

Cherkassky at the ESO

Rumor has it that Pierre Hetu is quite capable of making the musicians of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra feel more than a little uncomfortable about giving a performance that does not meet up to their potential and his expectations. It is out of that kind of rigorous discipline coupled with a sensitive demand for quality, however, that performances of artistic excellence arise. By placing those demands upon the members of the ESO, Hetu has been able to exorcise a good deal of the slack that has weighed down the sound that the orchestra has produced in previous concerts. But, as Saturday evening's concert has shown, Hetu puts an edge on the music that the musicians create. The result is that he is providing an impetus towards greater precision and clarity of performance, a result which is of increasing benefit to the audience.

The concert began with a pleasant, if somewhat unoriginal piece, by the contemporary French composer, Jacques Francaix. The reason that his *Serenade for Small*

Orchestra is "pleasant" is because of a certain familiarity which it has, not because it has been played all that often, but because it contains a more than reasonable seasoning of styles and techniques heard in the works of other more esteemed composers. Upon hearing the ostinato passages and particularly the bassoon introduction to the second movement, I could not help thinking that these were so characteristically from the musical palette of Stravinsky that they could not work, in so blatant a manner as Francaix used them, anywhere but in *Le Sacre du Printemps*. But, regardless of the structure of the piece, the ESO gave its audience a fine reading and in doing so introduced it to the solo talents of several musicians who have not seen prominence this season. Bassoonist Eddy Bayens did an extremely warm job of the solo passage mentioned above. It is hard enough to get that instrument up into the high register, and to play the passages with the clarity of tone which Bayens delivered is a formidable task. As well, trumpeter Ed

Nixon and trombonist Macolm Forsyth left no doubt as to their own virtuosity in the solo passages heard in the fourth movement marked *Vivace*.

Robert Schumann's *Symphony No. 2 in C Major, Op. 61*, the second piece on the ESO's program, opened somewhat haltingly in the first movement, but became more cohesive as the piece proceeded, and ended as one of the better performances of the symphonic literature heard this year. The initial problem in the orchestra's presentation seemed to be one of timing, with the brasses coming in just a wee bit late, giving the passage an unnecessarily jarring effect. Throughout the whole of the first movement, Hetu's choice of dynamics for the brass choir was questionable, in that he gave too much prominence to them and disturbed the balance of the piece. The second movement, a *Scherzo*, heard some delightfully well-played horn and woodwind passages, notably in the first of the two trios.

However, the most musically satisfying moments in the symphony occurred in the very beautiful third movement, marked *Adagio espressivo*. Here, the ESO paid fitting tribute to the very lyrical passages with which Schumann provided them. Most remarkable was the solo work of oboist Perry Buaman, who is the associate principal playing opposite principal oboist

Robert Cockell. It is nice to discover that the orchestra not only has talented principal players but has, in some sections, considerable depth to call upon. As well, in the third movement, the orchestra executed some extremely well-controlled pianissimo playing which greatly enhanced the tension which the composer was attempting to create in those moments. The symphony ended energetically and the

nobility of the final chords made the clumsy work by the brasses earlier in the piece almost irrelevant. It may come as a surprise to those of you who have been dismayed by the grotesque readings of piano concertos heard this year that, yes indeed, the piano can be played sensitively. This point was more than adequately driven to heart by the talented fingers of Shura Cherkassky whose performance of Rachmaninoff's *Concerto for Piano No. 3 in D Minor* was unquestionably the finest solo performance heard in this town since Claudio Arrau last performed Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto*. Cherkassky, who is so small in physical stature that he spent a full minute lifting his piano stool up to the proper height, whose fingers are so short that one wonders how he can make the stretches he has to execute - this man captured the poignancy of Rachmaninoff's concerto and delivered it, cooked to a turn, as a gourmet feat for his audience. Granted, the piece began somewhat clumsily, with both Hetu and Cherkassky struggling

to establish tempo and balance. If the opening was dangerously inconsistent, then the remainder of the piece was exquisitely flawless. The highlight of the performance, one in which Cherkassky's sensitivity demonstrated itself the best, was ironically enough in an accompaniment passage which he was playing for the solo passages of the flute, oboe and horn respectively. One could hear in those delicate passages that he was playing for each of the different instruments, even though the passages were written relatively the same in each case. His reading of the second movement had an enchanting aura about it, and his transition from the second to the third movement was brilliantly executed.

The concerto ended powerfully, yet with a clarity of the tone rarely heard with piano pieces. It is unfortunate that the woman who came up to the stage to implore him to play an encore at the end of the performance failed in her efforts. But, she tried - so did we all.

Proposal for doctor of music program approved by GFC

The executive of General Faculties Council Monday approved a proposal to set up a doctoral program in music at the University of Alberta.

It was also recommended that the program be given a high priority in making budget allocations.

The Academic Development Committee, the body designed to study academic budget priorities, reported that no additional funds or staff would

be required to establish the program.

The committee consulted several international music experts on the program, and received favourable reaction.

In fact, Henry W. Kaufmann, chairman of the music department at Rutgers University, felt the program "is one of the strongest offered on this continent..."

The proposal will be sent to general faculties council for approval.

Edmonton Folk Club

The Edmonton Folk Club is going into its last couple of meetings for the year. These people do more for folk music in this city than any one else so if you're at all interested in the folk scene there are still a couple of chances left this year to take them up on their offer.

On December 11 the emphasis is on Western Canadian Folk Music. For this occasion the folk club will be meeting on the 14th floor of Tory building in the lounge. Starts at 8:00 p.m. and the admission is free. Meeting will take place on Wednesday, not Tuesday as was originally reported in the Oracles column of this paper.

December 18 will feature Christmas folk music - mainly traditional, with a special emphasis on the Christmas music of the British Isles.

Phase II

A new theatre enterprise has opened in town recently. The alumni of the Victoria Composite Performing Arts department have put together a company under the title Phase II.

In search of the largest possible audience the company has chosen the popular British mystery-comedy, *We Must Kill Toni* for their first presentation.

The play will be directed by Don Pimm and the cast includes Shelly Superstein, Don de Beaudrap, John Treleaven, Dany Lineham and Linda Hiller.

Show opens on December 5 with a 8:15 curtain time. Tickets are available from Mikes or the Bay.

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DATE: December 14th
CINEMA: Paramount Theatre

HOUR: Midnight

QUENTIN & WILSON

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is 18, although the dancers range in age from 15 to 26. Most of them are from Alberta having come up through the ranks through the school with years of training and performing under their belts.

The Christmas week shows - a matinee performance Boxing Day in Edmonton, followed by an evening performance on the 27th, and evening and matinee shows in Calgary on December 29th and 30th respectively, will draw on dancers from the school.

A total cast of 40 will perform the exciting and electrifying classical and modern jazz program including two new Canadian world-premiere performances.

One is "Mobiles in Motion".

by Brian Foley, Toronto choreographer with the Wayne and Shuster Show and choreographer for skating star Toller Cranston.

The other is "Harp Concerto," by Larry Dill Hayden. "Quest," a haunting underwater ballet, and "Big Top," a fun circus piece designed for the whole family are also on the program.

In order to be eligible for grants from the Federal, Provincial, and Civic governments, the Alberta Ballet, a non-profit organization, must raise a substantial percentage of their own operating funds.

As the province's first professional dance company, and a group that's truly bringing enjoyment and pleasure to so many, they certainly deserve our support.

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