

ESO features drunken genius

Two things of great pith and moment on the musical scene: last Wednesday's Chamber Music concert and this weekend's Edmonton Symphony concerts.

The Edmonton Chamber Music Society ran more or less true to form last week by providing an entertaining evening of music of uniformly high quality: a Mozart string quartet (the first of the "Haydn" series), the Beethoven String Quartet Opus 127, and a fantastically good Prokofiev quartet (the Second).

Of the performance, it is sufficient to say that the Prokofiev was very good, the Mozart acceptable, and the Beethoven rather mediocre.

Tomorrow and Sunday (to wit, November 5 and 6), the Edmonton

Symphony will present its second series of concerts this year. The soloist will be Chinese basso, Yi-Kwei Sze, who, some of you may remember, sang here some two years ago, and struck everybody as being the greatest thing ever to hit Edmonton.

What's more, the program will be a really great one: it includes something for everybody. Respighi's *The Birds* will be played for the benefit of Italianes and ornithologists; Moussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* for Rus-sophiles, artistic dilettantes, and lovers of great music; and a nice selection of operatic arias for those that like that sort of thing (i.e. intelligent, discerning people).

Mr. Sze will sing the serenade from Gounod's *Faust* (a nice bit of

syrup to pacify those who specialize in the development of muzak), King Philip's aria from Verdi's *Don Carlo* (as great a bass aria as ever was written), three scenes from Moussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (perhaps the best thing ever to emerge from Czarism).

It's about time Moussorgsky received a little bit of attention from the ESO. He was a bizarre genius, a confirmed drunkard and nationalist. (Take that, teetotaler!) He wrote some of the best of all Russian music, and, in *Boris Godunov*, one of the best operas anywhere.

Pictures at an Exhibition is a series of musical portraits originally set for piano and later orchestrated brilliantly by Ravel.

—Bill Beard

so you're
an Engineer
who hates
fishing



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films

One of the problems of conducting this column is that it's written on the Sunday preceding the Friday on which, dear reader, you are presumably reading it.

Hence, while all sorts of exciting new movies may arrive in town between now and then, I find myself tonight with nothing new to review.

Two courses are open to me: I could write a column on the Task of the Critic, or I could review *The Sound of Music*.

I've decided to do the former, since at the moment my nerves aren't strong enough for the latter. Some phenomena are so obviously the work of the devil that examining them is simply foolhardy unless one has fasted and prayed, and I didn't get around to fasting and praying much last week.

So, the Task of the Critic!

Criticism, as practised by myself and Barry Westgate, isn't really an activity much different from sitting around over coffee arguing about the effectiveness and value of any work of art.

The disadvantage of this is that printed criticism can only provide one side of a dialogue. The advantage is that you, dear reader, can analyze the critic's stupidities much more easily when they're committed to paper than when they're floating around in conversation.

What, you may ask, qualifies the critic to pass public judgments on works of art?

I'm tempted to answer "Absolutely nothing", but this would be an overstatement. The good critic probably should be fairly knowledgeable in his field, or at least "sensitive", whatever that means.

Still, I'd argue that even the stupidest of critics performs a valuable function, in that he states firmly an opinion against which it is the business of his readers to rebel violently.

This rebellion is necessary because it's obviously impossible for a critic to be "fair" to a work: no description can exhaust a work's content and no judgment can take into account all of a work's aspects.

What the critic does is to try to verbalize the emotional residue, the "taste in the head", left with him after he experiences the work.

This verbalization itself is usually a falsification; I'm uneasily aware that what I write drastically oversimplifies what I feel about the films I see.

Anyway, my readers, ideally, themselves have a vague emotional residue they'd like to clarify somewhat, left either by the film I'm discussing or by the whole complex of films they've previously seen and opinions they've formed as to "what makes a good film".

And I hope that my weekly maundering may provide a catalyst to crystallize my readers' opinions, leading to a greater clarity in the ways we talk and think about art.

It follows that the only value of this column lies in the clash between my prejudices and those of my readers (other than whatever aesthetic satisfaction is accorded by my limpid prose style).

So, whatever you do, don't trust me.

Go to all the movies I pan. Write irate letters. Abuse me to my face if the opportunity presents itself. Anything, so long as you don't just sit there!

Briefly: **Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf** is back in town, at the Strand.

Mike Nichols did a truly abysmal job of turning Edward Albee's brilliant stage play into a movie. The shape of the work is blurred; there's no sense of the breaks between the acts (so beautifully handled in Citadel Theatre's fine local production of the play), nor of the action's confinement to one room (Nichols shifts the scene in the middle of the film to a roadhouse for absolutely no reason).

But enough of the original comes through to make seeing the film worth-while, and Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor turn in fine performances.

—John Thompson