



symphony's new main man- interviewed

Now that the Edmonton Symphony Society has announced the selection of Mr. Pierre Hetu as the musical director for the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra for the next three seasons I look back with respect to Tuesday, February 13, 1973 when I had the honor and pleasure of interviewing Mr. Hetu for the Gateway, prior to his guest appearance with our orchestra. The following text has been edited and condensed from the tape of the interview, which was recorded in his hotel room

GATEWAY: In Edmonton we have, I think, a very culturally aware city, but unfortunately when it comes to music, instead of everybody liking a lot of different things, we have a sort of split between all types of music. For example, we have an audience which is almost exclusively chamber music lovers, an audience which is exclusively symphonic and even their tastes differ from those who enjoy ballet and opera. Do you see any way for a type of musical education where the audiences can be made more aware of the different types of music and begin to appreciate them?

MR. HETU: Yah, there is a possibility, but it is through exposure. It depends on what you hear when you're young. If you are more inclined or if you hear more symphonic music when you're young or piano recitals or more chamber music and if you're not exposed to too much opera or ballet, when you are older you will rather go to concerts where there is chamber music, symphony or whatever. On the other hand, you have the opera public or the ballet public which has been exposed more to opera or ballet than to any other type of music.

GATEWAY: I would imagine that you would feel that music education in the schools would possibly help educate the audiences.

MR. HETU: For contemporary music -- you know what would be fun to try? An experiment to give a child who has never listened to music before, to give him first Xenakis or Stockhausen and really feed him for about three or four or five years and after that, try giving him some (traditional classical music); go from the beginning, giving him Telemann and then build it up and go through until Tchaikowsky and Richard Strauss and just see how he would react in a situation like that. It might be very interesting.

GATEWAY: Do you feel, perhaps, that in music education it's wrong to steer a student exclusively towards performance as an outlet?

MR. HETU: I think the word is 'participation'. I know you are speaking of performance now where students are studying instruments and things like that. Well, I think it's good. It's fun to play an instrument, to study one, but we are all not performers and to become a career performer it takes a lot of talent, a lot of work and a lot of drive. You must be ready to give up everything just to do that and that means that you must love it. That's what you want to do with your career, at whatever it costs. You have to die of hunger for a week, but you still want to do that....As far as the participation today of audiences or students (are concerned) I think that we may be going a bit too far. We speak for example of a new concept where the orchestra is giving a concert where the orchestra is right in the middle and people are all around. In this way they can touch the bass, they can touch the flute. I don't see what additional musical pleasure this would give me, if I had to touch it or if I had to see it close up. I think the new ways of education, starting from Columbia University in New York after World War II were based on participation, new ways of educating, permissiveness -- you know, never let the child contribute, let the child's personality rise up by itself. I think the idea was very good, but we are coming to the point where there is too much of it; too much emphasis is given the visual. As a result you must always see it, an image; accompany a text and in order to understand the text, in order to be able to concentrate on that text. If it is a poetical text of Shakespeare, for instance, sometimes you might spend two hours on one paragraph to analyze the whole thing. This, I think, we're missing today. What we're not teaching the children today is concentration. We think we're teaching it because with the help of the visual and with his full capacities of hearing and his full capacities of thinking he should be able to listen in order to develop his ear (for music) just in listening and without any visual help. It's like a text. You have to be able to read the text one day without the picture. You should be able to concentrate on it.

GATEWAY: What are your views toward the direction of today's popular music?

MR. HETU: I think there's a lot of snobbism there too. To use some Bach in a rock piece just to show

some awareness or advancement over the classics is snobbism. I don't know what direction it is heading, but it seems that in every generation some style seems to come out and eventually disappears to give place to some other style. It's amazing; like the Beatles were the first ones to wear long hair and not only the style of the music, but the image they had toward the public eventually produced a fashion. Now you would be surprised that maybe in five or two years from now who knows suddenly another group may come up with short hair this time and with a new style of music, something which may evolve from rock music and another style. You see, there are people in New York and Hollywood working on this from 8 o'clock in the morning to 10 at night. Do you realize the millions of dollars that records bring in? They follow a record--they follow a style and when they suddenly feel that the style will eventually drop out of fashion they *must* create a new one. Now rock is at its height. Everybody's working on it, but soon it will start dying a little like every style (does); then a new one will come. And the images that will appear that time in front of the public will probably dictate a new fashion....In my time it was the twist. I remember when the twist came. We were all excited and it lasted for about five, six or seven years, and was the music of the times, when we started to move the derriere. That was quite something at that time. You know everybody had dances just with their feet, but starting to dance with their derriere was something else. And I remember the first year there were always comments like "That's terrible." Many people that I know were even shy to start doing it, to learn it, because they didn't dare to move in that way. But then it became quite accepted and then after that came rock and roll but even then died away....It's amazing, but today it seems that we are almost going to country and western now, more and more. I wouldn't be surprised if country and western got more and more attention.

GATEWAY: In that sense, isn't it going full circle because Elvis started there?

MR. HETU: Yes. It's like the suits we're having today with the wide lapels. They were there thirty years ago. And after the wide lapels are gone we'll go back to the narrow ones.

GATEWAY: All our narrow ties will be in vogue again.

MR. HETU: Let's keep all our suits. They might be good thirty or sixty years from now. Who knows?

Jerry Ozipko

three things are needed for beauty wholeness, harmony, and radiance.

thomas aquinas