

Sounding like a high school orchestra

St. Cecilia is falling on hard times

St. Cecilia Orchestra and Concert Choir
Sun. and Mon., Nov. 16, 17
Convocation Hall

review by John Charles

If St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music, could hear what her namesake orchestra sounds like these days, she'd weep big, salty tears.

The orchestra played a joint concert with the U of A Concert Choir, Sunday and Monday at Con Hall, and both performances were packed with parents and pals who were perhaps in a more indulgent mood than this disillusioned listener.

The program's first half — which added up to a mere 20 minutes of music followed by a 25-minute intermission — offered a work for brass, one for winds, and one for strings. Such showcasing is a good idea if there's something to showcase. But none of the performances were satisfactory.

Copland's *Fanfare For The Common Man* (1942), for brass and tympani, is a three-minute work so full of thrilling epic declamation it survives misuse on TV, and even shaky renditions like the one heard Monday.

Trumpet notes were hesitantly slurred, like an ice-skater holding on to a railing, rather than being sculpted separately, which lets each hymn-like phrase ring free. Conductor David Hoyt, who plays first horn in the ESO, has done little conducting, and though his knowledge and generosity as a musician may be helpful in rehearsals, he doesn't have the expertise to bring off this work with students. There's no time for the players to get into this piece: they either

make it happen instantly or not. And in spite of hard work and many accurate moments not much happened.

Strauss' charming *Wind Serenade*, Op. 7 (1881) was better played, but Hoyt led it sluggishly, without a sense of fluidity or direction. Some feeble horn passages, and blurred accompanying lines didn't help.

It's a simple, mellow piece, inspired by Mozart's serenades, but it sounded stodgy, in spite of solid horn playing when the main theme returned near the finale, and some well-phrased flute solos.

Bartok's *Rumanian Folk Dances* (1917), for string orchestra, opened with such sour, out-of-tune playing it was hard to sit still. Norman Nelson conducted without a score, which indicated an intimate knowledge of the music. But he brought out none of the qualities which make these dances so earthy and irresistible. Slashing rhythms, pungent accents, tight dynamic contrasts all went by unobserved.

The string sound, when in tune, was a bit thick and bland. But Anne Kenway played well as soloist in two of the dances, and all the playing improved a bit once they got going.

But the St. Cecilia has fallen on hard times. Whether it's lack of good players or of leadership, or both, it was hard to believe you were hearing a group attached to a university music department. It sounded more like a high-school orchestra — one in which all the money goes for athletics.

Fortunately, they're capable of rising to an occasion, as conductor Leonard Ratzlaff demonstrated in the second half.

Brahms' *Begrabnisgesang* (*Burial Song*),

(1858) for five-part choir, winds, and tympani, was Brahms' first choral work, and its doleful, haunting harmonies are very affecting.

Ratzlaff let the work flow, keeping it firmly moving as it rose steadily to a climax, then subsided into quiet grief. The choir sang cleanly and intensely, and their involvement was part of the strong experience this work provided.

But the concert choir is top-heavy with women. 82 women to 33 men may be great odds for the guys at social occasions, but it presents major problems in terms of musical balance.

In Brahms (and the Mozart that followed),

when the men sang alone they sang out confidently, though with a light tone. But when the women joined in, the male tone evaporated. If there'd been no men the sound would have altered, but there was no point at which you consciously heard them — especially baritones and basses.

In spite of this Mozart's *Coronation Mass*, K. 317 (1779) was the evening's highpoint. Ratzlaff's pace was lively but never rushed, and though choral balances were off, the beauty and joy of the music came through undiminished. The quartet of soloists did well, and soprano Darlene Schubert and tenor Sean Ferguson, who had the most to do, sang with warmth and gusto.

A fictional look at our nation's playpen

A parody of Parliament

Bedfellows: The Blissful Times of Waverly Dolittle
C.J. Masson
Balmuir

review by Louis Hunt

Bedfellows is a fictional look at our nation's playpen, Ottawa. Ranging from the comedic to vicious satire, the book examines the actions of the newly elected Popular Reform Party. Many of the antics of the politicians and their staffs bear a strong resemblance to the present Conservative government.

