

The Sound from Left Centre

Symphony season promising

by J.C. LaDalia

The first pair of concerts in the Edmonton Symphony's 1977-78 season were auspicious for the orchestra. They sounded in excellent form which is the first requirement for a lively season.

The program began with a familiar work for which everyone stood. I at first assumed it to be our national anthem, but since no one sang it was presumably something else; the Esso song or Mr. Schmid's favourite Prussian march.

This was followed by Robert Turner's *Opening Night, Theatre Overture*, a meretricious piece the presence of which could be justified only by deference to a 'Canadian content' policy. Composed in the mid-1950's, in, (to put it mildly), a conservative idiom, it is a melange of every good-humouredly raucous work written between 1920 and 1945: a little Walton, some Randall Thompson and Copland, a daub of *An American in Paris*, early Bernstein and William

Schuman - Mel Hurtig would find it distressing, as most of the cliches are those of U.S. composers.

The fact is that, except for the rare exception (Forsyth's symphony last year, the Eckhardt-Gramatte concerto a few years before) Canadian content at our symphony concerts is always relegated to 10-15 minute fillers which are usually forgotten by program's end. We will hear Jacques Hetu's Piano concerto in October which, whether a masterpiece or not, is at least serious and ambitious enough to demand our attention. Why don't we hear other major Canadian works performed?

I'm thinking of earlier works such as Claude Champagne's *Symphonic Gaspesienne* (1945) or Healey Willan's *Second Symphony* (1948). It might surprise our audience to discover Canadian composers existed even before Canada Council did! These, or modern works by Anhalt, Pepin or Eckhardt-Gramatte would be worth performing, and preferable to feebly tipping the baton to governmental policies, without bringing anything to the audience. Hearing Turner and his ilk we can only conclude that Canadian music, like the oft-expressed opinion of Canadian film, is something to be tolerated because it's ours, and maybe it'll get better.

The Brahms Piano Concerto 2 (op. 83) was the evening's principal event. Misha Dichter, the young American pianist, was soloist. His first extended solo passage tended to be impassioned but unvarying in colour or volume, thus failing to build as it should. This approach tended to occur frequently throughout the performance. He savoured a hard, bright tone which was especially effective in the more manic sections of the second movement. Save for the first third the *Andante* was played with more feeling and dynamic range, but in the last movement Dichter though glitteringly precise, was rather cold even in the most tenderly reconciling passages. One has heard that Dichter can be both brilliant in technique and profoundly searching as to the music's meaning. On this occasion he was mostly brilliant, and the final effect was somewhat more bland and impersonal than it should have been.

Mr. Hetu's no-nonsense tempi abetted the impersonality, and the work's dark, ruminative, Teutonic qualities were nowhere emphasized. However, with Dichter's clarity, very strong orchestral playing, and the work's inherent greatness, it was still a considerable musical experience. The first horn played with finesse throughout, save for the second appearance of the opening theme, where he was too prominent, instead of emerging from the orchestral fabric. However, other horns had intonation problems which recurred throughout the evening. The strings were not full enough in parts of the second movement, but the playing itself was excellent. Woodwind and cello solos in the *Andante* were splendid, with the cellist particularly sonorous on his reappearance. At the work's close audience enthusiasm was unusually prolonged.

The Brahms is a hard act to follow, and if it can't be followed by something equally or more lofty (Bruckner or Mahler) it should at least be followed by something entertaining. Hetu chose the latter course. The Respighi tone-poem *The Pines of Rome* was scheduled, but not performed because, with the orchestra's annual contract still unsettled nine days ago, there was a possibility the concert would be cancelled, and thus arrangements to bring in the necessary extra musicians could not be made. Instead we heard Wagner's *Tannhauser Overture* (Dresden Version). This, followed by Liszt's *Les Preludes*, is a lot of calories in thirty minutes, but I saw no evidence of anyone O.D.-ing.

Hetu gave strongly structured readings to both works and, with no score in evidence, must know them well. The fireworks which often ensued emphasized the relative lack of them in his Brahms reading.

The theme representing the pilgrims (played by trombones) was very well balanced with the rest of the orchestra, the strings were appropriately languid and unhealthy sounding in the Venusberg section. Lower strings did not have quite enough body at the main climax, and the violins seemed slightly off in their feverishly repeated descending motif when the trombones repeat the Pilgrims' chorus, but it was otherwise a bright, alert performance.

Liszt's third symphonic poem is a sort of mini-*Heldenleben* with a theme for the hero's appearance which some of us know best for its use in the movie

serial *Flash Gordon*. Although a concert war-horse it's nice to hear *Les Preludes* now that Liszt's orchestral works are being taken more seriously than during the last generation. Perhaps Mr. Hetu can be persuaded to investigate the less-known tone poems as well.

The strings' performance of the love theme was the most satisfying string passage of the evening, with just the right fullness and intensity. In the section depicting Nature's healing powers Hetu was excellent in pointing up details, and first horn, harp and woodwinds were delicately evocative. The big, brass-ridden moments were irresistible; sonorous but not vulgar. Although not a perfectly balanced program, it should have demonstrated to any initiates why people go to symphony concerts and the visceral excitement such music can convey.

