

by Ross Rudolph

I will be forever grateful to the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, who played here Sunday last, for revealing to me the true qualities of the Edmonton Symphony.

Before I begin my diatribe, I must include some well chosen words on the acoustical properties of our much vaunted auditorium. This was not the first time that I have been subjected to the muffled, woolly, and indistinct sound that reaches the back of the main floor. The Minneapolis Symphony, under its associate conductor during its afternoon students' matinee, sounded a pale "deflection" of its real self, even in the noisy fugal finale of Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*. The first half of the Calgary concert heard from my unaccustomed vantage ranged in dynamic level from not-too-soft to not -too-loud. Whether this was entirely the fault of the hall is a moot point. Responsibility for my displeasure probably is divided equally among orchestra, conductor, and hall.

The programme embraced fine and familiar works ranging from a most Romantic overture by one of the greatest of classical masters, to the most rigorously classical movements of a Romantic favorite, with an excursion by way of mordant modernism.

The first disappointment of the evening, after the playing of the national anthem (*God Save Us All*) was the playing of Mozart's magic overture to *The Magic Flute*. I recall a recording played over CBC radio last year to commemorate the anniversary of the death of Arturo Toscanini, which revealed the master at work rehearsing his orchestra. One of Toscanini's most effective weapons, like the lion's, was his roar, but never for a moment doubt the lethal effect of both species' bite! In one expert from the rehearsal, the maestro, dissatisfied with the strings' performance of the fugato in this overture, let fly a blood-curdling bellow, "Smile!" followed by a startling report, which we were told was the conductor slapping his grinning face. The CPO performance did anything but smile.

The string performance was throughout skittery, to say the least. The woodwinds, while occasionally rising to the occasion, regularly mis-punctuated Mozart's compound musical sentences. The *Three German Dances* that followed did not present the same difficulties, either executive or interpretive. But one could surely question the pacing of the Trio of the third dance. The whole effect was redeemed by the spectacle of three apparently mature members of the percussion section actuating the most deadpan sleigh ride on record.

There followed a more debatable performance. No one could dispute Kenneth Amada's tremendous digital facility, but from this performance of the popular Prokofiev C Major Concerto one could hardly have concluded that here were the rhetorical qualities twice to deserve a Leventritt award. Under other circumstances, with another ensemble, it might have been otherwise. As it was the performance fairly exuded human kindness of a creamy consistency. While this is increasingly the mode of viewing this engaging work (for documentation, hear the version by Vanyushka Cliburn, if documentation were ever needed) we have convincing evidence by Sergei Sergeivitch, the composer who not only knew his mind, but whose fingers were their master's servants, that the work is most effective triple sec. While the piano performance was overly *gemutlich*, Haymo Tauber filled in a background more ludicrous than the composer ever intended.

Brahm's Fourth Symphony is his impressive swan song in the medium. Nowhere was the inadequacy of the mere weight of tone more marked than in this work whose closing *Passacaglia* is a fitting headstone for the composer Brahms. The orchestra's delivery is essentially lightweight, and while spring could certainly benefit the scherzo, it requires more unanimity of pitch and attack than this orchestra can presently muster. The important French horn section is illustrative. While it may make its share of gaffs, their delivery here was not so assertive as to publicize the errors.

In all, a disappointing performance, which might suggest the desirability of one consolidated orchestra. More of that in the future from a better informed source. In the meanwhile I promise to moderate my language. By comparison, the Edmonton Symphony sound like the Vienna Philharmonic.

## Male Chorus . . . . . Au Potpourri

The Second Annual Concert of the University Male Chorus will be held February 14th and 15th at 8:15 p.m. in Convocation Hall. Tickets are available from Chorus members and will be sold at the door.

The Chorus' repertoire consists of music chosen to display men's voices to best advantage. Following the precedent established last year, the concert will be "au potpourri." It will include spirituals, sea shanties, drinking songs, Broadway show tunes, and some genuine tear-jerking schmaltz, as well as works by Handel, Beethoven, Schubert, Verdi, Wagner, and Fauré.

The Chorus has a new conductor, Mr. David Peterkin. He

is the Supervisor of Music, Province of Alberta, and one of the adjudicators of this year's Songfest. The assistant conductor, Garth Worthington, is the Gold Medal baritone of last year's Western Board competitions. Garth will be featured as soloist in this concert.

