

Sequined dreams

BY JOHN CULLEN AND
ANDREW SIMPSON

Last Friday night, instead of doing the usual, Andrew and I decided to expand our minds. We're not talking about peyote, just Symphony Nova Scotia's tribute to Liberace (that's chey).

Why bother, you might ask. Well, as true aficionados of the strange and absurd, we felt a Liberace tribute might be fertile ground for some entertaining weirdness.

We arrived just in time to get a chocolate bar. Chocolate Bar Man was stern about us NOT eating our candy inside the theatre, but we smuggled it in anyway.

"Yeah, down with the Man," shouted Andrew as we found our seats. As the Symphony tuned up, Andrew chewed loudly and expressed his love for Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. I couldn't handle his pathological aversion to authority. "Would you just quit it? The lady beside is getting angry — she seems fragile."

"Yeah yeah," Andrew replied. "Down with the Lady, too."

Brian Jackson, roving conductor to small town Canadian cities, was the man with the sequined jacket for the night. He came on and quickly told the audience that in no way was he going to impersonate Liberace.

Andrew whined, "What is he talking about? I wanted glitz. Let's get our money back." I tried to calm his nerves by giving him some of my Kit Kat bar and reminding him that Arts Editors never have to pay.

"Yeah you're right," he agreed. "But let's try to scam the box office after the show anyway. We'll say we were misled by their press release."

"Yeah OK," I said. But I was scared. All that candy seemed to

be warping Andrew's mind, and I was feeling a little twisted myself.

Suddenly the symphony started cranking out a song neither of us knew. Andrew was so shocked by the sheer power of the music that he crawled under his chair and cowered in terror. "That's not Liberace, Liberace is pleasant music, this stuff's demonic."

I was worried he had become

possessed. Usually Andrew's sort of rational; now he was babbling like a rutting fish. "Fish don't rut," he said, reading my mind. "They spawn."

"Yeah, but you can't just walk around fertilizing eggs," I said. "Especially with all these people around."

"I know," hissed Andrew. "How am I supposed to find my pile of eggs from down here. And what if I want..." His voice trailed off and he turned his head to listen to the symphony.

"Hey that's 'The Entertainer,'" he exclaimed, looking a bit more relaxed. "My Grandmother used to play that for me all the time."

Andrew started humming and a stupid, far-away look came over his face.

I asked the grandmotherly-looking lady next to me if I could have a look at her programme. Sure enough, my fishy friend had called it right — "The Entertainer" by some guy named Joplin.

Over the next hour and a half the Symphony, under the direction of raving maestro Jackson, churned out a variety of tunes that Liberace liked to play. Many were re-mixes of classical pieces by composers with scary names like Gershwin, Chopin, Bach and "Rachmaninov."

"No, no, no," cried Andrew,

covering his ears. "I won't listen to you say that name, I won't. It's horrible, horrible..."

"Rachmaninov, Rachmaninov, Rachmaninov," I taunted. Andrew screeched from under his seat and began to sing loudly, still covering his ears. The grandmotherly lady began to sense something wrong, chided teasingly such a tortured soul.

"Down with the Lady," I whispered under my breath.

There were also moments when the music seemed to soothe rather than agitate him. He sat contentedly (albeit on the floor) through a rendition of the *Cats* classic, "Memory" by Webber, and an excerpt from *Beauty and the Beast*, by Mencken.

The highlight of the show was an arrangement of Beatles songs, by Custer, that Liberace had once

played in England as a tribute to the band. Andrew even ventured a peek or two at the stage while exclaiming. "I know that," he said. "That's... 'A Hard Day's Night', you know, the Beatles."

"Yes," I agreed. "The Beatles... too bad about that Yoko thing, though."

Andrew suddenly looked sad again. "You know John, there's a line you just can't cross. Why hurt me by saying things like that? Get it through your skull that some of us don't believe the Yoko theory." I regretted spoiling his good mood.

Our evening came to an abrupt end when the grandmotherly lady offered Andrew a mint. Thinking it was some kind of sexual gesture, he bolted for the lobby with me in hot pursuit.

Music is powerful no matter what form it takes. Just because it's classical, schmaltzy and stigmatized does not mean that it cannot evoke strong emotions and vivid memories. Try something different some day soon — why not let Symphony Nova Scotia take you for a little ride.

Dammit, be quiet up there

BY ANDREA WARD

On Sunday I attended Symphony Nova Scotia's performance of *Beethoven Lives Upstairs*. I was a bit apprehensive about trying to critique something I knew so little about, so you can imagine the pleasant surprise when I arrived at the Rebecca Cohn and found hordes of children. I thought, either the music children listen to has really changed since I was young, or yuppie parents are trying to force feed culture to their kids at an awfully early age. Once I received the program I realized the performance was actually aimed at children. This was reassuring, because if children can understand it — so can I.

The Classical Kids series finds a common ground for children (or the musically-challenged adult) and classical music. *Beethoven Lives Upstairs* features a combination of music, history, and dramatic storytelling. The story provides a small insight into Ludwig van Beethoven's character, personality and genius.

Beethoven Lives Upstairs was developed by Susan Hammond, who chose only small sections from Beethoven's symphonies in order to keep the performance from lasting all day.

The plot centres around a series of letters between the fictional characters Christoph and his uncle. It seems Ludwig van Beethoven has rented the rooms upstairs in Christoph's house, and his eccentric behaviour is causing Christoph some grief. It is through the correspondence between Christoph and his uncle that we learn about Beethoven's

character and genius.

What I found most remarkable about the life and times of Ludwig van Beethoven is that at the age of 28, Beethoven started to lose his hearing, and still went on to produce some of his greatest masterpieces. He would cut the legs off his piano and lay on the floor as he composed so he could feel the vibrations of his music through the floor.

When Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Ode to Joy, was to debut, the beloved composers deafness became apparent to the world. Beethoven conducted his latest masterpiece to the elite of Vienna, but the orchestra was completely unprepared and played atrociously. However it was perfect in Beethoven's mind and he continued conducting passionately, oblivious to the fact the orchestra had stopped playing.

Beethoven Lives Upstairs was historical in some senses, yet I found it put Beethoven in a very favourable light. He was rude and pompous until he lost his hearing, at which point he became angry and cranky. It is unlikely he would have shown any kindness to a little boy like Christoph, more likely, he would have looked upon Christoph as a nuisance.

The *Beethoven Lives Upstairs* symphony concert portrays the composer as a hero for today's children. There is no doubt Beethoven was a musical genius, and deserves the utmost respect. However, I question whether I would want my children to have a "hero" like Beethoven.

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