

the ARTS

Auditions held for "godspell"

If you can successfully combine the talents of acting, singing, and dancing, Mark Schoenberg will want you to audition for the contemporary love/rock musical 'godspell' on Thursday, November 1 and Friday, November 2, from 4-7 p.m. in Dance Room 3-117, Fine Arts Center.

Most of the ten available parts call for males. Singers are asked to prepare something in advance and to bring a piano part. Schoenberg says that as far as the dance goes, a basic knowledge of movement is all that is required.

This is the first time that 'godspell' has been released for performance in Western Canada. Studio Theatre will present the musical as part of its 25th Anniversary Season, December 6 to 15. Director Mark Schoenberg, on the U of A's Drama Faculty, is artistic director of Theatre 3, Edmonton's second professional theatre. He has had an impressive career, listing among his accomplishments the directing of five off-Broadway plays.

For further information, you are asked to call 432-1271.

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STUDENT TICKETS

STUDENTS WILL BE ADMITTED AT HALF PRICE, ONE HOUR BEFORE CURTAIN TIME. STUDENT IDENTIFICATION MUST BE PRESENTED.

Chamber music society season opener

Although they did not deliver a very grateful reading of the more traditional material on their program, the members of the Cleveland Quartet did present some intriguing contemporary string music to its Wednesday audience. The Edmonton Chamber Music Society opened its new season with a performance by this world renowned quartet which lacked poignancy at times, but which nevertheless did manage to provide some intense passages which made the evening musically satisfying, but not edifying.

The concert began with a very stiff reading of Beethoven's *Quartet in B-Flat Major, Opus 18 No. 6*. From the opening measures of the first movement it became apparent that the quartet somehow lacked the confidence to carry the piece off in the style to which it has been accustomed. Absent was the vigour which is such a necessary ingredient of the greater portion of Beethoven's music. The quartet - whose members are: Donald Weilerstein, violin; Peter Salaff, violin; Martha Strongin Katz, viola; and Paul Katz, cello - had troubles with their timing in this piece. As well, their transitions in tempo and dynamics appeared forced and did not arise in the seemingly effortless, organic way that would be the mark of an excellent string quartet.

What must be remembered is that a string quartet plays without the assistance of a conductor. Hence, all four musicians must be absolutely accurate in their timing and choice of dynamic levels. A piece of music can only be fused together if all the members are playing not only technically well together, but also playing "spiritually" well together. They are able to present the music in this way only if their listening skills are as well, or better, developed than their playing skills. The Cleveland Quartet played Beethoven, then, in a manner which make it quite obvious that they were not able, at that time, to meet up to that challenge. Especially disconcerting was the way that they "swallowed" the ends of their phrases. By the end of the

Beethoven it sounded as if the evening was headed towards mediocrity

However, with their performance of *Antiphones (1969)* by Sergei Solnitsky the quartet revealed that their musical hearts were much more at home in the twentieth century. It seemed as if there were four different musicians playing this piece in contrast to the opening number. Perhaps that is a function of the immense amount of work that the quartet must have done in their attempt to understand and present this very difficult piece. As its name suggests, the piece is a series of musical utterances and responses by way of interaction between the four instruments. The composer, as cellist Paul Katz explained, provided the musicians only with a vertical definition of the notes to be sounded but without any linear directions more than that notes should be short, long, or very long. This means that certain notes must be sounded together by the four musicians, but they have a great deal of freedom in deciding when to change to the next set of notes that must be played together.

This seems like a tremendous task, but the quartet found its key to understanding the piece in realizing that the composer was attempting the music of the Hebrew cantors or religious

singers heard thousands of years ago. The piece featured movement by the musicians around the auditorium, antiphonic utterances and responses, as well as the use of quarter-tones - all of which were part of the cantor tradition. The phrasings that the players chose were decidedly vocal, but the effects that they used which were idiomatically string passages were always complementary.

This piece did reveal that the quartet was more than capable of a sense of organic movement. A good many of the "chords" that they touched upon had an extremely rich tonal texture. For those of us who have often

wondered what music sounded like before the limits of a well-tempered system were foisted upon it, this piece was an intriguingly well played introduction.

At the beginning of the second half, the quartet chose to pay tribute to Pablo Casals, the master cellist, by playing the slow movement of his favourite quartet by Brahms on this the day of his funeral. The piece was played in an endearingly passionate way and aptly expressed the sentiment of those who will acutely miss the work of the maestro.

The quartet chose, as its major work of the second half, to play Mendelssohn's *Quartet in E-Flat Major, Opus 44, No. 3*. Here, the quartet was able to meet up to the very lyric melodic material with which the composer provided them. Although they were not hampered by the problems they created for themselves in the Beethoven, their performance seemed to lack depth. This was especially apparent in the slow movement, marked *Adagio*. Many accompaniment passages were just slightly unbalanced and this left my ear craving, at times, some sort of textural equilibrium. The piece ended, however, with a good deal of the vigour that had been absent from the beginning and this made for a satisfying and convincing close.

For their encore, the quartet played another work by a twentieth century composer, Charles Ives *Arguments*. It was a piece of a delightful musical wit in which a musical character, Rollo Fink, has a head on collision with some uncomplementary musical friends. For those who have long suffered the miseries of their encounter with the esoteric cloak of Italian directions that has surrounded music, the Cleveland Quartet's iconoclastic reading of Ives' iconoclastic piece struck a long awaited rabbit punch to vulnerable belly of musical snobbery.

allan bell

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