

# the ARTS

## B.B. King PhD



Uncle Vinty appearing with King

On October 9, B.B. King will be paying a return visit to Edmonton. His last appearance here was a smashing success so you're likely to have a hard time nailing down some tickets if you leave it to the last minute.

There's not much question that B.B. King is one of the finest bluesmen around but you can begin to understand the impact this man has when you hear that he's slated for an honorary doctorate from a university. That's the gospel truth. Tougaloo will be laying the honors on B.B. for his contribution to the world of music.

The idea was generated in a mini-semester entitled "Nina Simone, Issac Hayes, Ray Charles and B.B. King. The idea was to study the lyrics as historical documents on the Black experience. The success of the course prompted the teacher to nominate B.B. King for the doctorate. The same teacher is now teaching a course entitled B.B. King, Blues and the Black Heritage at Williams College.

With B.B. King will be two other fine back-up artists. Elvin Bishop, formerly of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band will be appearing as well as Uncle Vinty.

It's hard to know what to say about Uncle Vinty. For some people he's just a weird warm-up act and for others he's a magic musical messiah with a brand of music he calls happy rock gospel. Uncle Vinty has a background which includes training in children's theatre and as pianist in a rock band. Presently he is an enigma, a buoyantly funny and lighthearted fool thundering along the jaws of fate armed only with a grin. He has moved one critic to muse that he would be a great Cynicism Index. We could all plot our tolerance for idealism against him. His act is a parade of fools with a touch of sentimentalism. What else do you say about a man who would accept a recording contract only if the albums were distributed only in health food stores?



...also on Oct. 9, Elvin Bishop.

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## Tchaikovsky scorned - Symphony scored

Saturday evening's concert gave Edmonton's symphony audience its first legitimate opportunity to judge the talent of the ESO's new conductor, Pierre Hetu. Certainly, Hetu has held the baton in Edmonton before as one of the guest conductors auditioning for Lawrence Leonard's job. However, it must be remembered that there is a good deal of difference between conducting an orchestra that someone else has, over the years, rehearsed and molded into a unit, and having the opportunity to do that molding oneself; to gain a more intimate knowledge of the capabilities and temperaments of the musicians, to establish oneself as the central focus of power and direction within the orchestra - to place one's mark upon the orchestra.

The concert began with Rossini's *Overture to La Gazza Ladra (The Thieving Magpie)*. As an opening, it was endearing to the ear, a necessity for the preparation of the ear for the more intense pieces that were to come in the rest of the concert. The piece was played rather timidly, and seemingly without conviction by the string choir. On the other hand, clarinetist Ernest Dalwood and oboist Robert Cockell deserve to be complimented for their delightful rendering of their solo passages, which were equally as mocking and playful as the bird after whom the piece is titled.

When Tchaikovsky wrote his *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 1 in B Flat Minor*, the second piece that ESO played Saturday evening, it was called vulgar and unworthy of its composer. Certainly that is an unfair criticism; but even if it were fair, Tchaikovsky's first piano concerto did not deserve the treatment that it got from Gary Graffman, the evening's solo pianist.

Graffman himself is quoted as saying that he behaved irresponsibly towards the first movement of the concerto. The movement is marked "Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso" and not "Allegro... molto ragtime" as it would have had to have been to coincide with Graffman's rendering of it. He began forcefully and with what promised to be a very exciting reading of the piece. However, once he got on to the scalewise passages, especially in the lower register of the piano, his fortissimo playing took on a thumping, metallic quality which was totally unnecessary, considering the instrument upon which he was playing. What must be kept in mind at this point is that even though concerti are notoriously written to display the pyrotechnics of the soloist, they still must be heard as an integral musical whole.

The soloist must therefore attempt to honor and express the musical intentions of the composer as expressed by the whole of the piece including the orchestral passages, and not to attempt to thwart those intentions by seeing in the solo passages opportunities to expose the strength and dexterity of ones fingers. A

concert pianist is expected to have dexterous digits; it is the minimal requirement for the profession. What is more important is the pianist's sensitivity to the art that the musical creator has provided him with and his ability to communicate that which is between the notes written on the score - the magic with which the notes are pregnant, a magic which does not deserve to be aborted.

There were moments, however, when Graffman did redeem himself. These were mainly in the Adante portions of the second movement with his very fluid, delicate rendering of certain passages therein. He seemed ready to give the orchestra its due as more than just a back-up band. Some extremely well-executed orchestral passages occurred in this movement, notably the pizzicato entrance by the strings, the woodwind passages, and cellist Lyan Selber's solo passage. The concerto most certainly was a crowd-pleaser as witnessed by the applause after the first movement and the ovations at the end - but one which left me feeling somewhat disconcerted.

The ESO's performance of Schubert's *Symphony No. 9 in C Major* though it was exceedingly well-executed in some parts, suffered from a lack of consistency. What must be remembered here is that Schubert's Ninth is one which Schumann called a "symphony of heavenly length" which means for those of us without a direct line to the gods, a symphony which expands itself by repeating great portions of already presented material. This is

possible because of the richness of Schubert's melodic content, but it places a great deal of responsibility upon the orchestra to not allow that material to wear thin. This requires a great deal of stamina and a great deal of concentration. The ESO had its problems with this consistency so that passages which had been played remarkably well the first time through lacked the clarity and precision in their second hearing.

The opening motive of the symphony, played in unison by two horns, seemed to lack the haunting quality which I have associated with the notes. This opening, which was an innovation in Schubert's time, demands an air of mystery which was an innovation in Schubert's time, demands an air of mystery which the horn players were unable to get out of their instruments. This haunting quality of the opening is supported by a passage which the double basses play (which they executed extremely well) to end off an orchestral phrase later on in the piece.

There were moments of sheer brilliance in the performance. One of the passages which I recall as being most electrifying was in the transition between the first and second themes of the Andante second movement in which Hetu directed the orchestra exceedingly well through a change in dynamics and texture.

Throughout the evening, Hetu displayed a fine choice of dynamics though there were times when he seemed to subdue passages which desired to rage.

Allan Bell



# ORACLES

theatre lives

*Much Ado About Nothing* by William Shakespeare.  
Directed by John Neville. Now running at the Citadel.

*40 Carats* adapted by Jay Allen. Directed by Joe Vassos. At Walterdale Playhouse, 11407 - 107 Street. October 2 through 13 at 8:30 p.m. Reservations: phone 424-0121 or at the Bay Box Office.

the eyes have it

Dan Christiansen's abstract paintings explore problems of colour and surface. Opens October 4 with Sidney Tillim exhibition. Both artists will be present.

An exhibition of recent drawings by Edmonton figure painter, Violet Owen opens October 7. Meet the artist Sunday, October 7, from 2-4 p.m.

Exhibitions at the Edmonton Art Gallery in Sir Winston Churchill Square.

watch out for

B.B. King with Elvin Bishop and Uncle Vinty. Kinsmen Fieldhouse. October 9. \$5.50 advance, \$6.00 at the door. Tickets at Mikes.

Kris Kristofferson. At the Jubilee. Friday, October 5.

Mime artist, Pepusch. Sat. October 13 in Studio Theatre, Corbett Hall at 8:30 p.m. Students \$1.50

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