



# FINE ARTS



by Ross Rudolph

From how many a "laudator temporis acti" have we heard of that golden age of pianism that purportedly died with the last direct link with Liszt, in 1946 with Liebling and Rosenthal. Others may stretch a point to include Busoni's phenomenal disciple Petri, just recently dead. But on one thing, these anachronisms are in one hundred per cent agreement: namely, that piano playing is NOT what it used to be. The only other feature that distinguishes these critics is their inability to tell a Schnabel from a schnitzel. I would not establish contemporary instrumentalism as a criterion to judge the past, but not because I am ashamed of its estate. According to one of the performers reviewed later, the present dean of the Royal Conservatory of Toronto endeared himself to all his colleagues once by declaring publicly that piano playing is a plague in Canada. In recent weeks, the epidemic hit Edmonton.

Byron Janis

By far the most celebrated was Byron Janis, protege of Vladimir Horowitz just returned from a triumphal tour of the Soviet Union. There is little question in my mind that the artist was not in his best form, but then second best for Mr. Janis may well outrival someone else's superlative effort. After the announcement had transposed Haydn's Sonata from E flat to D flat, Mr. Janis firmly established the tonality as D Major. This vignette is often assigned students who might have rued their own inadequacy as well as luxuriated in the artist's well judged tone. Never did he hesitate to husband the full resources of a modern concert grand and the slow movement, so anticipatory of later Beethoven efforts, benefited especially from a virtuoso's ability to use the damper pedal in gradations. The occasional false note was not nearly the impediment to enjoyment that the unrelenting S.A.T.B. coughing cantata was.

The tempo set at the opening of Schumann's First Novelette was exactly what the composer had dictated ("Markiert und kräftig"); even the paragon Richter is swept away by his propulsive interpretation. The detache delivery probably gibes closely with the original intention. But one was simply not aware from this performance of the subtle polyphonies of the Trio sections.

Moussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition ended the first half as only they can. Mr. Janis tampers with the music, which is regrettable since we have ample evidence how well it can sound unedited. Mr. Janis plunges in medias res, which is one way of doing it. His gnome is more humorous than grotesque. Only one movement was done better than the "schmalzy" "Old Castle" and that was the atmospheric "Catacombs" (Con mortuis in lingua mortua).

Both Granado's Maid and the Nightingale and Ravel's Sonatine have been played with different piano sonorities, but Mr. Janis' version is at least persuasively arguable. The artist was in his metier for the first Liszt Valse Oubliee and the Sonetto del Petrarca No. 104 (No. 5 from Annees de pelerinage). The playing ran the whole gamut of pianistic effects, superbly controlled and poetically appropriate. Prokofiev's justly famous Toccata was given a steely performance which earned itself a thunderous ovation and the audience encores in the form

of Chopin's A minor valse (op. 30 No. 2) and Debussy's General Lavine Eccentric.

Eva Kowalik

This writer was absolutely unprepared for the impression made by Mrs. Eva Kowalik who rendered Beethoven's demanding C minor 32 Variations in masterly fashion. Any adverse criticism would be picayune, considering that this writer could hardly move his hands to applaud, let alone his digits to play. By all means let us hear more of this well-schooled pianist in solo and chamber work.

Kenneth Nichols

Kenneth Nichols program with the Women's Musical Club was particularly well chosen. Mr. Nichols' performances are invariably sensitive and tasteful. To avoid the maudlin, this young man resorts to tempi that seem invariably rushed. While this aided the realization of the Allemande from Bach's incomparable fourth Partita (slightly truncated: beside the Menuett, the superb Aria was omitted), it made too fleeting experienced out of the already enervated Faure Nocturne. Beethoven lyrical two movement E minor Sonata (op. 90) was given a respectful performance. The real difficulties of the first movement's left hand were forthrightly met. Any young lady serenaded with the rondo might have appreciated less respect and more gallantry.

William Aide

William Aide was guest soloist with the Edmonton Symphony in its November 25 concert. The Mozart concerto No. 25 in C (K. 503) is an heroic work, but Mr. Aide chose to render it in a chamber style. Within that framework, the performance was effective. This artist is of rather an introverted character, and the intimacy that resulted from his statement was welcome between the other fullblown works featured. Edmonton is always anxious to audition young Canadian artists. The function of any critic as well as the duty of any critical audience is to hail what is estimable as well as to censure what is not.

Next week: Lecture recitals.

## Arnott And The Birds

by Elan Galper

Of the eleven surviving plays which Aristophanes the son of Philippos has written, *The Birds* is second only to *The Frogs* in its fame as a first-rate social satire. Such an astringent comedy can fit very well our times, as Peter Arnott has admirably demonstrated on Saturday night. With a few modernizing touches, such as the use of modern slang and references to the Cuban "crisis" and women drivers, Arnott managed to show that basically people do not change, and that the Athenians of 414 BC were very much like the Edmontonians of 1962 AD.

The play itself concerns two men from Athens with an extraordinary idea: they were going to lead all the birds and fowls of the earth in a revolt against the human race and the gods in Olympus, until they gain dominion of the earth. As the play progresses, the audience is given a sardonic glimpse of everyday life, with its comical moments of greed, cowardice, fawning flattery, didacticism, and superfluous, artificial ceremony. Many acrimonious comments fall on the love of the Greeks (and of the men in our "enlightened" age) of litigation. At the end, in typical comedy fashion, Zeus gives in to the demand of the birds and of their two leaders (who managed to

change into birds in the meantime) and declares that the world is "for the birds".

