

the symphony

Last Saturday night I went to the Edmonton Symphony concert with the intention of reviewing it for the Gateway. Not being an experienced concert goer, my task was certainly not an easy one.

Nor was the program that conducive to writing an inspirational review. One of the compositions, Tchaikovsky's 1st Piano Concerto, is a standard. Schumann's 4th symphony, while lesser known, doesn't exactly give him a reputation for being a creator of brilliant or subtle themes. Perhaps the only exciting addition to the program was Manus Sasonkin's *Musica Post Prandia*--part of the excitement (for U of A audiences, any how) being due to the fact that Sasonkin is the acting chairman of our music department.

Musica Post Prandia translates as "After Dinner Music". and Sasonkin describes it (he prepared his own program notes) as being "conservative" in style. Reactionary might be a better word for it. The style seems to be that of the early 20th century French neo-classicists, suggesting the cool refinement and eclectic styles of Poulenc or Satie. Certainly, the substitution of harmonic complexities with a relaxed, almost conversational contrapuntal style reflects much of the early French reaction against impressionism. But times have changed--and now

it's difficult to conjecture what is being reacted against. Is it the forcing of music into mathematical formuli (eg. Stockhausen, Foss), or the randomness established by composers such as Cage--where it is the audience's duty to supply the order--or is it the very novel (and sometimes gimmicky)

creations of new sounds through unorthodox use of standard instruments, or by the introduction of new instruments? What the reaction is against is unclear--but it must be a reaction! Why else would a composer totally ignore all the advances that have been made in music since the 1930's?

The piece begins with the wind instruments building up as the other instruments gradually enter. In between each of the three movements there is the traditional pause. The first movement is heavy, while the other two are lighter; the almost fugual style of the second movement suggests an after dinner conversation--though a somewhat stodgy one, probably among a group of the academic elite. The last movement definitely seemed to be a reaction against 20th century music, with allusions to various classical and romantic composers thrown in.

While Dr. Sasonkin makes claims for the simplicity of the composition, to my mind it was actually kind of a head trip, with themes thrown in almost at random, then repeated at various times throughout the composition--but very cleverly

disguised. Despite my own biases about the nature of the piece, it was definitely worth being put on the ESO's repertoire. To my own ears the actual performance seemed fairly good, despite a few miscues, including a tonal infraction from what was probably a waterlogged french horn.

Schumann's 4th symphony is almost the opposite of the *Musica Post Prandia*, with rich harmonies and only the minimal amount of counterpoint. If the Sasonkin work was conversational, the Schumann work is question and answer. There are periods where the only counterpoint consists of the strings responding to statements made by the brass instruments. The symphony begins with a slow, arpeggio introduction (which later re-appears in the 2nd movement), followed by an Allegro. Themes from one movement are frequently repeated in another, giving the symphony much more unity than any of his other three. Although Schumann employs a lot of strange rhythmic patterns and subtle syncopations, I found that most of the main themes had very little substance; in

particular, the rather lame and scaly theme in the third movement. In this composition, however, I felt that the orchestra was definitely at its best.

Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto Number One in C Major is an old chestnut, the beginning of which everybody knows (and some try to forget). The rest of it, mind you, is creative, and unorthodox in its form. It is difficult to play, since dexterity at pouding out octaves very quickly is required-- and guest pianist Anton Kuerti proved that he has this dexterity.

That, unfortunately, is about all he proved. Regarding Kuerti's performance I am tempted to resort to the old reviewers line that goes "Saturday night Kuerti played Tchaikovsky. Tchaikovsky lost." But I don't think I'll use that one.

Throughout the performance I felt that the pianist was bored with the work and wanted to get it over with as quickly as possible. While the concerto does employ excerpts from Ukrainian folk music and a Russian Cossack dance, I don't think that Tchaikovsky intended it to come

off as "foot-stomping music". But Kuerti's pounding of the loud pedal created a brand new syncopated rhythm to the work that I'm sure Tchaikovsky never would have dreamed of putting in. If it had been anything other than a symphony concert, I'm sure that people would have been dancing in the aisles.

Despite the loudness and the hurried tempo of the soloist, the orchestra complemented him quite well. The only flaw was in between the first and the second movement, where I was unable to distinguish one of the string instruments re-tuning from the pizzicato opening.

While the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra is one of the best orchestras in Canada, I hope that their future programs will be somewhat more daring than this last one. Attempting to devise a program that is popular with the "masses" is only going to alienate those who wish to expand their musical interests beyond the basic repertoire. It is for this reason that I would like the ESO to play more compositions by lesser know composers, particularly young, modern composers--especially Canadians.

Larry Saidman

peace celebration



A November 11 Peace Day celebration was held in the Garneau United Church Hall last Saturday night. The event was sponsored by UAVAC (U of A Vietnam Action Committee). Three local bands donated their time and talents: Hot Cottage, Po'gy and Byte.

we need arts people

we need arts people. (people who would function in a capacity other than a reviewer) for example: be the art gallery person--or the book person or the t.v. person--condense press releases, write inspired articles, if you are interested in specifics (see above) or generals (a bit of everything) come and mingle in the arts department, be cultured. (gateway office, SUB)

theatre three

For their second show, THEATRE 3 will mount an adaptation of Lewis Carroll's delightful children's classic ALICE IN WONDERLAND. This important new adaptation, written and directed by Scott Johnson, combines great loyalty to Carroll's original text with brilliant innovative staging to produce a living fantasy. Unique features of the production include the use of dancers and hand puppets to re-create the dream of ALICE.

