

A virtuoso performance

Edmonton Symphony Orchestra
Jubilee Auditorium
December 5, 1981

review by Beth Jacob

The ESO management played a trump card for last week's performances and were rewarded with a full house. The near capacity audience, the largest I've seen so far this season, was mesmerized by the brilliant playing of guest artist Ruggiero Ricci, the world renowned violin virtuoso.

The concert began inauspiciously enough. Turnabout is fair play so this week the orchestra's wind players were given a chance to shine in Richard Strauss' "Serenade for Winds Op. 7". Though a charming and quaint little piece, the work lacked any sense of excitement or dramatic power. Neither did it have the rich sonorities nor the emotional intensity of the Barber "Adagio for Strings" heard last time. Technically it appeared rather perfunctory and in general failed to hold my interest.

The concert came to life with the return of the string section and the appearance of guest artist Ricci playing the Goldmark "Concerto in a minor Op. 28". Mr. Ricci breezed through the technical demands of the piece, equally at home with the high register pyrotechnics of the first movement and the restrained but singing tone necessary for the calmly reflective song of the second. The final movement cadenza, saturated with double stops was handled with expertise, and finished off a stunning performance of the piece.

After the intermission Ricci returned to play Saint-Saens' "Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso Op. 28". This bit of light Romantic fluff was totally devoid of any trace of musical development or ingenuity. The orchestra was reduced to playing mindless wallpaper music as background for the soloist's nauseatingly engaging tunes, the sort one expects to hear being whistled on the street. Despite these glaring faults, the work provided a reasonable excuse to hear Ricci again and the audience loved it, bringing him back for an encore. For that Ricci played a set of unaccompanied variations on "God Save the Queen" a la Paganini complete with copious amounts of left-hand pizzicato. This piece injected an unexpected note of humour into the proceedings (this is after all "serious" music), and provided an utterly dazzling display of virtuoso technique. Wow! Now that's entertainment.

After all that, it was hard to come back to earth for more mundane matters such as the orchestra performing Dvorak's "Symphony No. 7 in d minor". However Mayer managed to impart a sense of bristling energy and excitement to the music so that by the third movement's lilting dance, I was concentrating wholly on the symphony again.

Nonetheless the undisputed star of the evening was Ruggiero Ricci. Such talent makes it easy to understand how the cult of the virtuoso began. One can only hope that with the symphony's continued expansion, we can see more players of such calibre come to Edmonton in the future.



Doug a bit sluggish

Doug and the Slugs
SUB Theatre
Dec. 3

review by Michael Skeet

I really don't know what to do with Doug and the Slugs. How do you fault a band that openly admits to having you on? I can't, I guess, but I still feel uneasy following the Slug's Edmonton concert last Thursday.

The concert was part of the tour promoting the band's Big Time second album, proof that Doug and the Slugs have left their cult image behind. They even had a warm-up band on Thursday, removing the need for them to perform that task as well (this was often a feature of early Slug concerts).

The Slugs themselves are a tight, competent, rock 'n' roll band with no weak links. In fact, John Burton and Richard Baker make up one of the better guitar duos I've heard in a while: two leads who both play competent rhythm.

Doug Bennett is the be-all and end-all of the Slugs, however. As he goes, so goes the band, and on this particular night, at least, Dougie wasn't going so well. To start with, the mix was terrible. On anything faster than a sedentary foxtrot, Bennett's vocals were completely lost, and without the vocals, this is just another tight, competent rock 'n' roll band. Bennett himself seemed tired, or jaded, or just plain worn-out. His vaunted snappy patter seemed forced, hardly living up to the reputation he's gained. He did score,

though, with a couple of well-aimed shots at Rod (the Fraud) Stewart and Rush's Geddy Lee (Take Off, Eh?).

It should also be mentioned that the air-heads in the audience just lapped this up. If Bennett was laughing at them instead of with them, they didn't seem to care.

I must confess, though, that I'm getting sick of the lobotomy cases who think that they can entertain just as well as the headliners. Why doesn't SUB Theatre toss those jerks out?

The Slugset itself was just over an hour in duration, leaving time for little more than a run-through of the new album (see review elsewhere) with a reprise of the single "Too Bad" and "Chinatown Calculation." There was some very good material on display (I particularly like "Wrong Kind of Right" - another single there), which was hampered, as I say, by the mix.

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't entertained by Doug and the Slugs. I'd just been led to expect something better than what I got, that's all. And as for the merchandising - Doug and the Slugs baseball caps? Like I said, what do you do with a band that admits it's out to take your money?

The Bing Jensen Band opened for the Slugs. Take away the first number (a dismal cover of the Persuasions' "Good Old A Capella") and last (a dreadful hashing of the Stones' "Paint it Black"), and you had a decent set. Jensen is almost there with numbers like "One Cool Guy" and "Me and My Girl" (chorus: 'Everything causes cancer but me and my girl') - a sort of Post-Wave Ricky Ricardo, really.

ROUNDAABOUT

by Michael Skeet

At the top of the column, apologies to Jens AnderSEN. I will learn to spell my leader's name! AnderSEN! AnderSEN! I am not sic! OK then; Back to the libel and slander.

Neil Young and Crazy Horse
re*ac*tor
(Warner XHS 2304)

Last year in this space I dumped all over Neil Young's *Hawks and Doves*, a ridiculously simplistic record. I remember expressing the hope that Young, one of my favourite rockers, could get back on track with his next album.

re*ac*tor gets half-way there and then stops. Young has allied himself with Crazy Horse again, and thata darn smart move; re*ac*tor is all snarling guitars and pounding drums - good old stompin' music. The music is, for the most part, good and savage.