Recordings. Among the best readings of the Brahms are Leon Fleisher with Szell and the Cleveland Orch. (*Odyssey*); Emil Gilels with Reiner/Chicago Sym. (*Victrola*), and Richter with Leinsdorf/Chicago Sym. (RCA). All three are budget labels. Richter is the most poetic, but not as consistent as the first two. Among the best full-priced versions are Arrau/Haitink (Philips), Serkin Szell (Columbia) and Gilels/Jochum (DGG). Both Arrau and Gilels emphasize the ruminative aspects, Serkin the whole structure. All are major pianists with great orchestras and first-rate conductors. The *Tannhauser Overture* is best served by Szell and the Cleveland (Columbia) in a program of Wagner preludes. Solti and the Vienna Phil are also impressive (London). Liszt's *Les Preludes* has no version currently available which realizes all its moods with equal conviction but two very good recordings are by Bernstein and the N.Y. Phil. (Columbia) and Haitink/London Phil. (Philips). Both records are all-Liszt, with Haitink including Tasso and Orpheus, two other symphonic poems.

Dialectics and You



by Thaddeus "Bongo" Watkins.

(A column, the frequency of which is directly proportionate to its appearance of frequency. The author refuses to accept responsibility for any damaged or stolen property resultant.)

Yes, you ineffable jackasses, 'tis I — with good tidings, for this particular column might easily fall under the subtitle "On Living With the Implications of a Certain Death or How to Suck Farts from Car-Seats."

During recent years I have sought through a long series of bitterly competitive tiddly-winks matches, not to entice the chrome-plated fraulein who would smear glossy crozak all over her ruby lips prior to making her adamantine presence felt at these evenings of sheer debauchery, but rather, as a pantheist, to disclose to the satisfaction of a famous back-scrubber manufacturer's oldest daughter what general significance(s) there is (are) to be disclosed in the event(s) in which you, I, and the pogos above us are inv(ol)ved.(.) Why do we eat pickles?

Two weeks ago, however, my hitherto insatiable hunger for flicking counters into trays halted abruptly. The insignificance of the significance was newly disclosed. So I arranged my new clothes in a random sequence all over my body, ran to the nearest bicycle rack, stood impressively near it and shouted for the world to hear, "You cadaverous ninnies, what is this but a process of necessary adjustment, with no mystery about it?"

No one seemed to take notice of this monumental lucidity I had suddenly found myself to be the bearer of excepting a young black-haired thing of innocent mien, plump, soft, and perhaps the better part of fifteen who approached me with eyes so large that it was as if she stumbled upon Peter Fruptum (or some such teen-age hero). She looked stupid but proceeded to do something I couldn't understand, something, the doing of which I found to be vaguely interesting.

Resuming my impressive stance I told her everything, everything and more! I plotted on a handy graph the entire edifice of human relationships and social structures! I crumpled this same graph with my bare hands and reduced it to the level of a regulated epiphenomenon! I became animated and informed the bicycle rack that it and its relatives had no value or substance of their own and therefore no future!

It was all for nothing. I spilled the better part of my soul into a vacuous pressure cooker with nothing but old, and molding chili clinging to its walls. I did have the presence of mind, however, to close the lid in order to preserve some of this remonstrative eruption for you folks, as it were. I have yet to decipher the green peppers, though, but when I have done so the results shall appear in print for all to see (next column, I guess).

what's next

drama

The Northern Light Theatre begins its eight season starting Sept. 29 with the production of *Ten Lost Years*. The work is a musical collage by Canadian journalist Barry Broadfoot performed by eight musicians and actors. Compiled so that it may be viewed in either one act or full length form, the play has a special performance schedule which follows: Tues. 12:10 p.m. — Part One (The Farm); Wed. 12:10 p.m. — Part Two (The City and the Jungle). Thursdays and Fridays Parts One and Two run consecutively at 12:10 and 1:10 p.m. and on Saturday evenings (7 p.m.) both parts are shown. Tickets are on sale at Bay Ticket Offices or the Northern Light Theatre office. All performances will be held in the Edmonton Art Gallery Theatre.

cinema

The Community Programs Section of the Library is presenting a series of feature-length monster movies every Saturday and Sunday until Oct. 15 and 16. The showings are at the Central Library Theatre and admission will be granted by showing your library card. This weekend's movie is *The Creature Walks Among Us* (USA 1956), the final sequel to *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. Both showings start at 2 p.m.

On Sunday, Sept. 25 at 8 p.m., the National Film Theatre presents *Profumo di Donna* (Italy 1974) directed by Dino Risi. Bittorio Gassman's performance of a disabled army captain with unique perceptual abilities won him the Grand Prix for best male actor at the 1975 Cannes Film Festival. To be shown at the Citadel's Zeidler Theatre.

art

Two showings currently run at the Edmonton Art Gallery. *The Fauve Heritage* examines twentieth century art as influenced by the Fauvist orientation to color. The exhibition contrasts works by Fauvists Marquet, Derain and Vlaminck with twentieth century artists Bush, Noland, Louis, Frankenthaler and others. *Color and Abstract Painting*, a didactic subset of the show, will run concurrently and deal with the subject of color theory.

The influential and controversial art critic Mr. Clement Greenberg is scheduled to give a lecture at the Gallery on Wednesday, Sept. 28 at 9:00 p.m. Greenberg's reputation is based on his support for such American abstract painters as Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline and Helen Frankenthaler.