

German jazz giant coming to SUB

The Edmonton Jazz Society is bringing one of Germany's foremost bassists to Edmonton next week. Eberhard Weber will be playing in SUB Theatre on Tuesday Oct. 9 at 8:30 p.m. Appearing with Weber will be his band Colours featuring John Marshall on drums, Rainier Bruninghaus on piano and Charlie Mariano on saxophone.

Weber was born in Stuttgart 39 years ago. He began playing cello at the age of six. After ten years he switched to bass because of a need for that instrument in his school orchestra. He became interested in jazz and eventually left school so that he could devote more time to that idiom.

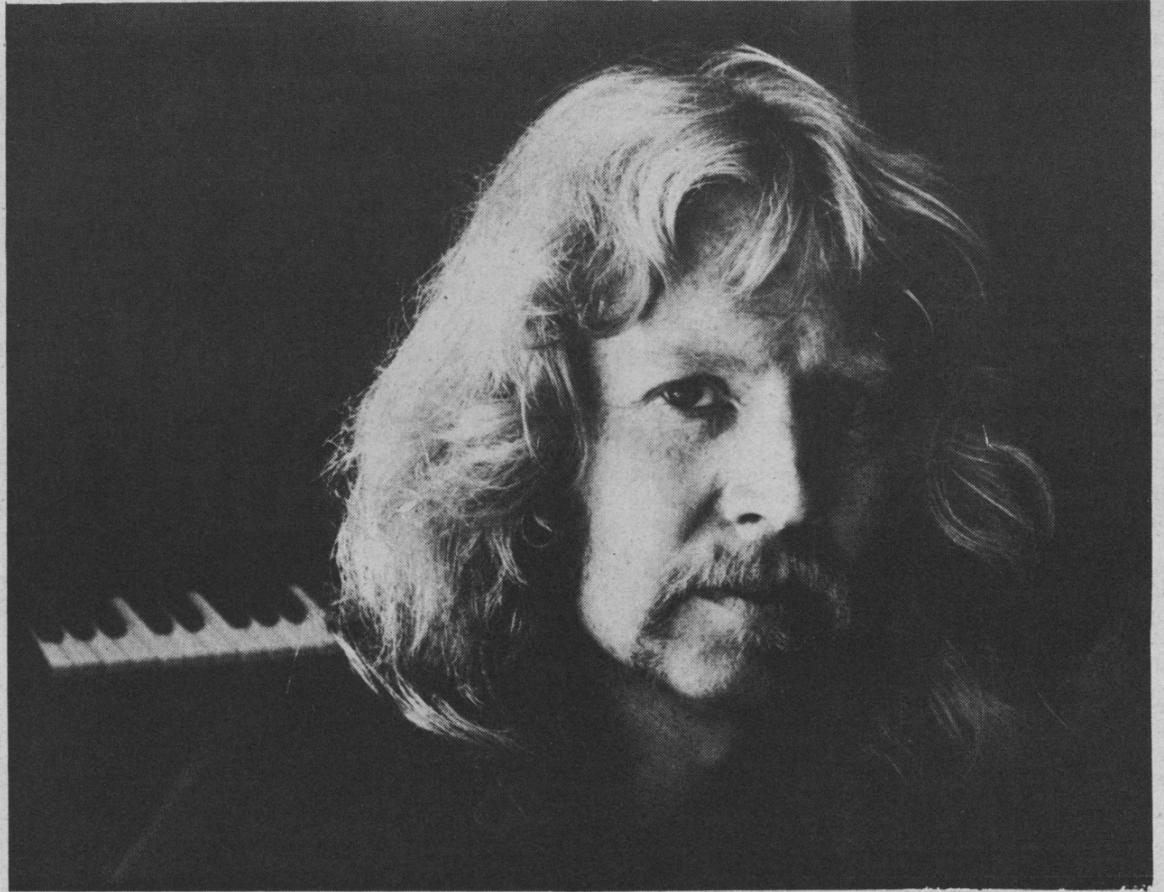
From 1961 to 1967 Weber wrote and directed for several television and film companies. At the same time he continued to play bass, winning several amateur contests.

