

Local pianist a welcome guest

J.C. LaDalia

The Edmonton Symphony Orchestra's most recent performances Jan. 28, 29 and 30, were greeted with special public interest because of the guest appearance of John Hendrickson, the 20-year-old Edmonton pianist whose career has already assumed international proportions.

The program began with Rossini's Overture to his opera *William Tell*. This was a strong, well-pointed performance of an overplayed but beautiful work. From the meditative cello opening, played with warmth by Colin Ryan, to the heroic conclusion, taken by Hetu at a good clip, the work was vigorously entertaining. Several passages (the trombones in the storm scene, the trumpets at the abrupt beginning to the finale) were rawly played but dramatically right, and only increased the intensity. Such an approach can be easily overdone, but here it worked. The flute and oboe passages following the storm were interwoven delicately. There was a slight slackening of strings after the finale's theme was first stated, and pizzicati should have been more incisive, but otherwise the playing was admirably crisp.

The Chopin F minor Concerto followed. Hendrickson's entry told us this was to be an intimate, rather melancholy interpretation, and carefully thought out. There was a sense of inwardness and repose even in the *vivace* last movement. Hendrickson is clearly a sensitive pianist, with impressive technique and an intelligent sense of rubato. His first solo passage, consisting of the second theme, had a rapt, improvisatory quality played as lovely as I've ever heard. However, considering his inward interpretation, the second movement should have been the crown of the performance. Unfortunately it sounded more "public" than the other two.

One reason, I think, was a simple misjudgement of balance. The orchestra played with such

delicacy (especially in the 29-bar string *tremolo*) that the piano was too loud. Then, too, although the soloist perceived the movement as one great song, his left hand's interjections were too forceful, thus impeding the song's movement. Finally, a clarity of touch which was admirable in the outer sections, became, if not staccato, at least quasi-declamatory, which seemed inappropriate in view of his general interpretation. But, these reservations only explain why it wasn't the most perfect F minor performance ever. It is exhilarating to contemplate that Hendrickson is fully capable of such a performance.

The orchestra gave excellent

support, with special kudos for the bassoonist, William Harrison, for his haunting solos.

As an encore, Hendrickson played Chopin's C-sharp minor waltz.

The Dvorak Seventh Symphony in D minor was the post-intermission work, and Hetu relished it. His approach was generally lyrical, rather than taut and weighty, many entrances and attacks being slightly softened rather than razor sharp. In the scherzo and finale a delightful lilt was emphasized. There were several passages (specifically: high strings in the first movement, a cello melody in the finale, and the coda) which were taken more leisurely than is often the

case, and they were very effective. Since Dvorak's woodwind writing is inspired, the gracefulness of our woodwind's playing was especially appreciated. The blazing final chords stirred a few members of the audience to cries of "Bravo!" a word seldom heard at the Jubilee.

Recordings: Toscanini's *William Tell* Overture is still the touchstone, a really electrifying performance. It's available on Victrola, a budget label, with other Rossini overtures. Though recorded in 1953 in mono, the sound is good. If a stereo version is essential Bernstein's (on Columbia) is the best.

The Chopin F-minor concer-

to is performed with poetry finesse by Vladimir Ashkenazy on a London record. Its curiously disc-mate is the Bach D-minor concerto. If an all-Chopin recital is wanted, the best bet is Rubinstein (his earlier recording with Wallenstein) on RCA. Tamas Vasary on DGG. Others include Chopin's *Andante Spianato*. The latter has tremendous sound.

The Dvorak Seventh Symphony is available on two excellent London Stereo Treasury budget records. These are Kubelick's with the Vienna Phil., and Monty Markovitch with the London Symphony. More sumptuous sound is available on Kubelick's newest version with the Berlin Phil. on DGG.

Homecoming reveals a maturing artist

by John W. Charles

John Hendrickson, the 20-year-old Edmonton pianist who is establishing an international reputation, was in Edmonton this past weekend to perform with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. Gateway spoke with him on Saturday following a children's matinee. Hendrickson currently lives in New York where he is in his third year at Julliard School of Music, one of the best music schools in North America.

GATEWAY: What exactly do you study at Julliard? Only the piano? Or are there non-musical subjects as well?

HENDRICKSON: Julliard is a four year music school, and though they offer optional courses in non-musical areas — for example, I took Freshman English — the curriculum is nearly all music. This year I'm taking Literature and Music, which investigates such aspects of music as orchestration, counterpoint, fugue — specific technical matters. At present we're studying late nineteenth-century opera: Berlioz' *The Trojans*, Wagner's *Tristan*, Debussy's *Pelleas and Melisande* ending with Berg's *Lulu*, written in the 1930s. Then all piano students must join the Julliard Chorus.

My piano teacher is Irwin Freundlich (he's one of the main reasons I chose Julliard) and I see him each week, and am working on various pieces for him.

One of my favourite courses, which I've taken every year, (it's an elective), is Chamber Music. In it I work with other instrumentalists, say violinists, cellists, clarinetists. We play trios, quintets, whatever. Languages are available (French, Italian, German) but they're aimed primarily at the vocal students who are learning lieder and opera. And you can do just so much in four years.