Only a few of the men have had an intensive musical training—the criteria for chorus membership are simply the desire to make good music and the willingness to work. The group is a glee club with a comparatively informal format, and as such is something new on the campus.

In March, the Chorus will give another concert during Varsity Guest Weekend and will make a weekend tour of Southern Alberta.

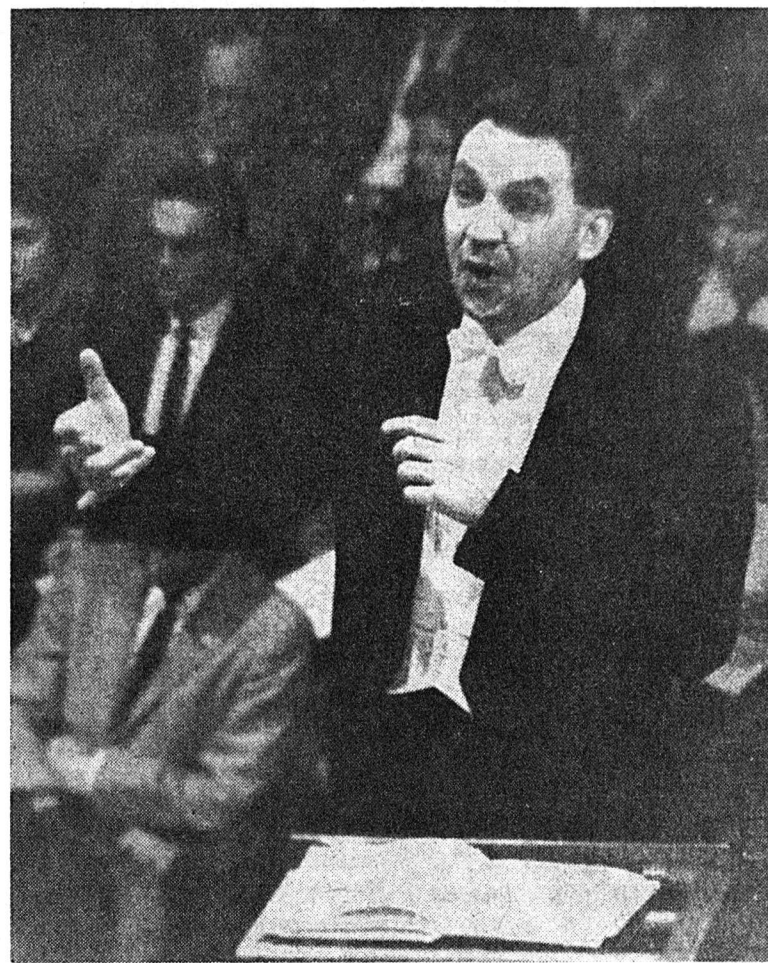


photo by Wm. C. Stenton

Prof. R. S. Eaton, directing mixed choristers.

## Mixed Chorus Concert

by Elan Galper

Monday's Mixed Chorus concert was, as a whole, a very enjoyable occasion. One reluctantly left after it was over (and it seemed, too soon!), cherishing memories of some of the fine and poignantly lyric moments of the evening.

I, for one, shall ever remember the tender rendition of "A la Claire Fontaine" with the arrangement of the conductor, Professor Eaton. But other memories will be prominent as well—the flowing "Cradle Song" and the clarity of the voice of its soloist executant, Handel's madrigals full of joie-de-vivre, the vigorous and jaunty Yugoslavian folk songs, especially "Huzzars", and the simple and delightfully pure Siberian folk song.

It seemed to me as if the chorus has improved markedly since I last heard it. As a whole, there were fewer less pleasant moments than there were a year ago. One of the pieces, which, in my opinion, was not sung as well as it could have been was the introductory piece, a cantata by Buxtehude. This difficult Baroque work was performed in a somewhat rigid, heavy style, lacking some fluidity and expression. This may be because the offering, being the initial one in the evening, was attempted when the chorus had not been 'warmed up' for it. I offer my humble opinion by suggesting that next time the chorus start the evening off with a less complex and demanding piece of lesser gravity. Thus, after having gotten into the spirit of the evening with a folk song or two (which seem to be the *métier* of Mixed Chorus), to tackle pieces of the seriousness and the grandeur of Buxtehude's chorale.