In 1962 Weber formed a trio with an American drummer and the excellent German pianist, Wolfgang Dauner. He played with this group for several years, and then in the early seventies he joined a group led by American vibraphonist Dave Pike. This lasted for about a year and in 1974 he joined guitarist Volker Kriegel's Spectrum. During these years Weber also played on innumerable recording sessions with people like Hampton Hawes, Mal Waldron, Gary Burton and Ralph Towner. Finally though, Weber decided that after 15 years as a sideman he wanted a chance to develop his own musical ideas. His opportunity came when Manfred Eicher of ECM Records offered him the chance to make his own album.

Weber has been a perfectionist as an improviser and innovator, inventing better and better sound possibilities. He invented a special electrically amplified instrument with a minimal sound box area, similar to a base guitar, but with more modulation capacity. This instrument is far less cumbersome than the traditional double bass. Another innovation has been the addition of a fifth string, high C, which gives the bass more melodic potential. Weber has also experimented with adding a sixth string to his bass.

Like most European jazz musicians, Weber has been firmly trained in the classics. This has resulted in a discipline towards music that has been prized by all of his prominent collaborators. It may also be the reason for Weber's musical philosophy. He is averse to anything wild, ecstatic or uncontrolled. He shuns the looseness of jam sessions: "Only 20 percent take the trouble to succeed in them, and I don't like throw-away music."

Weber has released five solo albums, all of them for ECM. His first album, *The Colours of Chloe*, released in 1974, featured Weber working with members of a symphonic orchestra and choir. It had a more prepared sound than his second album, *Yellow*



Fields, which was released in 1976. There was more room for improvisation on this album with its emphasis on a small group setting. *The Following Morning* (1977) saw Weber shift back to symphonic composing, incorporating instruments such as oboes and French horns into his music. *Silent Field*, also released in 1977, found Weber back with his group Colours. The group albums reflect the repertoire and dynamics of Weber's live gigs, the special projects give insight into his compositional concepts. *Fluid Rustle*, his latest album, belongs in the latter category.

It is a rare opportunity for Edmonton jazz fans to hear live a musician like Eberhard Weber. It's an opportunity that should not be missed. Tickets are available at Mike's, and at the SU Box Office; \$7 for Edmonton Jazz Society Members, \$8 for non-members.



The Smarties packed them into the Princess last Friday night.

Photo Brad Keith

Rigoletto is strong on music

Rigoletto
Opera review by John Charles

A strongly sung, dramatically enervated *Rigoletto* was performed by the Edmonton Opera Association Thursday and Saturday at the Jubilee.

Verdi's seventeenth opera, but his first sure-fire masterpiece, *Rigoletto* is the tale of an embittered, hunch-backed court jester who loves only his daughter Gilda. His master, the philandering Duke of Mantua, sees Gilda in church and plans a dalliance, posing as a young student (it was easier in those days).

The Duke's malicious courtiers kidnap Gilda, thinking she's Rigoletto's mistress, and turn her over to the Duke for fun and games. Rigoletto vows revenge and hires an assassin to kill the Duke. But the assassin's sister, Maddalena, also smitten by the Duke, talks him into killing instead the next stranger who shows up at their sinister inn.

Gilda, aware of the Duke's faithlessness, nevertheless loves him, and sacrifices herself by deliberately entering the inn to be murdered. Rigoletto, returning at midnight to gleefully collect the sack containing his dead enemy finds instead his dying daughter.

Verdi later wrote more sophisticated, complex and profound operas, but never a more gripping, theatrical one. Although irresistibly melodic and rhythmically alert, the music always characterizes and delineates. (Ironically the Duke's deliberately shallow, lively arias are the work's most popular tunes.)

