

# ARTS 73

## guest conductor

Before a capacity crowd and a distinguished panel of judges, four of the Province's most promising young musicians competed in the Alberta Prize Winners Competition Concert held at the Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium.

I would not presume to set my layman's opinion of the competitors against the expertise of the judges and as the concert progressed it became apparent that their task was an unenviable one.

The nervousness of the young artists was evident, fortunately the audience showed complete empathy toward them and this, no doubt, encouraged them to attain the high degree of excellence during their performance.

I particularly admired Montgomery's performance of the First Movement of Chopin's Piano Concerto in E Flat. This was a work with which he was definitely familiar, there was excellent communication between the young artist, Kardash and the orchestra. I have heard this work performed on numerous occasions and would class this artist's interpretation as almost technically perfect.

John Hendrickson gave a competent performance of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto (First Movement). He was obviously well rehearsed yet for some reason his rendition came through with a blandness and lack of enthusiasm that could possibly be attributed to Kardash's somewhat loose handling of the orchestra.

Joachim Seeger was extremely workmanlike in his performance of the Greig Piano Concerto (First Movement). The rousing chords in the early part of the movement were ideally suited to the artist's rather aggressive style, yet there was a certain lack of delicacy in the lighter passages.

It seems unfair to place an

operatic tenor in open competition with three concert pianists and whilst I had perfect confidence in the panel of judges as to their ability to distinguish and evaluate the technical merits of each performer on an unbiased basis it would appear that Roger Ohlsen did not. I have no desire to criticize a budding talent too severely his 'Vainement, ma bien aimee' was only passable and his 'Che gelida manina' was a complete fiasco of lost notes, changed keys and an orchestra over which the conductor had absolutely no control. I hope that somewhere, someday Mr. Ohlsen is given another chance, obviously this debacle was not entirely of his own making.

The second part of the concert came under the baton of the very competent Lawrence Leonard. The change in the orchestra was startling under his very authoritative direction. The delightful Schubert's Sixth Symphony with its many variations of mood and rising repetitive crescendoes was a fitting climax to this pleasant evening's entertainment.

To encourage talented musicians in the manner of this competition is a tremendous idea and I hope that consideration of finances or other trivialities will not preclude the competition from becoming an annual and well respected contribution to Alberta's cultural activities.

Ken Williams

Tonight at RATT, the Edmonton Folk Club will feature Roy Agnew, an Edmonton singer and guitarist, and Chuck Roberts, a Toronto folksinger who was one of the directors of the Mariposa Folk Festival. Everyone is invited to participate in the singalong workshop; bring along your own instruments. No admission charge, donations welcome, 8 p.m.

## It was almost wonderful in aliceland

Walter Plinge

If for one reason or another you missed or avoided Theatre 3's presentation of *Alice in Wonderland* you lost out on one of the more pleasant pieces of theatrical entertainment in the city during the Christmas season. *Alice*, though badly flawed in a few instances, was a wonderful show, in the truest sense of the word. It was the kind of show that left you sitting with a contented grin of delight on your face. Just plain, ordinary delight. If you hadn't rubbed minds with Carroll's work for some time it was like a refresher course in innocence, a tweaking of jaded senses which constantly reminded one how much "childness" we lose trading in our childhood fantasies for reality's malignant nightmares. What this production preserved, above all else, was Carroll's delicate balance of confusing nastiness and the eccentric behavior a child's mind can endow on creatures seemingly more human than parents. Thankfully we were spared a reiteration of Disney's glucose-ridden, diabetic monstrosity which tended to strip the story of all but the little girl sweetness so beloved of harrassed parents.

*Alice* as a show was fraught with an unusual set of problems for the designer. Lee Livingston proved quite adept at coping with them in an adequate manner by maintaining a discreet simplicity. The changes in size were simply handled by

diminutive set pieces when Alice was large and puppets to replace the characters when Alice was very, very small. Puppets have a magic all their own as every child knows and every adult remembered when confronted with Don Mill's delightful creations. There was an obvious and frustrating skimpiness about the set and costumes which was undoubtedly enforced by the theatre's economic straight-jacket. Hopefully, some day there will be enough money to do these things with the full fervor they deserve.