The words, on the other hand, suck air. I'm really beginning to think that ol' Neil's done one alkaloid too many and turned his brain to guacomole. T-Bone, for example, is 9 minutes long. Here are the lyrics: 'Got mashed potatoes. Ain't got no T-Bone.' That's it. For *nine frigging minutes!* Rhythmically and musically, T-Bone is pretty decent stuff for a 4 minute song. At 9 minutes, though, I'm tempted to lay fraud charges.

Unfortunately, the whole album is like this. A few songs transcend this minimalism-gone-miasmic: Get Back On It and Southern Pacific are essentially driving songs, and you don't notice when the lyrics get trite. My favourite has to be "Opera Star" - rock 'n' roll for people with cultural inferiority complexes.

re*ac*tor is one of those albums that get your feet moving, and it gets by on this point. Don't listen too closely though.

Doug and the Slugs
Wrap It!
(Ritdong, KKL1-0430-2)

Doug and the Slugs may be the ultimate Canadian cultural phenomenon; a rock 'n' roll band headed up by a funny advertising man, the Howie Meeker of rock 'n' roll. Doug Bennett is a joke who's laughing all the way to the bank. (And don't get fooled by the Slug's show of embarrassment at all this crassness. They like being famous.)

The inner sleeve tells us that *Wrap It!* was calculatedly designed to sell, and I'll buy that. Bennett is a superb pop craftsman, combining half a dozen musical genres and ghod know how may stylistic influences with a quirky, sardonic view of life that is classic in its own way. And if

Bennett occasionally out-quirks himself and produces a lyric that is so arch it's impenetrable ("Infrared," for example), he hits the mark the vast majority of the time.

There are a lot of good tunes on this album: the jumpy "Embarassed (Just A Little Bit)" or "Forget About Me" or "Frankie" (With doo-wop courtesy of the Nylons) and "Wrong Kind of Right" (with its great militaristic hook) could be, should be, hits. "Dangerous" is another good tune, but it is paced a little too quickly, and its full impact doesn't come across.

Ironically enough, Bennett, who provides the album with its strongest point, in the writing, is also the weakest link. His voice just isn't up to the demands of serious music, and with *Wrap It!*; it appears as if Doug and the Slugs have decided to play serious. Sort of.

Godley and Creme -
Ismism
(Polydor PDS-1-6328)

After languishing in the delete bins for years, Kevin Godley and Lol Creme may get back on the charts with this one. The former members of 10 cc. have received critical kudos for their ambitious efforts since leaving that band, but commercial success has always eluded them. One song seems to have changed all that.

The song is "Under Your Thumb", a top 4 hit in Britain that should make it equally big over here (or there just ain't no justice). A haunting (literally) story set to a manic British Rail rhythm, "Under Your Thumb" is intelligent and chock full o' hooks, too.

Thumb is the only real grabber on the album, though there are a couple of songs that really grow on you. The word 'songs' may be a bit of a misnomer, though. Lol and Kev seem entirely taken for some reason, with the Rap Song. They've done far better by this hoary genre than it deserves, with 'songs' like "Snack Attack" (the ultimate munchy nightmare) and Lonnie (a new line of the Kennedy assassination?) or even "Joey's Camel", but these two are capable of much better work.

I'm recommending *Ismism* largely on the strength of "Under Your Thumb". That song aside, though, this isn't that much of an improvement on, say, *L*, another... unsuccessful (commercially, at least) attempt.



Folkie scores a few

Chivalry Lives
David Sereda
Rock Wednesday Records RWR 24

review by Jens Andersen

A musician like David Sereda starts out with several handicaps when dealing with a crotchety reviewer like myself, and if he had had any inkling of my prejudices he might not have walked into the *Gateway* office as he did, and entrusted a review copy of his record to me.

First of all, I have an extremely low tolerance for protest songs, especially when they have lyrics as banal as:

'cuz big people have big plans for my city
they're gonna make it new and shiny
but I'd be surprised, when all this
building is thru
if there's any place in this city
for me and you

Second, homosexuality is something that only arouses my distaste, and Sereda's gay love songs do absolutely nothing to raise my consciousness on the subject (although I should probably add that I have always felt the buggers should at least be left alone).

My third and major crotchet is against adolescent romanticism. The spectacle of yet another stary-eyed youth rolling his eyes and hanging his jaw in amazement at the splendor of the universe, simply makes me tired. Sereda has a lot of this kind of gushy emotion coursing through his bloodstream (he is only 17 apparently). Tell it to the undertaker, kid.

Having said all this, however, I have to confess I still found many things to like on the album. "Underage Blues" is a catchy tune, "I wept with Joy" has a moving touch of majesty, "Mama's Song" is downright poignant, and "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," the only non-original song here, closes the album in style.



And even the boring and embarrassing stuff isn't grossly offensive, just a bit silly and naive. Sereda's musicianship and vocalizing are fine throughout, even on the less than wonderful material. It is a testament to his voice that it survives without the slightest help by echo, natural or otherwise (a bit of it would probably have worked miracles).

At any rate Sereda is appearing this Thursday at the Provincial Museum Theatre and it might be worth a listen. Portions of this album were recorded live and the audience seemed enthusiastic.