G: It certainly sounds like a lot. What music are you presently working on?

H: I'm especially interested in late Beethoven at the moment, so I'm learning his Diabelli Variations, which is a large piece about forty-five minutes long. I'll be playing it this year in recital. Then I want to begin on some of his last sonatas, such as the "Hammerklavier" and the opus III.

The other large project at the moment is Liszt, especially the piano transcriptions based on operas — and they've really been ignored in this century. At a recital this past autumn I performed his transcription of the "Liebestod" from *Tristan*, and it was the first Julliard performance in forty years.

G: You seem to be mostly interested in nineteenth-century music. What about earlier composers, Bach or Mozart? And what about modern composers?

H: You're right, the nineteenth century holds the greatest fascination for me right now. But I'm working on the Bach E minor partita, and his Italian Concerto. I tend to think in terms of giving recitals, and what's needed to balance them. I'd like to play some pieces for virginal by Byrd and Farnaby. I know some people will frown: playing virginal pieces on the piano! But I think they could sound right, and it would make a very nice opening to a recital.

As for modern music, I'm interested in Prokofiev and Bartok. The only contemporary composer whose piano music really interests me is American — George Crumb. He seems to me a truly humanistic composer, and I'd like to play his *Makrokosmos* and *Voc Balaena* some time.

G: Do you have time to go to many concerts in New York?

H: Oh yes — that's one of the points of going to Julliard. I've heard Rubinstein, and Horowitz — he's fantastic! And some opera, though that's pretty expensive. Emil Gilels is doing all five Beethoven concerti with the Cleveland Orchestra this spring and I'm going to them. Then there are a lot of recitals at Julliard. I'm working right now on the Brahms



Concert pianist John Hendrickson

photo Kevin Gill

D minor concerto for a Julliard competition.

G: Just how does such a competition work?

H: Well, the Julliard Orchestra has a concert season and performs a concerto each time, usually for violin, cello or piano. Any Julliard student who wants to can enter the competition. I've entered several times. Haven't won yet, but maybe next time.

G: Considering the talent such students have, it must be difficult. You've been in many competitions now, haven't you?

H: Yes. Last summer I was one of fifty competitors in the Montreal International Competition. We had to play quite a range of works, but the tough part was learning a new piece written for the competition, a fantasy for piano and orchestra by the French-Canadian Jacques Hetu (no relation to Edmonton's conductor). We were locked up in a convent for a week to learn it. The main problem was that, though difficult technically, and therefore challenging, it wasn't interesting at all musically.

G: How did you fare in the competition?

H: I placed third.

G: Congratulations. Do you really like such competitions? Or do you feel you're under too much pressure?

H: It depends on the kind of competition. The Chopin Competition in Warsaw (1975) was exhilarating. There was a full house at every event. The audience had its favourites and developed a passionate attachment to them. I'm still receiving gifts! The other extreme is the Leventritt Competition in New York, where the public is excluded. So your only audience consists of ten critics, mostly famous older pianists, who sit scattered throughout the hall in complete silence. It's really eerie. I think I'd be depressed by it — the response an audience gives is really important.

The Leventritt, because the

winner plays with the New York Philharmonic, is still an important competition but not

as important as it was 20 years ago because there are a lot more competitions. I think competitions are useful avenues for launching a career, and so

interested in entering them. You've got to keep some perspective. You've got to know what competitions can do and what they cannot do and not feel that you don't win it you'll give up.

You need to have a sense of where you are as a pianist and let such a competition judge for yourself.

G: Is this the first time you've played professionally in Alberta?

H: Oh no. I played with the Calgary Philharmonic in December. I played the Chopin minor concerto there also. I started playing recitals when I was fifteen in such places as Whitehorse and North Battleford. In some ways it's like training for athletic competitions. You've got to get gradual exposure, find out from first hand what various situations are like. When I was fifteen I entered the Chopin Young Pianists Competition in Buffalo, N.Y. and tied for first place. My Edmonton teacher, Alexandra Munn knew the kind of experiences I needed to get, and at what stages I could handle them. I began studying with her when I was twelve. Freundlich was her teacher, by the way.

G: So there's a line of success at work here. What was it like being a high school student going off on concert tours?

H: Frankly it was a hindrance. Except for one or two teachers most people seemed quite sympathetic to my concertizing. They were upset that I was interested in chemistry and physics, and that I was missing classes. Some were actually hostile about my being so involved in playing the piano. They thought it should have been just a nice hobby.

CINEMA

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<p style="text-align: center;">FRIDAY, FEB. 11</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: large;">Jack Nicholson Maria Schneider</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: large;">Antonioni's "The Passenger"</p> <p style="text-align: right; font-size: x-small;">Adult</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">SATURDAY, FEB. 12</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">the ultimate trip STANLEY KUBRICK'S 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY </p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Family. NOTE 2nd showing 9:45 not 9:30 p.m.</p>

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