Since the backbone of *Alice in Wonderland* is Alice, the highest praise must go to Rhonda Carlson who created a quintessential Alice and skillfully avoided the cloying sweetness that could all too easily have exuded from any characterization. Adroitly and bewitchingly she remained the perfect Alice as her world grew curiouser and curiouser.

There were some other fine performances from others in the cast as well. Jeremy Hart as The Duchess and The Mad Hatter contributed two finely limned characterizations, preserving the controlled nastiness in the former and a redundant perversity in the latter. His fine timing kept his scenes fairly bubbling with profitable confusion. Johnathon Harrison in a like manner proved particularly captivating as the speaking third of a truly

marvellously created caterpillar which proved so confounding to Alice. His equally fine Queen was delightfully arbitrary in a malevolent manner and as an instructive Gryphon he was convincingly condescending to Alice.

David Stein was exceptionally busy in five different parts, all of which he carried off with great relish. His portrayal of the Cheshire Cat and The March Hare were particularly touching in that they seemed to be singularly just right. Such was not the case with James DeFelice, alas, who floundered pitifully as The Mock Turtle. As a character The Mock Turtle is almost a set piece which required much sharper distinction and far more vocal precision than DeFelice offered. His failings as the Mock Turtle did find some use as the bumbling inarticulate and castrated King which was funny even if it was so for all of the wrong reasons.

The Alberta Contemporary Dancers fleshed out the cast and made a somewhat questionable contribution to the proceedings. As dancers they were charming but as actors they induced despair. Perhaps it is too much to expect dancers to speak like actors but better not at all than that they should squeak like dancers. The choreography was not very inspired and absent it would hardly have been missed. It seemed like a fine idea. It just didn't work.

Scott Johnson's direction of his own adaptation was blatantly simplistic. His work was adequate in a superficial manner. On the credit side he did manage not to destroy Carroll's fantasy by trying to produce an extravaganza and in that light he seemed to have made most of the right compromises. If his creation wasn't exciting it did offer us a coherent appraisal of the tale.

*Alice in Wonderland* was not without its shortcomings most of which were minor but were culminatively irritating in an uncomfortable way. Still, the production's merits did outweigh most of the misgivings one might have had if for no other reason than Carroll's idea survived triumphantly. It's a hard tale to destroy. If you missed it you owe yourself a swift kick in the rump and a good long frustrated suck on your thumb.

## studio (R.A.T.T.) albany

If you get off on low key performances by songwriters doing their own material, you would have enjoyed Bob Carpenter's two evenings at the Albany Studio Part 2.

When I say low key, I mean that Bob cut through the pizzazz and sang his songs for what they were worth. This and his bass voice with a simple guitar accompaniment impressed me. His material is honest and poetic without deluding itself and its importance. It follows common images such as ships. Ships sailing across oceans of life and wisdom. The difference is that

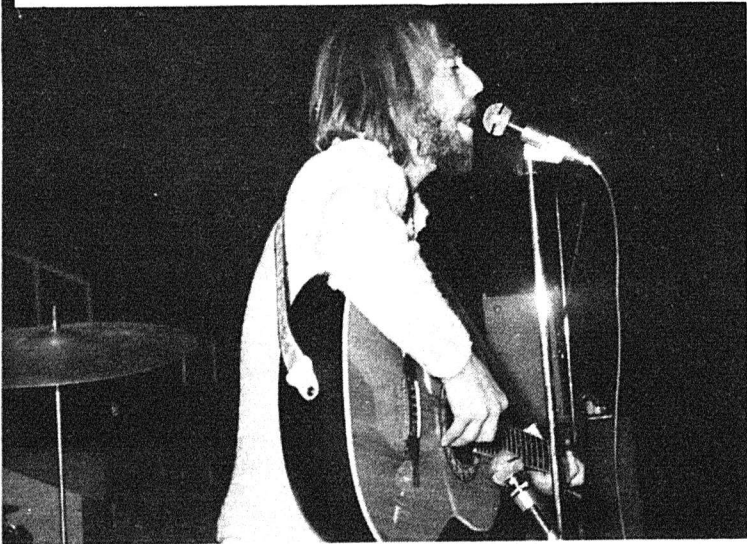
Bob Carpenter's ships are magical and some of them so magical that they concretize and become reality.

