



Entertainment

Percussion group features students

interview by Elaine Ostry

"Ensemble work," says John McCormick is the closest you can get to a solo performance in percussion, and still get that feeling of a group." McCormick is the conductor and founder of the Alberta College Percussion Ensemble, which will be performing a variety of music on Wednesday, at Alberta College.

McCormick plays the percussion in the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. He has also given private music lessons for several years. He found that "the music that's provided in schools is very good, but a lot of time doesn't challenge percussion performers" — Therefore, in September 1985, McCormick started the Alberta College Percussion Ensemble, which is open to young performers who are interested in a musical career. Their ages vary from 13 to 27; most of them are studying music at the University of Alberta. They are a group of students at what McCormick claims to be a professional level.

The group certainly has grown: the number of participants has doubled since the ensemble's conception. Of the 26 musicians, only the advanced group of about five will be performing on Wednesday.

The keynote of Wednesday's concert is variety. "Everybody knows of the rhythm aspect of percussion," said McCormick, "but the greatest variety is in the 'colour effect'." The 'colour effect' is the effect of different sounds. The selections chosen for the upcoming concert certainly are various in nature, ranging from a "Concerto for Violin with Percussion Orchestra" by Lou Harrison to "Para Los Rumberos" by Tito Puente. "The songs very rarely have the same instrumentation," said McCormick.

Part of the demand for variety is the demand for ethnic songs and percussion instruments. For example, the selection by Tito Puente is written in a salsa format, featuring congos and melody lines based on marimba-type instruments, which originate from Central America, South America, and Africa.

"All of the students in the ensemble," said McCormick, "are finding various things in their environment that make beautiful sounds." To McCormick, this creative thinking is what makes percussion playing exciting: "I love how you can find sounds out of everything." This creativity is evident in the students' uses of coffee cans, automobile brake drums, flower pots, washtubs, and



Music students experiment with the sounds of everything from bass drums to flower pots.

plumbing pipes. Of course, a high standard in the techniques of playing more conventional percussion instruments such as the snare drum, the bass drum, and tom toms is also emphasized.

The Alberta College Percussion Ensemble feels "quite honoured" to be accompanied by Mary Harangozo-Cockell, a violinist and a respected solo performer. Like McCormick, Harangozo-Cockell is a member of the

Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. She is, claims McCormick "really enthusiastic" about the project, and the two performers have been discussing the concert "for about a year." Harangozo-Cockell has just returned from a tour of South America, playing in a chamber music trio, which also performed at Expo.

"In an orchestra," said McCormick, "there are endless periods of counting bars of rest.

A percussion ensemble, however, keeps everybody active." It demands much of the performers "musically and technically." McCormick stressed that Wednesday's concert features "a very demanding program for this age level... which illustrates how much more advanced the players are becoming now." The results of this progress will evidently be heard at Buchanan Hall of Alberta College on Wednesday night.

Who killed Sister Rita?

The Runner Stumbles: religion, love, and murder

The Runner Stumbles
Walterdale Theatre
Run ends April 11

review by Michael Maitland

Based on a true story, *As the Runner Stumbles* is a murder mystery play. Set in rural Michigan at the turn of the century, the play opens in the jail cell of Father Rivard, accused of murdering a nun. Everyone including his defence lawyer, has assumed that he is guilty. The scenes move back and forth from jail cell to the courtroom, skillfully interspersed with flashbacks of events leading to Sister Rita's death.

The flashbacks act as clues to solve the mystery of the murder. They also reveal the characters of the central actors.

Father Rivard is an outcast of the church and has been sent to rural Michigan to write as penitence for questioning the authority of the Catholic hierarchy. He struggles with his convictions — and with his attraction to Sister Rita.

Mrs. Shandig is an insecure, illiterate con-

vert to the Catholic religion and Father Rivard's housemaid.

Sister Rita is young, pretty and somewhat immature. She is still uncertain about her role in life. On one hand she is dedicated to the service of God, while on the other she wishes to be a wife and mother. Idealistic and progressive, Sister Rita teaches at the convent school. She offers to teach Mrs. Shandig how to read and presents the Father with a variety of ideas on improving the conditions at the school, such as planting flowers and introducing fingerpainting to the children. She is attracted to Father Rivard and secretly loves him.

This attraction grows when Sister Rita moves into Father Rivard's house due to the outbreak of a contagious disease amongst the children.

When Rita moves into the house, tensions begin to build. Mrs. Shandig suddenly becomes cold and indifferent towards Sister Rita's friendship. The tension amongst the characters climaxes when Sister Rita lies — in the presence of Father Rivard and Mrs. Shandig — to Monsignor Nicholson about

the living arrangements. To show his disappointment in her, Father Rivard refuses to talk to Rita.

Rita confronts Father Rivard, and she tells him of her love. Father Rivard rejects her love. The next morning Rita's body is found amongst the flowers that she planted.

The plot is gripping and poignant. It is a pleasure to watch the play and to speculate on its outcome, but it is at times stilted and mechanical. This could be due to opening night jitters. Tom Dodd begins strong as Father Rivard, with his contemplative gestures and sombre dialogue as he sits in his cell. As the play progresses, the viewer is uncertain as to whether the resulting inconsistencies are the result of the inner turmoil of the character, or nervousness on the part of the actor. Toby Felker, played by Kelvin Beck, is the court jester of the play. Quick to admit his incompetence as the defence lawyer — and his preference to fishing over fighting legal battles — Toby Felker offers comic relief to a very serious play. However, it is difficult to know when the character is being serious, as in the courtroom scenes.

With his authoritarian voice, Hank Perry skillfully assumes the role of Monsignor Nicholson, as does Andrew Yskes as the arrogant State prosecutor.

Margaret Bles presents Mrs. Shandig in a most believable way, utilizing the subtle nuances of the character to their fullest, while withholding her deep and dark secret as long as possible.

The emotional turmoil of serving God and falling in love with a priest who has vowed to love no one other than this same God; the withheld secret desire to be a wife and mother; the passion and the humiliation of rejection make Sister Rita a challenging and difficult role to play successfully. Tammy Bentz assumes this role with ease and presents Sister Rita in a powerful and moving manner.

Man versus Man, Man versus God, Man versus Himself. These basic conflicts of Man intertwine throughout the play. Some are resolved. Others are not. Combined with the challenge of solving the mystery and anticipating the outcome, the play is a challenging and provocative production.

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