The following work, a polyphonic psalm by Schutz, displayed, sadly, the Achilles' Heel of the chorus—the weakness (due to the small volume) of the tenor register. As a result

of the lack of a large number of tenors (there were only six first tenors in the entire chorus), and since the tenors sing the lead in this eightfold-harmony antiphonal work, most male singers had to scream to be heard—which detracted from the purity of the work and gave it a slightly confused, muddy sound. It is indeed very deplorable that in a campus of this size, so few male singers are to be found. The female singers outnumber the male by approximately two to one, which may be good romantically (from a purely masculine point of view) but musically—? The chorus is, after all, a MIXED chorus, and not a woman's choir with male voices *obligato*.

For those in the audience, like me, who are lovers of Schubert, the chorus sang six songs from various song cycles in the theme of Winter and Spring (a bit too late, perhaps, for Schubert's birthday was four days before). These *Lieder* were recognizable only with difficulty, having been heavily masked by a poor translation and a schmaltzy arrangement which often wavered on the brink of destroying the intense intimacy and delicacy of the songs. It is no fault of the chorists, however, for they have handled their material relatively well, although the translation and the arrangement (Schubert wrote the songs for a single voice and accompaniment only) just added saccharine to such famous pieces as the "Serenade."

I do not have the space to comment about all the presented works, meritoriously done as they may have been. But I should like before I finish to make mention of the good singing of the soloists, Elizabeth Walker and Arthur Querengesser. Another person, next to Professor Eaton, who deserves a pat on the back is Pat Colvin, the accompanist. She has played well, although I still think that an organ accompaniment would have been more effective for Buxtehude's work (just regard the program notes!)

In summation, the Mixed Chorus has done a good job. If you were fortunate enough to attend, you enjoyed it—I am sure. If not—then maybe next time! I think that it is worth it.

## L'Amerique Insolite "fascinating, funny"

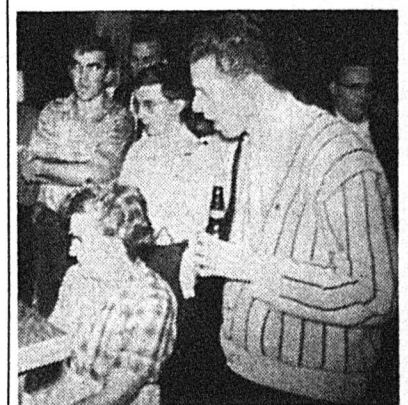
by Bob Pounder

The idiosyncrasies of American manners and mores are examined with an unsparing eye in a French picture called "L'Amerique Insolite," which was screened Monday at the Edmonton Film Society. It is a super-satirical documentary which delves into various extreme and peculiar aspects of U.S. society. It dwells on the morbid, stupid and obscene in an attempt to make a strong impression concerning the vulgar facets of an affluent society. At the same time it provides an often extremely amusing lesson about the follies of all that is flamboyant without cause. Americans should not take offence; an equally unbalanced pastiche could be strung together about Europe. And let Canadians remember that our country could provide the setting for a similar film.

Francois Reichenbach, the director, has a very keen and perceptive imagination, and he uses it to full advantage here. He delves into such American passions as love of ice cream, photography, travel and Miss Americanism, and purposefully blows out of proportion their importance in the structure of the nation. The sight of Texas prisoners arriving at a rodeo in wire cages built onto trucks and being frisked before taking their places in a screened section is ludicrous and appalling. The spectacle of teenagers drinking, chomping on bubblegum and going through the motions of a form of dance brings to mind the mating rituals of the jungle animals which have been so diligently recorded on celluloid by Walt Disney, an American whom Reichenbach certainly does not admire. And rightly so. The infantile phoniness of Disneyland receives a merciless kick in the shins.

A major point made in "L'Amerique Insolite" is that there seems to be a fetish made of violence and the destruction of the symbols of plenty in the U.S. A wild throng at a football game, which could easily have been sitting in the Colosseum during the Roman Empire, and the "Hell Drivers" of the state fair circuit, who smash up cars (and sometimes men) to delight the assembled company, are used to drive this point home.

In general, Reichenbach concentrates on the most bizarre behavior which he can find. There is no statement made that what is shown is typical of all America. It is a kaleidoscopic view of weird areas of the society, continually fascinating and often downright funny. The chatty narrative is deceptively naive, the juxtaposition of sequences often effectively incongruous. It is the work of a clever man, who should do very well indeed when he has a lot more to say.



Male Choristers rehearsing; making music and more.