

# Classical music must cause a musical happening

The following is the second in a series of eight articles examining the Arts in Edmonton. It explores the wide range of classical music performed in this city—the symphony orchestras, chamber music groups and solo performers—through the vocal and instrumental mediums, and attempts to evaluate their present status and potential in the future.

Viola Braun is a third-year Bachelor of Music student with an applied major in piano. She has studied music for over fourteen years, and performed last Sunday at a Brahms concert at the Centennial Library. She will be performing in a similar program at Convocation Hall February 1.

By VIOLA BRAUN

Serious classical music in Edmonton can be experienced through both instrumental and vocal mediums. It can be heard played by large orchestral or choral groups, by chamber groups of several players, and by solo performers. Various compositions are sung and played by these groups for widely diverse audiences.

Edmonton has two large instrumental groups of players—Edmonton Symphony Orchestra and University of Alberta Symphony. ESO runs two series, the Saturday night-Sunday afternoon performances and the mid-week series. It has approximately 80 members and is conducted by Lawrence Leonard.

It is important that one can go to an ESO concert and become a participant while physically being non-participant. One can musically experience the sounds by allowing one's feelings to unite with or reject the sounds. Some "consciously knowledgeable" concert-goers of Edmonton cannot unite with often-heard versions of *Night on Bald Mountain* by Moussorgsky or Ravel's *Bolero*—or was it Mozart and Haydn symphonies that were "Edmonton-hackneyed-trash"?

What upsets me is hearing many programs without any Schonberg, Stravinsky, Hindemith, and other contemporary composers. These composers are difficult to play and need professional musicians with musical insight and agile technical ability.

Should we not perhaps demand that, through the mass medium of orchestral sound, ESO express what is going on around us? Are we paying them to play pleasant music to us so that we do not destroy the image of our professional musicians and comfortable society?

The University Symphony is a group of amateur musicians on campus. Not only are the members trained non-professional musicians but also experimenters in creating. Students play in it because they choose to create with others.

As their conductor, Ted Kardash, has said, "One does not necessarily have to understand the music totally, but one must feel it." This these amateurs must do—artistically create sounds to communicate feelings to the listener.

When I think of all the Canadian campuses, I wonder how many of the universities have a symphony orchestra comparable in size and calibre to that at the U of A. That is why it is exciting to experience a composition like *Essay for Orchestra* by Malcolm Forsythe played at the fall symphony concert. Forsythe is a music professor here and wrote this composition in 1965 while traveling. Its performance here was a musical happening.

Large choral groups in the vocal medium in Edmonton are the Opera Association chorus, Symphony chorus, U of A Mixed chorus, and various ethnic choirs. It is interesting to note that large choral groups, to create a musical experience, have only their voices. Perhaps that is what makes good choral singing especially exciting to hear. U of A Mixed Chorus is usually a very good choral group which puts on several spring concerts and goes on winter and spring tours within the province. Opera chorus in operatic tradition is closely aligned with the ESO because opera is a combined instrumental and vocal medium. Several operas are annually performed with guest artists.

A chamber group of players or singers have through their medium a



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more intimate and personal contact with the listener. With a more direct and more exposed sound, a few players or singers in a smaller concert hall can express emotions and feelings more succinctly. A great sense of rapport develops within a small group of performers. Becoming attuned to each other (hearts and minds too), they can communicate with an audience.

Edmonton has several good organizations which are involved in the instrumental chamber group medium. The Edmonton Chamber Music Society sponsors some excellent chamber groups. Further, U of A as of this year has a resident string quartet which is practising regularly and going on tour. The St. Cecilia Chamber Orchestra under the direction of Michael Bowie has developed into a very fine group performing several concerts this year.

Chamber Music Society sponsors six or so concerts a year. A very commendable group that was here last year was the Hungarian String Quartet. Through the efforts of the music department, they were in residence for a month. As artists they were totally immersed in the music of the twentieth century Hungarian composer Bela Bartok. It was exciting to hear and see a small group of musicians talk about the man and hear his music played. The reality of their musical experience enhanced mine in listening to them.

A good vocal chamber group of Edmonton is Da Camera Singers. Also under the direction of Ted Kardash, it shows a true blend of sound and attempts such compositions as Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*, which the group is preparing for its Edmonton premiere.

Finally, the soloistic medium is most personally expressive, for one person alone produces the sound. Here the performer becomes totally exposed technically and musically.

His own judgment and interpretation determine his characteristic style. The sound produced is an indirect exposure of the thoughts, feelings, turmoil and peace within the performer. The soloistic medium very much becomes a "one-to-one" communication, where the listener very urgently is drawn into responding.

The scope of solo instruments is vast. Wind, brass, and string instruments usually are accompanied by another instrument, by an orchestra, or by piano. The instrument in soloistic position is emphasized, however, by a characteristic content which makes it easily recognizable. Piano and voice are both solo instruments with piano frequently accompanying the voice.

Many of the students in the Bachelor of Music program at U of A are in the applied music program. It becomes very apparent which of these music students are soloistic artists. Technical concerns are very imminent, often more so than the artistic necessity of expressing. Music can very easily become the world here—a world which no longer fits into the natural cosmos of all art and life.

Opportunities for performing are very good for music students. There are workshop concerts, junior and senior recitals demanding solo performing by the students. Featured soloists also perform with many of the larger orchestral and vocal mediums mentioned.

As an artistic expression, serious music must not become an isolated art. It must have appeal. Very often people avoid experiencing it because they cannot understand it and thus feel they cannot appreciate it fully. The technical aspects often seem too highly complex. Then, the quality of the medium must help create a reaction within the listener.

The content of classical music as in all music is sounds—tones creating beautiful consonances and striking dissonances. These sounds must be creatively communicated in order to become real. When these sounds are real, nearly everyone can listen and say—"Yes, that's it. That I also feel inside me. I don't exactly understand what you are saying or why you are saying it in that manner, but continue. In your creating, I can create with you."

Serious music is created within a structured form. When performers recreate the musical experience of a composer, the listener spontaneously reacts to that musical experience. The musical response of a listener is then a reaction to the content, the medium, or the form.

In its various mediums, is serious classical music necessary for being and living? As juxtaposed to the great spontaneity and impermanence of much of the popular rock and jazz, can it exist with its greater concern for permanence and form? The next few years will very likely see a continued interest in electronic music. Perhaps within the next few years mixed media will also be examined by the ESO and by solo performers. Through the various instrumental and vocal means and forms of expression, one experiences many things concurrently. This is the musical times of mediums.



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