

the ARTS

CHAMBER NOTES

by Allan Bell

As a lutinist, Rodrigo De Zayas of the Duo Perret-De Zayas was a convincing musicologist, but as a musicologist he was much more inclined to try to "sell" the musical worth of his instruments verbally than to play them in a musically satisfying way. If there was one pervading problem with the performance of the Duo at Wednesday evening's Chamber Music Society concert it was that De Zayas failed to realize that music that is technically well-executed and, most important, sensitively performed does not need to be "sold." No words will ever properly describe the kind of feelings that one gets when listening to an artist gratefully performing the music that he or she loves; no words will ever gloss over the "down" that a musician creates for the audience if he or she gives them an insensitive performance. Quite simply, if we had the words, we would not need the music.

De Zayas, who plays a number of Medieval through Baroque stringed instruments, and Anne Perret, a soprano vocalist, performed more than a dozen songs and pieces for solo instrument during the course of their program. The concert began in an impressive manner, visually, with the Duo dressed in the eighteenth styles, Perret as the charming *belle du Salon* and De Zayas very much the gallant courtier. Expectations, if they

were not high already, rose in the hope that the same Duo that was painstaking enough to try to be reasonable authentic in dress would also be meticulous in their attempt to recreate the music of the era. But, from the opening measures of their first piece, *Morenica Dame un Beso*, a Spanish tune, one began to realize that if the Duo's music was an accurate recreation of the way in which the music was played during the time in which it was written, then music ought to have died out long ago. De Zayas' "plucking" of the baroque guitar and soprano and baritone vihuelas, precursors to the modern guitar, was decidedly clumsy. The number of missed notes and the amount of fret buzz that he got from the instruments pointed directly to the inaccuracy of his technique.

The Duo passed from the music of the early Spanish composers to the works of John Dowland and Thomas Morely of England. Here De Zayas switched to the lute and upon this instrument he became progressively clumsier. Admittedly, some effort was made by the two performers to breathe some sensitivity into Dowland's very beautiful song *In Darkness Let Me Dwells*, and Ms. Perret was not a bly more successful than her accompanist. However, De Zayas proceeded to present a clogged version of Dowland's *Fantasy* for tenor lute, and the two performers agreed to fizzle out together with their interpretation of Thomas Morely's *Absence*.

The first half of the concert ended with an undeservedly sloppy reading by De Zayas of four dances from J.S. Bach's *Suite for Lute in G Minor*. Here, if he had any problems delivering a precise phrase in the earlier pieces, he completely obscured them, especially in the second Gavotte and the Gigue. He seemed to have little feel whatsoever for the rhythms of the dances and not much more concern for the notes that he played, evidenced by the final chord of the piece, which sounded much more like a twentieth-century tone-cluster than a very tonal, very Bach *finae cadence*.

The second half of the concert saw an improvement, technically, over the first, especially when De Zayas began playing the theorbo. Ironically, perhaps, he played the instruments which had the most strings (twenty-seven) the best. It was the instrument for which

he seemed to have the best feelings and perhaps the closest association since it was the instrument upon which he played the only contemporary piece of the evening's program, one of his own compositions called *Pied Beauty*. However, in explaining the history of the instrument he claimed that the theorbo was used in the first opera ever performed which he said was *Erudice* in 1600. One ought to suggest to him that he check in any introductory text on opera history or music history where he will find that another opera *Dafne* was performed three years earlier. The fact of the matter is that no manuscript or score remains for *Dafne*, which makes *Erudice* the first opera for which there is an actual published score available. This may seem like a picky criticism of De Zayas' work, but when a performer chooses to rather pedantically use the concert stage as a platform for a music history lesson and interrupts the applause which the audience is giving in order to tell them that they can buy a copy of his or her record and/or book which just happens to be conveniently on sale outside the door, then he or she had be damn well better be accurate in what they say. And De Zayas wasn't.

Even though I was immensely impressed with the care and love which De Zayas displayed for his beautifully crafted instruments, I was equally indignant for the lack of feel which both he and Ms. Perret had for their music. As De Zayas himself stated, in the accompaniment passages, a good deal of the music depends upon the improvisation of the performer to bring it to life, because the musician is provided only with chordal outlines, in much the same way that the harpsichord continuo is written. If this is the case, then the musician must have a fairly deep understanding of the notions which the composer is attempting to express in order that the improvisatory passages complement the work of the singer and do not obscure it. De Zayas spoke as if he indeed had a verbal understanding of the piece, but it was the failure of the two performers to make an adequate translation from the verbal to the musical (the verbal is a superfluous step anyway) that made the evening's performance hopefully a forgettable one.

Kick out the jams

or

WHOOPEE !

by Bernie Fritz

I suspect that most of us tend to see the same kind of groups playing the same kind of music time after time in the local bars and cabarets. The only real choice is usually between tedious country music or pseudo-contemporary CHED-radio type repetitious music. This stuff seems to reflect a common trait - of being consistently shitty.

Well the other nite, last Thursday, Christmas happened in the SUB theatre...Spiney Norman's Whoppee Banana put it on (honey!) in a show of impressive quality that was totally professional. It was a gift to all who attended.

