



MAREK JABLONSKI

—Jim Griffin photo

... as Christ-figure

Edmonton Symphony goes big league

The time has come, I think, for a reappraisal of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. Last weekend's concert convinced me that this worthy body has lost its amateur status.

No longer (alas!) is it possible to overlook the technical faults of performance because the orchestra was young, and because it was trying so hard, and because it obviously had immense quantities of musical insight, and because

(above all) it was the only thing we had.

On Saturday evening last, the orchestra proved that it was professional: it played well technically; it showed control when it had to show control, and spirit when it had to show spirit; it responded well to conductor Joseph Eger; it was good.

Certainly congratulations are in order to the orchestra, to Mr. Priestman, and to the Symphony

Society in general. I think we can congratulate ourselves, too (not because we deserve congratulation, but because it's a pleasant thing to do). I mean, don't you all feel warm and glowy inside over the whole thing?

There is, however, a catch. Now that we have awarded the Symphony professional status, it has to be treated accordingly. And compared, say, to the Toronto Symphony, the ESO is slightly shabby. There are still moments (and not as infrequent as they should be) of incohesiveness, moments when the horns make disastrous errors, moments when the texture threatens to fall apart completely.

There was a time when all of these pitfalls were stumbled unerringly into at least a dozen times per concert. But they were ignored, for the most part, because everyone concerned meant well, and the shape of the piece usually emerged with no fatal injuries.

But if (as the Symphony Society has been saying for the last three years), the orchestra really is professional, all of these little technical peccadilloes will have to be exposed in all their pristine ugliness.

SOLIDLY COMPETENT
Now on to the concert itself. Verdi's powerful, if not exactly subtle, overture to *La Forza del Destino* was probably the best-played item on the program. The piece is a straightforward selection of tunes (all of them good ones) taken from the opera, permuted, and plunked together with a coda tacked on at the end.

The orchestra under Mr. Eger handled it carefully, so as not to bungle it, and it didn't. Especially outstanding was the clarity of texture that Eger managed to get in the quiet sections.

Tchaikovsky's Second Symphony "Little Russian" is definitely not typical of the composer so justly reknowned for powerfully subjective melodrama and dying fall. It is a slighter work than any of his last three symphonies, but contrives to be a little masterpiece of grace, charm, and (in the last movement) drama.

After a slightly confused first movement, the orchestra settled down and delivered a solidly competent performance.

The last half of the program was taken up with the playing of Sergei

Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto, with Marek Jablonski as soloist.

Technically, Jablonski has never been better, and he managed to make the first movement quite exciting.

Towards the end, the fantastic demands of the piece began to tell, and his playing became slightly muddy. But to reach the three-quarter mark in Rachmaninoff's Third without suffering some degree of fatigue is a gift given to very few.

It was, on the whole, a very good performance indeed.

RACHMANINOFF PROBLEM

This is probably as good a time as any to thrash out The Rachmaninoff Problem. It goes something like this: *Sergie Rachmaninoff—Great Poet of the Soul or Arch-Romantic Villian?*

The significant thing to remember about Rachmaninoff, I think, is that he was a LATE Romantic.

That is, all the intellectuals are mad at him for not writing like Schoenberg, and all the swooners whose sensibilities are trapped back in 1875 are ecstatically happy with him for writing like Tchaikovsky.

Obviously both factions are wrong. There's nothing wrong with not writing like Schoenberg (or with writing like Tchaikovsky, for that matter), but then there's nothing wrong with writing like Schoenberg, either.

In point of fact, Rachmaninoff, wildly inconsistent as he was, turned out in the end to be a very good exponent of subjective lyricism and High Romantic passion when he was "on", and a trivial sentimentalizer when he wasn't.

Luckily for symphony-goers, the Third Piano Concerto has more of the first Rachmaninoff-persona than the second.

NEXT PROGRAM

To insure a really merry Christmas, the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra will have Arthur Fiedler as a guest conductor for its next presentation (December 10 and 11).

In the works (which are all rusty and grease-clogged) at The Gateway is a diabolical plan to interview Mr. Fiedler for an upcoming issue of *Casserole*. Watch for it and run!

—Bill Beard

WAITING FOR GODOFFAL or THE OLD OAKEN BECKETT a tragicomedy in one column

(Scene: The roof of Assiniboia Hall, gaily decked with confetti produced from 30 years' back files of freshman essays. There is a dead, leafless tree in the centre of the roof. Binkie and Bismark are standing listlessly under the tree.)
BISMARK: Oaf! You forgot the list again.

BINKIE: Lithp? Lithp? I have no lithp.

BISMARK: You uncultured boor! Have you never heard Franz Liszt? (Enter the Flying Dutchman)

THE F. D.: Who are you calling an uncultured Boer? I formally challenge you to a duel. Choose your weapon.

BISMARK: Indian wrestling at 20 paces.

(They assume positions for Indian wrestling.)

BISMARK: Binkie, give the signal.
BINKIE: Wrest, wrest, perturbed spirit!

(They grapple. Enter the Garneau Grappler.)

THE G. G.: Put down your bright legs, or the dew will rust them.

BINKIE: This is no rustling match, o dim one.

(The leaves of the leafless tree rustle inaudibly.)

THE G. G.: Smart-aleck tree!

THE TREE: Shut up, or I'll press my leafless mouth against your sweet-smelling breast, you nit!

BINKIE: (scandalized): What? In front of all these people?

THE G. G.: Yes, have you no shame? I prefer to work at night, myself.

THE TREE: Say, what are all you people doing here, anyway?

BINKIE: We're Fifth Columnists. No, really we're the dregs of an English Department party. Tonight we discussed "Erotic Elements in the Poems of Anon."

THE G. G.: I'm just an amateur in this field, but I wonder if you could tell me: who *really* wrote Shakespeare's plays?

BINKIE: Well, naturally a lot of work has gone into discovering the real author of the plays. Plenty of theories were advanced—Bacon, Marlowe, George Bernard Shaw, Walt Kelly . . . But a member of our very own department has finally proved, actually *proved*, that the plays were not written by Shakespeare, but by Homer.

THE TREE: Homer and Jethro?

THE G. G. (ignoring it): But I thought no one knew who wrote Homer's works.

BINKIE: Well, I admit there's a problem there, but then, after all, that's the Classics Department's area, isn't it?

(Enter a Classicist, on a bicycle.)

CLASSICIST: Aha! Shakespeare wrote Homer's works. *Drat!* My beard keeps getting caught in the spokes.

BINKIE (mockingly): You spokes?

(The Classicist rides off the edge of the roof, chanting Virgilian hexameters as he goes. Meanwhile, the wrestling match ends as BISMARK, with a mighty effort, heaves THE FLYING DUTCHMAN onto the roof of Pembina Hall, where he is consumed by sex-starved female grad students.)

BINKIE (his eyes glazing over): Is this a dagger I see before me, its Handel towards my hand?

(He seizes the dagger and stabs BISMARK, who collapses, oozing raspberry jam. Enter a lost Computing Science grad student, pushing a complicated computer.)

STUDENT: Which way to the Vandergraf Generator?

(At this point, all of the remaining characters, seized by a wild and incomprehensible force, begin to attack each other violently. Then, from the output jack on the computer, a Shadowy Shape emerges. Everyone freezes with amazement.)

BINKIE (to the Shadow): Who are you?

THE SHADOW: Fool! I'm the God from the Machine.

—The Fantastic Trio

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