Scott Johnson, author and director of this adaptation is no stranger to THEATRE 3 patrons. Johnson trained at Wayne State and Indiana universities, and worked in repertory theatre for three years in Detroit before coming to Edmonton, where he now teaches speech at the U of A.

Rehearsals are now under way for ALICE IN WONDERLAND, and the cast includes only one female; Rhonda Carlson as Alice. In the rest of the cast we see Jeremy Hart as Carrol, Duchess, and Mad Hatter, Jon Dougall as the White Rabbit et. al. Although enjoyed by all ages, ALICE IN WONDERLAND is without doubt for children. To accommodate the expected overflow of holidaying youngsters, THEATRE 3 has planned an extra week of matinees. The show will play at regular times from December 13th to the 24th, and then will play two matinees a day (1:00 and 4:00) from December 26th to the 31st.

(the journey to the east) (hermann hesse) (panther, 1972, \$1.25)

The writings of Hermann Hesse show an obvious chronological evolution from the mundane to the spiritual, from the concrete to the abstract and from the exoteric to the esoteric.

Two of his earlier works, *Knulp* and *Demian* are recognizable as novels: although they contain a good deal of spiritual and psychological profundity, they nevertheless cling very definitely to a plot and a linear sequence of events. This is not to say that they are not primarily concerned with the spiritual plane above the narrative plane, for they are. But they do attempt to tell a very real story, complete with characterizations, conversations, descriptions, climax's, etc., and whatever visionary or spiritual revelations that Hesse develops are distilled from his down-to-earth story.

But there is a constant progression in later works away from this solid sort of narrative reality. His next major work, *Siddhartha*, whatever its successes as a symbolical and spiritual chart of Hesse's inner life, nevertheless suffers in that towards the end, the plot drifts out of the realm of the credible and into that of the artificial. The elaborate frame that Hesse constructs to support his abstractions almost collapses. In *Steppenwolf*, which is perhaps Hesse's greatest work, there is none of this artificiality even

though the reality of the narrative line dissolves into a fantasy as the novel progresses. The success of this work in fact is in the effectiveness with which Hesse lifts the center of the readers interest from the concrete elements in the story to the elusive, ephemeral and visionary elements.

In Hesse's next work, *JOURNEY TO THE EAST*, (which is what this review is all about) his metamorphosis is complete. Unfortunately, the butterfly never gets off of the ground.

The entire plot is contrived and painfully artificial, obviously existing solely for its symbolical content. Although I was not able to decipher enough of the symbolism to understand in any more than a superficial sense what he was talking about, I am congratulating myself on recognizing that it was in fact an allegory. I dutifully finished the book however and filed it in the closet bookshelf between *Gulliver's Travels*, by Swift, and *The Faerie Queene* by old what's-his-name.

What is remarkable about this thin little book published by Panther (and there must be something remarkable about it to justify a review of a book that has existed in English translation since 1956), is the introduction. I had the fortunate opportunity of reading it before noting the author's name so that I formed all sorts of fresh unbiased

opinions about a person who turned out to be rather well known. It was the usual sort of introduction where a bombastic and didactic author develops an interpretation of a book around an absurd and irrelevant detail. (Kind of like interpreting Hamlet as the story of how Fortinbras regained his rightful throne). Served up in this introduction is the Deluxe LSD Theory of Hermann Hesse. When the author described Govinda's vision in *Siddhartha* as a "classic LSD sequence," I formed an

image of the author as a turned-on professor of comparative literature who had found drugs a useful but phoney gimmick in the lit. interpretation biz. But when he concluded by saying "Before your LSD session, read Siddhartha and Steppenwolf. The last part of Steppenwolf is a priceless manual," I just had to know who this guru was. Need I say it? Timothy Leary, of course, writing in 1966 before he had completely fried his brains.

Arthur Savage

canada west

The University of Calgary will host CANADA WEST Nov. 17-19, one of four regional conferences being sponsored by the Canadian Conference of the Arts. These gatherings are being held across the country in order to obtain views and recommendations concerning the funding of the arts in Canada.

Paul Schafer, York University professor who will be the analyst at CANADA WEST, says: "Canada has arrived at a critical point in its history. Abroad, forces are being exerted on Canada to describe its cultural present and declare its cultural future. At home, more and more Canadians are joining in the search for national unity

and cultural identity."

Yves Trudeau, internationally-recognized Montreal sculptor, will be in attendance, as well as representatives from the Secretary of State, The Canada Council, The Speaker of the B.C. House, The Honourable Gordon Dowding, et. al. Some of the main questions to be discussed include: How can the Arts get to all the people and How shall the Arts speak for themselves to their governments?

The conference promises to be an 'artistic event' of sorts, as the organizers are anticipating painters, potters, sculptors, poets, writers, actors, musicians, craftworkers as well as arts consumers.