A two-part show that included a rock opera that sounded like a bastardization of a frank zappa-pink floyd-fugs-jethro tull-monty python theme, was preceded by a hilariously gauche attack on common lifestyles. Nothing was sacred: it was like going to a confession again after all these years. A tremendous dog act, a quickie stripper, Jan Randall, visits by both Joan Baez and Gordie Lightfoot, bananas, balloons,

and a little pecker called Shorty were all presented in appropriate (even excellent) taste. There was even a delightful odour to the whole place.

And there was an eight-foot banana that played a red and white cabbage ensemble, a frog, a limey, an organ, a piano, a bunch of horns, guitars, and (god-damn!) a fiddle. Drums and spoons and Spiney Norman. And a p.a. system that deafinitely (sic) demonstrated the difference between it and total silence.

The theatre was full; the whole show lasted a couple of hours. The band got one encore...they deserved an ovation but Edmonton

audiences invariably lack the spontaneity and enthusiasm that makes a really good act want to do another couple of numbers (got a light?).

Be sure to get their show the next time they come together. It's more than worth the money and effort. They could well be thought of as a stabilizing element for your sanity. Spiney Norman's Whoppee Band - bring your future mother-in-law... she'll never be the same.

Willows at Theatre 3

The opening date is fast approaching for THEATRE 3's Christmas special, *The Wind In The Willows*. The play has been adapted from the Kenneth Grahame children's classic by Edmonton playwright Bill Pasnak, and is being given its world premiere by THEATRE 3. Running dates for the production are from December 12th to the 30th.

The Wind In The Willows is THEATRE 3's second show of the season following the opening production of *OLD TIMES* by Harold Pinter. A difficult show for both cast and audience, *OLD TIMES* brought praise from critics as well as a warm response from the public. In the substantially larger Centennial Library Theatre hundreds more people were able to see the show than would have been able to in THEATRE 3's old quarters.

The Wind In The Willows is the second children's classic staged by THEATRE 3. The first one, produced last Christmas, was Scott Johnson's adaptation of *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*. "ALICE" proved to be an unqualified success as every single performance in an extended run was sold out.

In anticipation of a similar response to *The Wind In The Willows*, THEATRE 3 is again planning an extended run. Regular scheduling will be in effect from December 12th to the 23rd, with an extra week of matinees from the 26th to the 30th. For further information, please call the office in McCauley Plaza, 422-4411 or THEATRE 3's 424-3488. Reservations should be placed now to avoid disappointment.

Appearing in major roles in *The Wind In The Willows* are (by alphabetical order) Conrad Boyce (Badger) Phil Cheney-Williams (Toad), Hart (Rat), Jim Dougall (Mole) and

Jonathan Harrison (Otter). Adaptation by Bill Pasnak, direction by Ken Agrell-Smith, and choreography by Sandra Aitken. Production design by Karen Waidmann. KENNETH AGRELL-SMITH

Born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, he now makes Edmonton his home. This fall, he received his MFA (Directing) from the University of Alberta. Included among his most recent productions are the musicals *CANTERBURY TALES* and *THE MAN OF LA MANCHA*, the Canadian premiere of de Felice's *THE ELIXER*, and Gorke's *THE LOWER DEPTHS*. He also has wide experience in acting, lighting and stage design. This is his first production with THEATRE 3. BILL PASNAK

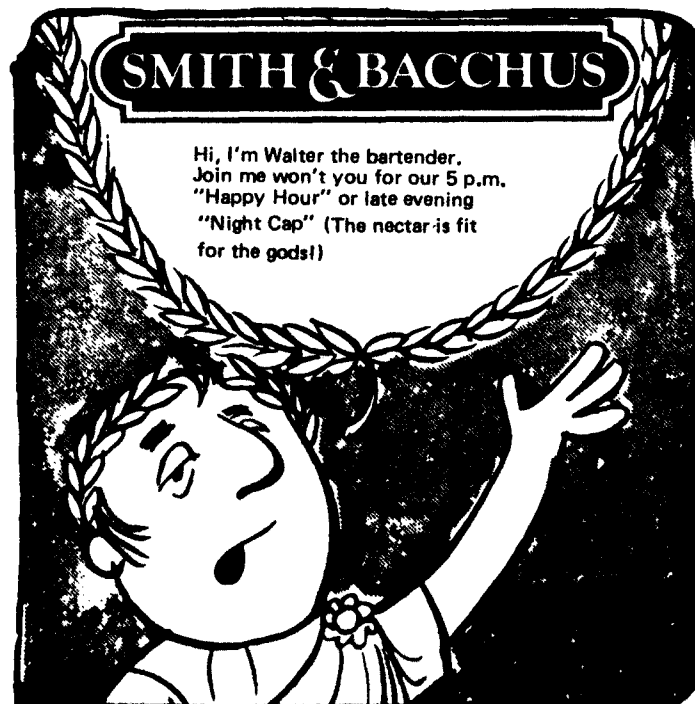
A native of Edmonton, his writing credits include collaboration on a film script of Sheila Watson's novel *THE DOUBLE HOOK*, two puppet plays, several unpublished children's stories, many poems, lots of ad-copy and now defunct column in The Edmonton Journal. At present, in addition to various free lance activities, he is the publicity director for THEATRE 3.

Christmas concert

The department of music at the University of Alberta will present its annual Christmas concert on Sunday at 7:30 p.m. at All Saints' Cathedral, 10023-103 St.

The concert will feature the music department's concert choir.

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