

Ronald Murdoch

Superb lyric tenor

by Eric Simpson

Ronald Murdoch, a native of Merigomish, Nova Scotia now residing in London, England, gave a concert with pianist Clifford Benson at Saint Mary's University last week which reaffirmed his reputation as one of the best lyric tenors ever to be produced in our musically-rich province.

Murdoch's superb programme was a well-balanced and challenging mixture of light arias by Handel; operatic arias by Lalo, massenet, and Tschaikowsky; a modern rendition of Thomas Trahern's **Dies Natalis** composed by Gerald Finzi; and Benjamin Britten's moving **Winter Words** based on poems by Thomas Hardy.

The last concert that Murdoch gave with the Brunswick Quartet at the Cohn Auditorium in the fall was less suited to the voice and range of this versatile tenor. At that time He concentrated on modern works (Tom O'Bedlam; On Wenlock's Edge) and the audience was not treated to the choice of material which gave such dep-

th to this performance.

Clifford Benson's bouncy piano and Murdoch's clear precise enunciation combined to create a full, happy sound in the first Handel aria: **Spring is Coming**. Although the performance looked a little incongruous in their white ties and tails under the red girders of the rink-like Theatre Auditorium, the music—"source of all gladness with voice divine"—soon established a calm and peaceful mood.

Murdoch's voice was most impressive in its clear, precise control and its rich, expressive tone. It is refreshing to hear a tenor who does not attempt to overpower the listener. This is a sensitive and unerringly accurate voice most at home in works demanding interpretative ability rather than volume and brute vocal strength.

Benson's accompaniment was lively and colourful, but never 'out front'. His performance of two Chopin études was inspired and full of driving intensity. the contrast between the wide **Scherzo** and the soft **Nocturne** was in-

vigorating. The energetic nature of this diminutive Englishman is an excellent compliment to the refined but intense qualities which Murdoch exhibits. It seemed fitting that Benson would forget his music while Murdoch waited unperturbed on stage.

The immortal, celestial spheres were praised in **Dies Natalis** by the rapturous but strangely sad figure from Trachern's 18th century poem. The modern arrangement of this work gives it a new perspective which is very intriguing.

The operatic arias demanded a few octave leaps which Murdoch handled well considering that he was suffering from a sore throat and a dreadful cold. In added the transition from the light, soft ode from **Manon** to the hard clear aria sung by Lensky was carried off brilliantly.

Murdoch studied voice at Mount Allison University, Montreal and Switzerland before settling in London.

He gives Leider and solo recitals (a rare event in Halifax musical circles) as well as performances with chamber



Nova Scotia tenor Ronald Murdoch: lyric artist par excellence

groups, opera groups and orchestras all over the world. He is moving on to Vancouver after having performed in Hong Kong earlier this year.

It is unfortunate that the moving performance of Britten's **Winter Words** which Murdoch gave last week was not more enthusiastically at-

tended. The musical description of Thomas Hardy's poem about a young boy with a violin meeting a handcuffed convict is something everyone should hear. It is something everybody can understand and appreciate, especially when it is so beautifully and artfully sung.

Davis exhibition

View of nature convincing

by Wanda Waterman

The Leighton Davis exhibition is certainly one of the better art shows to appear at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia this year. Davis is basically a realist who renders in water-colour, pencil, and lithograph very convincing depictions of the natural world.

The paintings are generally of small segments of nature, such as a patch of ground covered with stones and dead leaves, or part of a rock face. The artist often uses unexpected shades of blue and green to brighten a brown and beige palette, and sharp shadows give the objects a surrealistic quality.

I overheard one man say that the rock drawings looked like photographs. This is true for many of the pictures if you step back and examine them. But nonetheless there's something in them that goes far beyond photographic accuracy. Davis doesn't achieve his realistic portrayals of his surroundings by copying every superficial detail. His rocks, for example, are somehow a creation of his own, yet are more like rocks than those of any nature photographer. His pictures are balanced and well-proportioned without seeming contrived.

An interesting Davis phenomenon is the series of watercolours in which battered 'Keep Out' and 'No Trespassing' signs are shown against a background of confusing foliage. These signs are ironic because it doesn't

look as if you could get beyond them if you tried—the trees and tangled brush would make entrance impossible.

His few portraits seem to be an extension of his nature ethic. Perhaps the most striking of these is 'Portrait of David', which is the profile of a gaunt, old farmer in a faded denim shirt and suspenders. What Davis does with this seemingly commonplace subject is incredible. The man is like a monument against a

background of deep blue, and his face has the dignity and character of years of hard work and suffering. Another is 'Lorne's Hand' in which a strong, weathered hand is shown resting casually on a post. This one is done in two versions—one a pointillist sketch and the other a water-colour, which in a way gives you but two vantage points from which to view the subject. In this picture Davis takes one insignificant

moment and expresses a lifetime.

Davis's view of Mother Earth seems to be a typically Canadian one, in which nature is seen to be both ominous and gentle—and always beyond man's control.

The artist was born in

Winnipeg and has lived in California and Vancouver. He is currently studying at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and will receive his B.F.A. this May.

The Leighton Davis exhibition will be showing in the

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