Two well known guitarists sat in with Bob on some songs. Bob Edwards sat in on Friday night and Steve Bodington on Saturday night. Their styles added new mood and strength to Carpenter's plaintive songs.

In two weeks, Jan 19 and 20, HOME will be performing at the Albany. The eight piece group is a switch from folk into progressive rock-jazz and poetry. See you there!

John Shearer

## tom northcott: (re) (inter) view



Harold Kuckertz, jr.

Tom Northcott was happy. Having just completed his December concert with the Edmonton Symphony, the singer told me backstage how much he had enjoyed the evening. "I really liked it. It was great." He was certainly not the only person to leave the Jubilee satisfied that night as the standing ovation had shown at the end of the concert. Northcott continued the

conversation with a remark about the orchestra:

"The attitude of the ESO is ideal to work with. They really played behind me. They've got the right beat." Members of the orchestra returned the compliment by expressing how much they had enjoyed playing with the singer.

In conjunction with the ESO Tom Northcott performed "And God created woman" and "Lifesong(movement 1)", both

superbly arranged and orchestrated by Spring member Robert Buckley. The orchestra, however, played only a minor role in Northcott's presentation. It acted as a large backing band, effectively used to underline the main themes and choruses of his compositions. The encore —when Northcott played the not yet orchestrated second movement of "Lifesong" alone —showed that the orchestra had served to enrich the music without being a necessity for it. Asked whether he preferred playing with or without orchestra, Northcott said he liked both. Personally I preferred the pure folk part without orchestra.

For those who would like to hear "Lifesong" again, I have good news. Tom plans to record it with an orchestra for release "next spring or in a year's time." He would like to record it with the ESO, not because of its Procol Harum fame in pop circuits, but because he likes their style and feeling for his music. The recording of "Lifesong" can be the turning point for Tom's attempt to win international recognition.

"Lifesong" possesses the two factors necessary; originality and commerciality. In a way one might compare it to Don MacLean's "American Pie". Both singers have a certain similarity in musical style, a mixture of folk and rock. Further more, as "American Pie" summarizes MacLean's outlook on music, Northcott's view of life is represented in "Lifesong". "As we believe, so shall we grow. Where it will lead is not ours to know. So simple the ways of pleasure and pain so why do I come to question again ("Lifesong, mov. 1")." I asked Northcott from where he gets the inspiration for his lyrics. "I get my ideas from simple colloquialisms and put them into my own words." Musically he "tries to keep the songs simple but original". Even with Buckley's sometimes monumental arrangements Northcott's compositions kept their basic simplicity and one could almost sing along on first hearing. Music and lyrics combined represent some of the finest music Canada has to offer at the moment and it might be with "Lifesong" that Tom

Northcott finally achieves the international breakthrough he deserves.

Spring played during the first half of the concert. They are a tight band and have in Terry Frewer and specially in Bob Buckley, two composers whose musical capacities surpass those of most of their contemporaries. Their music is very rich and varied, combining rock, jazz, blues and classical elements. Unlike Northcott their presentation really was a coproduction between group and orchestra, giving both a possibility to display their capabilities. Spring's "Song cycle" is one of the few good attempts to combine orchestral and popular music. However, there was one weak point in their performance. Terry Frewer's voice is good in combination with a rock band, but backed by strings, Terry sounds rather weak. Bob Buckley's singing faces the same problem. This is a point where the group could still improve their overall good performance.

(Lyrics printed with permission of Tom Northcott).