A cabinet minister resigns in disgrace after he leaves a briefcase of documents in a Brussels brothel; pensions are de-indexed; drug and consumer products are excluded from expensive research and testing regulations; pollution regulations are dismissed in the name of employment and political expediency; and the sons of a maritime minister of the Crown become involved in a patronage dispute.

The Prime Minister, Waverly Dolittle, considers his role to be public relations, entertaining dignitaries and posing for photographs. A truly silly fellow, he allows

his defence minister to assume responsibility for five federal departments and effectively take control of the government. Dolittle's wife Bliss, a member of REAL Women, has a smile transplant, and becomes Speaker of the Senate.

The master politician and arch-villain of the piece, however, is Arnold Mann, the Minister of Defence. From his office, complete with camouflage tent and hurricane lamps, Mann carries out his grand design to eliminate those who do not support his party. Deputy ministers are run down as they cycle home; a Canadian Arctic Sovereignty Detail is established for civil servants and citizens who register as non-Party supporters.

There are of course cynical press club members, naive ministerial assistants, and the usual hangers-on, most of whom eventually find themselves living in the Arctic Gulag.

The story moves from light comedy to a vicious attack on the style of the Mulroney government. It is recommended reading for all Conservative members of Parliament, and those who are fascinated by the combination of misguided power and public apathy.

Girls much too trendy

Modern Girls
Atlantic Releases
Capitol Square

review by Glenn St-Germain

Okay, class, let's get trendy. Nightspots. Discos. Los Angeles. Neato clothes. MTV. Trendy.

Modern Girls is a film that tries to be trendy, in the Los Angeles sense of the word. Margo, Cici, and Nikki are the *Modern Girls* in question.

By day the three work in somewhat uninteresting jobs. At night they put on their trendy fashions and go to trendy nightspots looking for fun, excitement, and the perfect man.

The story ("plot" is being too generous) has something to do with a search through L.A.'s nightspots. Nikki has gone out on a Friday night without her roommates and without her date Cliff (who shows up a few minutes after she leaves).

So Margo, Cici, and Cliff go looking for Nikki, and keep missing her. Meanwhile, Cici meets Bruno X, a trendy rock star (sort of a new-wave Corey Hart), who wants her to go away with him. They get separated.

So Margo, Cici, and Cliff go looking for Bruno X as well. The fact that Cliff (with a

change of hairstyle and clothes) is a dead ringer for Bruno X helps them get into the trendy nightspots.

This movie reeks with trendiness to the point of nausea. The locales are the trendy places in L.A.: all the hip nightclubs and discos that only the right people can get into. The clothes are flashy, colourful, and oh-so-trendy. Bruno X is trendy. (I could go on, but I won't.)

The cast are a bunch of unknowns. So are the crew. The movie was well-filmed, using L.A. exteriors to the fullest, to show how colourful (and trendy) the night can be. We see glitz, glamour, and sparkle in the streets. We don't see winos and bag ladies because they aren't trendy.


There is also a fairly decent soundtrack in the film, featuring the likes of Depeche Mode, Toni Basil, and Icehouse. A soundtrack album shouldn't be far behind. It will likely sound trendy.

The problem with trendiness is that it is short-lived. Trendy for the summer of 1986 (like this movie) will be hopelessly passe in the summer of 1987.

On the other hand, this movie is hopelessly passe now. Bad movies (unless they're *really* bad) are never trendy.

Class dismissed.

SUB THEATRE LECTURES
★ presents ★



ANN MEDINA
FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT
ON
"THE ROLE OF MEDIA
IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS"

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 8:00 p.m.

**TICKETS: \$1.00 for Students
\$3.50 for Non-Students
AVAILABLE AT
ALL BASS OUTLETS, INFO: 432-4764**

432-4266
Room 250 SUB

Student

Help

YOU'RE NOT ALONE . . .

University life can lead to unrealistic levels of stress that in turn increase pressures on academics, personal problems, relationships, finances and many other things.

Student Help is a Student Union Service staffed by student volunteers. As students, we understand your problems and we care about how you're dealing with them.

You're not alone . . . we're here for you.

A Service of the U of A Students' Union and Board of Governors