

## Bethune — confused action

theatre review by Kevin Gillese

by Rod Langley. Playing at the Citadel's Theatre until April 23.

This play doesn't have heart and I think that's an avoidable flaw in a drama about one of Canada's — the world's — greatest humanitarians, Dr. Norman Bethune. Bethune was a man of heart — a heart so big it drew him away from the upper-class genteel medical circles of Montreal and Montreal to immerse himself in relief of suffering wherever he found it. Bethune, whose surgical and tubercular-research work won him fame throughout North America, was an ardent communist in the 1930s and supported the republicans in the Spanish Civil War, organizing a blood brigade which brought him international acclaim and saved thousands of lives. After Spain, Bethune went to China to assist the communists in the fight against Japan and the subsequent communist revolution. There he taught crash-courses in medicine and helped organize medical relief for the Chinese. A slip of his own scalpel caused a blood infection that killed him before the revolution ended. He had become one of its heroes and a man revered as Tse-Tung himself. But to stage a play worthy of the courage and humanity of the man Bethune requires much more than a flawless script and cluttered staging spooned up by the Citadel and playwright Rod Langley. John Neville, let it be said at the outset, is very good — sometimes inspiring — in his role as Dr. Bethune. When he delivers a speech Bethune made before a Montreal audience pleading the merits of the Russian revolution ("a mother in childbirth — is she not ugly, bloody, beaten, but is she not beautiful and heroic?") his strength in acting and Bethune's courage in life become inseparable. But unfortunately, Neville can't hold the show

alone. In addition, playwright Langley confuses the action with so many flippant minor characters that often Neville/Bethune can't even get a word in edgewise. Add to this the jarring use of intrusive moveable stage props which serve only to distance the audience further and you get a show that should be sent back to the books before ever being offered to Edmonton audiences.

The show is not *that* bad of course, since it is a Citadel production and certain of the professional polish pulls the show through, no matter what. Compared to what it should be, however, *Bethune* is a disgrace.

If the Citadel had staged this play with only five wooden boxes for props (instead of trellises falling from the ceiling and left and right wing stages moving on and off the main stage), and if the Citadel had cast the show appropriately and stayed well away from fake Russian and Chinese and Spanish accents, and if director Keith Digby had paced the first hour of this two-and-a-quarter hour show with some life and action, *then* the show would have been a good one.

It still would have been incongruous, of course, since Bethune's speeches could have easily been directed towards the Citadel's black tails-and-tie audience as to the people on stage. And it would have been mis-written, as well, since it would still have the toss-off funny lines that everyone could laugh at without having to face up to the inequalities that Bethune was talking about.

But at least the show would have given us a moving rendition of the life of a truly great Canadian, a humanitarian who gave his life up to the Chinese peasants because he believed in their revolution. And that, at least, would have rewarded all the good intentions of those on the Citadel staff who had the audacity to stage this type of drama in the confines of Edmonton's own luxury theatre.

## Pianist and symphony exhilarate

music review by J. C. La Dalia

One of the year's most exhilarating musical events took place this past weekend when Gary Graffman, soloist, performed with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra.

The entire concert was highly successful, thanks to Graffman, Associate Conductor for the Vancouver Symphony, who conducted with rare aplomb. The opening work, Haydn's 85th Symphony (nicknamed "La Reine") was played with bright and firm tone.

In the first movement's development all strands could be heard with x-ray clarity, precision and balance of most passages in the second and third movements was notable. The last movement was taken fast, but not at whirlwind pace. The result was a very satisfactory performance.

Mozart's great d minor piano concerto (no. 20, K. 466) followed. When Mr. Graffman performed the Prokofiev First here in 1973 it was my first experience in Jubilee and so I attributed much of his clarity to the hall. Hearing him again, however, I am sure that in the intervening years no other pianist has his clarity and presence. His tone tends to be large and heroic, which is not always appropriate in Mozart, especially in the second movement where more warmth and bloom are wanted. But I'm not sure that isn't the hall's fault, with its dry, overbright acoustics.

Over-all it was a beautiful performance. Graffman's handling of the cadenzas was very exciting, and Graffman's conducting was excellent. The outburst in the second movement's middle, wherein the piano passionately exclaims to cascades of woodwind notes was splendid. The last movement had the proper heroic tragic weight until finally reconciled by the triumphant march which ends the work.

After intermission Mr. Graffman played the Prokofiev First Concerto. Here Jubilee's acoustic was effective, as the composer uses the piano as a percussive instrument. In Graffman's hands the frequent toccata passages were galvanizing. Being but 15 minutes long, the work readily sustains interest in its constantly glittering and swooningly lyrical moments. Graffman is one of the work's foremost exponents and a responsive and more-than-prepared orchestra result was visceral music of the first order. The audience should have been there! Not since the Cherkassy played the Tchaikovsky Second has Edmonton heard anything like it.

The last work, Grieg's *Peer Gynt* Suite No. One, would have been an anti-climax. Instead, because of Graffman's intelligent and well-judged response to the work it was most affecting. "Aasa's Death," played by muted strings, was a summing up of all our string playing has accomplished this year. Because Graffman shaped it with care for maximum effect there probably not a dry eye in the house. "Anitra's

Dance" was handled with well-coloured delicacy, and "In the Hall of the Mountain King" grew to a really manic climax.

