

Luca entertains small crowd

by J.L. Round

The small group of performers clustered about in the middle of the stage mirrored the scattered audience of 60-odd people who had come to hear some of the most graceful and stylistically-beautiful music in the world.

It is embarrassing for performers of the renown and acclaim of violinist **Sergiu Luca** and **The Music Fraternity** to be confronted by such a situation after being accustomed to playing to capacity audiences. Perhaps it serves to put one's head in its place, but that is not the point. So what is the point—that ostentatious performers like Van Cliburn will sell out the hall at three times the price and not be a third as interesting? Well, perhaps.

Luca, who is an Israeli of Rumanian ancestry, was brought to study in the U.S. by Isaac Stern. His debut was with the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1964, and since then he has made major appearances worldwide. **The Music Fraternity**, a group Luca organized and regularly performs with, is an excellent five-piece ensemble which devotes its energies to music of the baroque and classical periods.

What makes **The Music Fraternity** stand out from other ensembles is their attempt, technically and interpretatively, to recreate the styles of playing in which a piece was written. To do this they use instruments built to the idea of the times. For example, the violin bow is curved to enable the violinist to play all strings simultaneously while the strings themselves are "gut strings"—a comparative rarity nowadays. Further, the bodies of the instruments are designed to give less tension than modern instruments, which serves to lessen the edge of the sound and increase its resonance. This was immediately evident in the sweet, glowing tone produced by these instruments.

More than just a recreating of styles, however, the group also makes efforts to restore neglected pieces of music to a stature that many well deserve. In the first part of the programme were two pieces which Luca explained were "probably receiving their premiere performances in Canada, somewhat after the fact." The first of these, **Concerto No. 96 in D Major** by Giuseppe Tartini (a famous violinist of his day), was marked by carefully-poised phrases and a meticulous counterplay between the instrumental balance.

The second piece was **Concerto in A Major, Op. 10 no. 2** by Jean Marie Leclair. Leclair, perhaps the most famous French violinist of his day, wrote pieces whose technical demands greatly forwarded the technique of playing bowed instruments in his time. (Somewhat a man of mystery, he ended up being murdered in Paris at the age of 67.) In these two pieces was the crisp, detached secco quality of playing in the baroque seen to full effect.

The concluding portion of the show consisted entirely of Vivaldi's ever-popular **The Four Seasons**, a series of four concerti depicting—of course—the seasons. These Luca introduced individually and explained in detail. His informal comments on the pieces and the nature of the group's instruments were greatly appreciated and added to the concert's appeal.

One unusual aspect of the performance was that these pieces were being played on the instruments for which they were written and in the manner in which they were composed. Nowadays the instrumentation has been augmented and varies greatly, with the work being used much as a show piece because of its popularity. And here the harpsichord provided the strings with continuous accompaniment which is keyboard extemporization on a



Sergiu Luca and The Music Fraternity brought the styles of centuries past to a small but receptive crowd in Halifax recently.

basic line of music, a common feature of 17th and 18th century musical styles.

Now Vivaldi's **Four Seasons** would never make it into the top ten on a "Music I Like Best" list, but it is highly-enjoyable light fare and extremely attractive, particularly in the prelude from "Summer" and the entire "Winter Concerto". In this Luca showed himself to be an excellent showman as well as a master of beautiful tone.

Perhaps it would be valid to question the rationale of preserving the past by retaining "antiquated" musical styles when we should be seeking out new styles in our own time. Maybe so, but it is always an interesting excursion tracing back to the roots, especially with **Luca** and **The Music Fraternity** to serve as an example of living music history. So c'mon, people. I mean, really . . . Van Cliburn? Boring, boring, boring.

Rockwell alive and well in Saskatchewan

by Gregory J. Lawson

Norman Rockwell is one of the most popular artists of our time. Rockwell's work has the incredible quality of perfectly reproducing person, place and thing. Not necessarily through a realistic style, but by simply capturing on his canvas the right movement of the right people, in the right setting, at the right time. His genius results in the most quaintly touching scenes of people that are identifiable to everyone.

There is an inherent warmth and humanness in Rockwell's work that has never since been captured; that is, on the stillness of a canvas. Now, however, there is a new film in town called **Why Shoot the Teacher**. This film has captured that same Rockwell charm and warmth, but on the cinema screen and in living motion.

If you enjoy Rockwell's work you'll love this film. The choice of person, place and thing is perfect. The moment, movement, and setting are flawless. And the warmth and humanness of this work is undisputable.

The persons involved in this motion portrait are basic, prairie farm folk, and a green school teacher from the east, whose first responsibility in the teaching profession is the entire primary school system of the prairie community.

The place is, specifically, Willow-

green, Saskatchewan. Willowgreen is seen as the eternally flat heart land of the bleak prairies. The moment is 1935, the height of the depression. To the hardy farming folk depression is little more than reading material in the daily newspapers.

The setting is primarily a one-room school house that is in the middle of nowhere. The story takes place during the period of an entire school year. School commences with the beginning of winter and terminates with the early signs of spring. In between is the never ending cold, snow, and ice of the hard, long prairie winter.

The overall effect of combining these basic elements in film results in that same warmth and feeling that is present in Rockwell's work. In addition to this, Rockwell's quaintly, touching effect is equally evident.

Max Brown (Bud Cort) as the teacher from the east looks as though he has been directly extracted from one of Rockwell's pictures. His slight, gangly, figure, his simple facial characteristics and his whole state of being all portray him as exactly what he is. This is typical of all characters in the film.

The story is simply about Max's experience of the new world he has come into. This causes a continuing, gentle humour which springs from Max's strangeness to

the prairies' ways and his relationship to the people, as the community teacher.

There is no hero in this film because there is no place for one. There is nothing gruesome or explicit in the story because it wouldn't fit if there were. There are no fantastic landscapes to work with because there aren't any on the prairies. There is nothing new or

unusual in the film because its basic content is completely adequate itself.

The fact is that the makers of this film have beautifully and perfectly utilized the little they had to work with and made a masterpiece out of it. As Norman Rockwell did with his art work they have done with **Why Shoot the Teacher**.

Dristan unnecessary for fine opera concert

by Don Goss

The Dalhousie Department of Music presented another afternoon of entertainment and education in its Sunday Concert series. Excerpts from ten different operas, ranging from Mozart to Puccini, representing different styles and periods of times were performed by mezzo soprano, Elvira Gonnella, and Jeff Morris, tenor.

With a minimum of costuming and staging, Gonnella and Morris welded the diverse selections into a solid and colourful spectacle. They introduced and commented on the plot of each opera, and then performed an aria from it. This allowed those in the audience who were not fluent in the foreign languages to understand what was

going on.

Gonnella, a member of the faculty of the Dalhousie Department of Music, has a truly rich and beautiful voice, and proved what a fine actress she was in the aria "Am I Afraid?", from Menotti's **The Medium**. Jeff Morris, also of the Dalhousie Music Department Faculty, sang masterfully and with great power; especially so in the excerpts from Rossini's opera, **The Barber of Seville**, and **Lohengrin** by Wagner. They were both accompanied skillfully by Helen Murray on the piano.

With two such fine singers, Sunday's concert, **Opera Without Stuffiness**, certainly did not require any nasal decongestant!