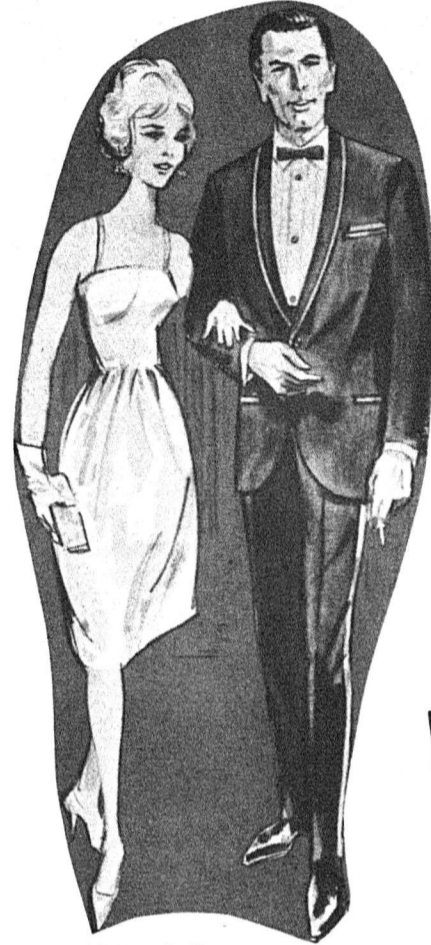
The Shostakovich *Symphony No. 10* is 52 minutes long. To play it at all is a *tour de force*. To play it well—well. . . . Perhaps there was a hint of fatigue in the third movement, but the music must generate its own adrenalin, for the orchestra surely surprised even its most ardent supporters. You can fill in your own superlatives.

One does not know how to share the congratulations for this superb afternoon of music. Pour it out generously to guest conductor Lawrence Leonard, whose obvious passion for the Shostakovich was transmitted to the orchestra, to Brian Priestman for his magnificent influence on the orchestra's maturing process, and to the players, who have come of age as a group.

We can no longer boast of good sections in the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, but only of a good orchestra, period.

—John Lewis

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