At the risk of gushing I must say the ESO is fortunate to have a guest conductor who is so musically solid and unpretentious and with whom our orchestra seems to work so well. His solo bows were well-deserved and both players and audience responded enthusiastically.

**Recommended recordings:** Haydn's 85th is best served by Bernstein and the N.Y. Phil. in a set of the complete "Paris" symphonies (82-87) on 3 Columbia records. The Mozart Concerto K. 466 is beautifully played by Alfred Brendel, conducted by Neville Marriner on a Phillips record which includes the K. 491 concerto. Graffman's reading of the Prokofiev First is on Columbia, with the Third Concerto (Szell, Cleveland Orch.) However if you're a Prokofiev fan Ashkanazy's set of all five concerti with Previn and the London Sym. is superb (3 lps-London). Grieg's complete *Peer Gynt* is warmly played by Barbirolli and the Halle Orch. (Angel).

## Bsst's pltnum misses

by Kevin Gillese

Bissett, Bill *Plutonium Missing* (Intermedia Vancouver 1976), 71 pp. \$2.95 paper.

Wht  
s ths  
sht?

Wrds  
without meanng  
scatrd acrss th pge  
wth rggd  
right  
margins  
bt nuthng lse

little thought,  
few unique perceptions,  
no imaginative use of the English language  
beyond a mindless removal of vowels, "language abbreviation."

bill bsst  
hs trly  
ffrrd th rdr  
nthng  
bt  
xcrmnt

arts arts arts ar  
arts arts  
arts arts  
arts arts

## hot flashes

music

The Richard Eaton Singers celebrate their 28th anniversary this year with a presentation of *Elijah* by Mendelssohn, at All Saint's Cathedral, 10035-103 St. on Saturday and Sunday, April 16th and 17th, at 8 p.m. Conductor will be Larry Cook of the U of A music dept. Tickets available at Mike's U of A music dept. and at the door.

The Stringband, Canada's leading exponent of home-made music, will be playing at the Provincial Museum Theatre located at 12845-102 Ave. on Fri. Apr. 15 at 8 p.m.

Bruce Cockburn will appear in concert at SUB Theatre on Fri. May 6, Sat. May 7 and Sun. May 8 at 8 p.m. on Friday and Saturday and at 7:30 p.m. on Sun.

The Edmonton Jazz Society will present two concerts this month, the first being the Bobby Hales Big Band Sat. Apr. 23 at the Provincial Museum and Archives at 8:30 p.m. The second features Oregon in concert at the Hovel on the 29th and 30th of April.

Ensemble vocal Michel Gervais will appear in concert performing the music of Canada, Spain, England, France, Hungary and the US on Wed. Apr. 13 at Vic. Comp. High School at 8:30 p.m. Tickets on sale at LeCarrefour, the Bay, Dept of music, U of A.

Free jazz will be presented at the Edmonton Art Gallery Sat. April 9 with Bill Emes, an Edmonton jazz pianist. Music at the Edmonton Art Gallery is presented with the assistance of the Edmonton Musicians Associations.

cinema

The National Film Theatre presents *Granma's Boy* (USA 1922) part of the Harold Lloyd Comedy series tonight at 8 p.m. at the Central Library Theatre.

Next Mondays ACA presentations at the Hovel 10907-Jasper Ave. are at 7 p.m. *The Rules of the Game* (France 1939) and at 9 p.m. Bergman's *Stardust and Tinsel/The Naked Night*.

theatre

Theatre 3's *Far as the Eye Can See* premieres April 12 and runs through April 23 at 10426-95 St. Produced by Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille, in association with Edmonton's Theatre 3 the play is written by Rudy Wiebe in collaboration with Theatre Passe Muraille.

Theatre francais d'Edmonton presentera *Je Veux Voir Mioussov* un comedie en deux actes de Valentin Katalev au Rice Theatre du Citadel le 15, 16, 22 et 23 avril a 20h et 17 et 24 avril a 15h. Billeets sont en vent au guichet du Citadel 425-1820.

*Bethune* is currently running at the Citadel. Directed by Keith Digby, the presentation stars John Neville, the Citadel's Theatre Director. Tickets are at the Citadel Box Office 425-1820.

The Walterdale Theatre's production of *The Boys in the Band* runs April 5-16 inclusive at the Walterdale Playhouse 10322-83 Ave. Performances begin at 8:30 p.m.

art

The Edmonton Art Gallery will present free films documenting the works of Matisse April 9 and April 16. The first presentation documents the development of the idyllic quality of Matisse's works, the second the growth of the painter who affirmed the use of color above all and carried his vision to the farthest possible limits. Both showings are at 1 p.m.

Richard Chenier's official opening at the Edmonton Art Gallery will take place on April 6 at 8:30 p.m. The artist will be present at the opening and the public is welcome to attend. Richard Chenier has been described as "one of the most individual and arresting of his generation of young Canadian painters."