Grotesque, nightmarish, a world of corruption and cynicism is shown us which can't be dismissed just as melodrama because of the presence of the innocent Gilda and Rigoletto's profound, obsessive love for her.

The love of fathers for their children produced as much great music in Verdi as did the responses of lovers. And in the unpleasant, pathetic, deeply tormented figure of the court jester, Verdi created one of the indelible figures in all opera. It is a character who must be acted as well as sung, for even a ravaged voice

can move us if the jester comes to throbbing life.

That is what Garbis Boyagian is yet unable to do. A rich-voiced young baritone, he sang admirably with full, well-rounded tones, even touchingly in his aria "Piangi, piangi" but his acting was nil. He seldom even colored his voice dramatically and Bliss Hebert's staging provided him with no little touches to bring the role to life.

The duets with Gilda, wherein we see that they have only each other in a tiny, artificial world, were not effective since the singers seldom looked at each other but rather, at the conductor. Thus the work's key relationship seemed flat, although it came to life at Act Three's climax which moves from despair to pathos to revenge. In scenes where the courtiers bait him, and he flails about like a wounded animal, Boyagian seemed inconvenienced rather than anguished.

A general air of girlish innocence can carry a Gilda through the evening if her voice is good enough, and a cocksure swagger will suffice for the Duke if he belts out his arias suavely. But Rigoletto is a more complex figure and strapping a cloth hump to his back doesn't fulfill the requirements.

Faye Robinson, as Gilda, has one of the loveliest voices heard in Edmonton in many years. Her warm, liquid tones suggested well Gilda's sweetness and inner strength. Her acting was adequate without being impressive.

Her problem at present is a desire to linger over notes, take dramatic pauses without creating drama, and be generally too expansive, thus breaking up Verdi's superbly shaped lines. Her skill in gliding up and down between notes was often delicious. Too often however she hit a note just below the one written, then slid into it. This is simply vocal laziness and should be stopped before it becomes a habit, as is the case with Martina Arroyo.

The Duke was sung by Ruben Dominquez, for whom I do not predict a brilliant career. One felt he had learned the arias from a Greatest Hits album, only to discover later there's a lot more to the role.

In Dominquez' entrance supporting singer Larry

Benson sounded bigger and more vital because Dominquez was saving himself for the last third of his aria — which was, in fact, impressive.

His performance, frankly, was best when applause was only a page away. Elsewhere he sounded tight and husky, creating problems for the conductor by holding too many notes, and even distorting the melodic line of "La Donna e mobile" in his eagerness to get back on a high note. His introspective Third Act aria was unashamedly addressed to the audience, and he bellowed through the great Fourth Act quartet.

It seems likely Dominquez had a cold, in spite of which he did have some quite effective moments. He is thus by no means the worst Edmonton has ever heard. (Memories of Bernebe Marti in 1974's *Turandot* still wake me in a cold sweat.)

The supporting cast was unusually strong, with Janet Stubbs' sexy, lustrous Maddalena, and Pierre Charbonneau's splendid, sonorous Monterone (seldom sung by a major voice) and Sparafucile. Even the walk-ons, such as Kathy Megli and Merla Aikman, were notable.

Bliss Hebert's staging was tasteful, lacking Irving Guttman's tendency for the distracting, gimmicky and irrelevant. But it comes to the lack of a minus rather than a distinct plus. Rather than bad ideas, Hebert offered no ideas. There wasn't a single gesture or expression that brought the story to life, not a single grouping or stage picture which would make you recall this production.

The sets, though serviceable, were equally bland: stone facades and maroon draperies equally suitable for a dozen other operas or plays without the power to evoke a particular place or mood.

Alfredo Silipigni conducted the Edmonton Symphony with a good feel for Verdi, though without the drive some scenes cried out for. Choruses were especially cautious. The ESO was in quite good form.

The evening's musical values and Verdi's astonishing genius make *Rigoletto* an evening worth taking in. The last performance is Wednesday, Oct. 3, and tickets are still available.