

# Arts & Entertainment

## Maestro Mayer muses on music

interview by Mike Spindloe

For Uri Mayer, Maestro of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra since 1981, the making of music has been both a lifelong passion and a vocation. During his tenure as director and principal conductor of the ESO, the orchestra has recorded five highly acclaimed albums for the CBC and continued its evolution as a world-class performance ensemble.

Born in Romania, Mayer's formal musical training was divided between Europe and North America. He began playing violin and piano at the age of eight, then took up viola at 15 and conducting at 16. After studying at the Conservatory of Music in Tel Aviv, Israel, Mayer did post-graduate work at the Juilliard School of Music in New York, from which he graduated with a double major in viola and conducting.

In 1970, he came to Canada as assistant principal violinist with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. "I claim that I really did my serious studies then... I matured there." Mayer was with the MSO for eleven years, becoming principal violinist after five years and eventually associate conductor.

He also entered several international conducting competitions, of which he says, "I won some and did not win some, but if anything they have helped me to gain credibility and invitations to conduct abroad and in Canada."

Mayer feels that excellent musical training is available on both sides of the Atlantic, but that "one must choose the facility, the school, the teacher according to your needs, your aspirations and your particular area of music." For conductors, however, "the best training after one graduates is in practice. That's where the difficulties arise, because there are many conductors and not enough live training possibilities, because orchestras are very expensive human instruments. Unlike a singer, who can vocalize, a conductor needs a band or an orchestra to really improve his metier." Mayer adds that Juilliard accepts eight conducting students while they have 400 or more pianists, and in many cases, candidates face a three or four year wait to get in.

Mayer still enjoys performing as a player (and will do so later this season with the ESO) but finds in conducting "the satis-

faction of being able to interpret musically the great orchestral works of the masters. The only way one is allowed that possibility, challenge and also privilege, is to conduct."

Although he hesitates to choose particular conducting experiences as the most memorable, Mayer mentions an ESO performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 2 last season, many of the ESO's season openers, and his first concert in Israel as a professional conductor among the highlights of his career. He also recalls a rather unique event: "Many years ago I conducted an open rehearsal of a work by Leonard Bernstein. It was the first time I had conducted an absolutely fabulous orchestra, and I took over from Bernstein, who was sitting in the hall. I had this terrific choir play for him, and me, and respond so well to what I did."

As for the ESO, Mayer feels the orchestra had an "exceptionally successful" opening to the 1988-89 season, which includes five different series of concerts totalling over 100 performances. "We feel that this is a year when we consolidate the art and the public response that has been with us for the last year and half very consistently. That response is something that we have to respond to even more. It's also the first time in many years that we don't have financial troubles. The house is in good shape."

Mayer is excited at the prospect of Edmonton finally getting a new concert hall, but feels that "we have to justify artistically the need to go from the Jubilee, which has been very good, to a hall which will be specifically for concerts."

He feels that the orchestra is certain to be even more successful in the new hall. "We are going to make sure that, acoustically, the hall is absolutely terrific. We know that the orchestra is very, very fine — we have recordings and broadcasts to prove it. We played six months ago in the Jack Singer Hall (in Calgary), which is a first-class facility, and we were overwhelmed by the sound that we could produce. It's bound to attract more people. Every organization that has been moved to a proper facility, in a core area of town, has improved their standing in the community."

Mayer also feels that the hall will make a substantial economic contribution to the



Rob Galbraith

Edmonton Symphony Orchestra Maestro Uri Mayer. Under his direction the orchestra has reached new heights of success.

downtown area, as well as its cultural life. "We perform around 100 concerts a year. Only 12 of those productions are with the Opera, which will stay in the Jubilee. That's 88 concerts, or about two and a half per week in the hall during our 40 week season, plus there will be many other events."

The new hall will also give the orchestra a chance to rehearse on stage all the time, or at least most of the time. At present, the

orchestra has one dress rehearsal on stage at the Jubilee for weekend concerts. This is important considering the great number of works which must be prepared in a relatively short time. "We usually have four rehearsals for each concert of the Masters series, depending on the difficulty and length of the program and also upon other commitments scheduled such as the open house last week. We played that on

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## Nevill sculpts with steel

interview by Chuck Painter

Sarah Nevill's world is one of fire and molten steel. Armed with acetelyne torches and arc welders, she creates fantastic abstract sculptures from odd scraps of metal. Some of them can fit into the palm of your hand, while others would require a forklift to move.

At thirty-three, Nevill is already an accomplished artist in the field of metal sculpture. Her credits include formal schooling at the Wimbledon School of Art, in London, England, where she graduated with honors in the B.A. program, and exhibitions in Scotland, England, and Canada.

Nevill is also the recipient of numerous awards, including, most importantly, the Commonwealth Scholarship. It was this scholarship that convinced Nevill to come to Edmonton. "It's really great, the scholarship pays for everything... tuition, medical, and a monthly allowance. The whole thing is sponsored by the (Canadian) government. I'm very grateful," explained Nevill. She also applied for and received a grant to go to New York to see various art galleries, and steel works by David Smith and Antony Caro last year.

When asked about the creative process involved in steel sculpture, Nevill gets serious. For her the whole thing is spontaneous: "you get the steel, and you look at it... it's like being given a load of building bricks," she says, with a smile that reveals

her enthusiasm. To her, sculpture is a living thing, like nature itself. Nevill explains, "I create my sculpture not to represent, but to be interesting of its own. Sculpture is like a language, and to appreciate it, you must know a bit of the language. If you show someone a piece, and they're unfamiliar with the art-form, it would be like handing them a poem in a language they can't read." Nevill is a dedicated artist, and her deep insights reflect this. She is also very confident that her chosen art-form is not just a passing thing, but a permanent feature of art of the future: "It may come and go, but steel sculpture will always be there, unlike conceptual sculpture which will go soon, such as a pipe, just barely visible above the ground, but actually sunk a mile down into the earth. It's just a fad," says Nevill.

Nevill is currently completing her requirements for the degree of Master of Visual Arts. One of these requirements is a public showing of her artwork. This exhibition will be held in the Fine Arts Building Gallery, beginning on September 21st, and running until October 2nd. Mrs. Nevill will be exhibiting eleven pieces, including seven large and 4 small ones. This show represents a milestone in her career as an artist, with over 1600 hours of labor having gone into the pieces being shown. Nevill's future plans include returning home after graduation and studying sculpture in Glasgow, Scotland. From the looks of her accomplishments so far, it's certain that she will meet with success wherever she goes.



Chuck Painter

Sarah Nevill at work with the tools of her art.