Arnott himself translated the work from the original Greek. His translation was inaccurate—but he did not strive at pedantic accuracy. Instead, he has treated his material quite freely, writing it as to preserve the spirit, if not the letter, of Aristophanes. This fully preserved the unique piquant savour of a fully ripe Greek social satire, whereas a more orthodox translation would have given the play a scholarly, dry air.

By putting in the play several modernizing touches, Arnott tried to show that *The Birds* is an immortal work of genius, applicable still to the Age of Automation (I always called it ironically "The Age of the Feeding Bottle") where the desire to leave everything and "get away from it all" like a bird on the wing is especially rampant. Arnott also preserved the pungent bite of an Aristophanean comedy by using oblique rhyme to deflate a euphuistic strophe.

In summation, the performance was well-done, and thoroughly enjoyable to all those whose idea of good drama is above that of the level of the action-packed, intellectually void, Robin Hood programs on television.

## POETRY PREVIEW

### Queens And Duchesses

by George Johnston

*Miss Belaney's pleasure is vast,  
Indeed it fills the night;  
She doesn't remember who kissed her last  
But he did it good, all right.*

*She doesn't remember who broke her flowers  
When her fastenings came undone;  
Her lipstick hasn't been straight for hours;  
She's had a night of fun.*

*Queens, queens, a little bit lighter  
They go than we of the town,  
And jewelled duchesses, grander and brighter  
When they step down, step down.*

*Queens, queens, they come and go,  
Their loves and deaths are said;  
Duchesses now and again stoop low;  
Miss Belaney is bad.*

George Johnston

Poetry Reading

Friday, Nov. 30, 8:15 p.m.

Convocation Hall



Boris Roubakine lectures on The Composer's Piano

## Milking Sacred Cows For Lucre

by Leishman

"Alas, the trade of humorist is not attracting new blood. We are not even getting the unteachable. They are going into teaching."

The pure humorist, exemplified by Vancouver's Eric Nicol, is a vanishing species. As he himself points out, even the undergraduate newspaper, once a training-stomping-ground for wags, now wheezes solemnly and earnestly over disarmament issues and the like (—like lately sex, man).

Nicol spends his time writing dutifully droll descriptions of the inanities of modern living for a dozen or so newspapers. Every now and then, for increased revenue, his articles are published in book form. *A Herd of Yaks* is a new anthology of the best in these collections, a pot-pourri of amusing (or less) anecdotes, essays and rewritten histories.

One of the ill effects of tying oneself to the security of a weekly column is that one's writing soon begins to sound like it came from a weekly column: excellence is dissipated, quality becomes uneven... No man is a camel, or a yak.

Unlike Leacock, the man whose ill-fitting mantle he officially wears, Nicol finds it difficult to sustain a high level of laughter throughout a long piece. He is at his best in his cryptic, aberrant glances at history: "It is sometimes asked how it was that Erik the Red landed in Canada. But with a name like that he had a fat chance of landing in the States."

Into these he often throws a blatant bit of nationalistic titillation: "Very little is known about the war of 1812 because the Americans lost it . . ." He even proposes the confederation of the United States as Canada's eleventh province so that "the U.S. loses an identity that is resented in many parts of the world and takes on the bland, inoffensive character that all countries know as Canada."

On the whole, *Herd of Yaks* should be taken in small cathartic doses. After ingesting five or ten "yaks" the reader's reactions slip from loud, vulgar guffaws to queasy, cerebral smiles and inaudible titters.

Craftsman Nicol gives his own best justification for his work. In his delightful vision of the unionization of Canadian humorists under the Teamsters, he pictures a convention banner reading "HOFFA LAUGH IS BETTER THAN NONE."

(Herd of Yaks, Ryerson Press)

## The Knife

by Bob Pounder

From Holland has come a very fine motion picture called "The Knife," and it was shown Monday evening at the Edmonton Film Society. It concerns the emergence of a thirteen-year-old boy into adolescence and the emotional problems which therewith ensue. He is a sort of junior Dutch Holden Caulfield, although less cynical and more charming, and his bitter-sweet frustrations are captured by a young actor called Reitze van der Linden with an ingenuity and ease which are without flaw.

Indeed, the director, Fons Rademakers, has drawn excellent performances from every member of the cast, and it seems evident that he is a filmmaker to watch. His camera is skillfully used throughout, but never more cleverly than in a stark dream sequence which smacks of the best of Ingmar Bergman. Stilted slow motion is also used to good effect in creating a complex and enigmatic unity of the film.

The knife of the title represents the defiance of young Thomas, who

steals it from an exhibition as an act of defiance against his mother and his tutor, a good friend of his dead father, whom he resents. The mother is hopelessly in love with the man, a harmless boor, but it is not until the conclusion that the boy begins to realize his mother's needs and his own failings. There is a young girl friend who offers counsel and advice along the way with infinite feminine wisdom and who stirs in him his first feelings of emotional love. She also succeeds in making him realize that his defiance will be to no avail, and in a symbolic act, he buries the knife before being shipped off to school a young man, complete with crew cut.

"The Knife" is full of comic, tender and angry touches. The children go to a fair and visit a Madame Zelda-type fortune teller, one of whose pearls of wisdom for the children is "honesty is the best policy!" They also visit a mixed scout camp by night, where an encounter with illicit sex shocks and fascinates them both.

The anger, confusion and wonder of a boy growing into manhood is brilliantly captured in this film.