

With razor sharp notes...

Pianist slices through score

by J. C. LaDalia

last week's Edmonton Symphony Orchestra concert was a bit of a surprise with two of the three programmes of Debussy. Hetu was a great sense of refinement to such impressionist music which were excellently played. The works are "about" orchestral colour more than anything else and it was a pleasure to hear the ESO define colours so subtly. The first piece, *Fetes*, which sometimes sounds a bit vulgar, was played most delicately with the proper liveliness. The middle section, which contains a passage for muted horns, was *ppp* as anything ever heard in a concert hall. The third nocturne, *Sirenes*, was committed (as it often is) to include a women's programme. The program notes, however, listed all three and missed the third at length. This is not the first time the ESO's program has contained missing or incorrect information, someone should supervise it more closely. Such sloppiness is less than unprofessional.

Next we heard Rudolf Firkušny play the Mozart Piano Concerto in B flat, K. 450. His intention was to play it coolly and sentimentally. I must confess I was disappointed to Leonard Bernstein's overly-romantic rendition, which like it. While most of Firkušny's playing was a joy, it was a bit aristocratic, with a fullness there were runs which were of his tempo were not heard, and the second movement might have had more with without becoming dull. If the orchestra had had the soloist's precise intonation we would have had a superbly consistent if somewhat detached performance of this splendid work. But conducted with greater care and less crispness, so that dialogue passages, wherein orchestra or piano 'answer' each other with the same phrase, did not match as they should. Still it was a very good performance.

Following the interval we heard *Oscillations* by Papineau, a contemporary French Canadian. This was excellently played though with a certain ambiguity which reminds us how much music of the '60s and '70s the ESO plays. A six-minute filler is a feeblest of commitments to modern music, and while we heard the concern with Cana-

dian composers (Forsyth and Archer are to be heard this season), such great foreign contemporaries as Lutoslawski, Carter and Tippett should not go unheard.

Finally we heard Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, that composer's most brilliantly concise orchestral work. Again, and more unusually, Firkušny's approach was cool and decidedly unromantic. Such an approach works best in the daemonic variations of this set of 24 variations, such as No. 12 and 15. But the rhapsodical quality inherent in no. 6 and 11 was not in evidence, and the big tune which blossoms in no. 18 wasn't as surgingly bittersweet as it might be. Firkušny's technique was highly impressive, and it was an exciting performance with many impressive orchestral details such as the razor-sharp notes in the 16th variation.

Recordings. Firkušny has few recordings available at present, although he has had a considerable recording career. On *Candide* label he has two delectable records of Dvorak's underplayed solo piano works including the Mazurkas and Humoresques, played with much charm. He has begun recording for London records recently and has a fine version of the Beethoven "Emperor" Concerto (Uri Segal conducting) which boasts excellent sound. A new

disc contains Beethoven's "Moonlight," "Pathétique," and "Waldstein" sonatas.

The three *Nocturnes* are available conducted by Claudio Abbado on DGG, and by Giulini on Angel in outstanding versions. Stowkowski's fulsome rendition is on Seraphim, a budget label.

The Mozart Concerto K. 450 has been beautifully recorded by Robert Casadesu with George Szell and the Cleveland Orchestra, part of a cycle which is one of the great Mozart recordings of all time. On the other side is the 17th Concerto (K. 453). Peter Serkin has a lively performance on RCA, and Peter Frankl has a very good version on Turnabout, a budget label.

There is a large selection for the Rachmaninoff. On budget labels Jqius Katchen on London's Ace of Diamonds, and August Anievas on Seraphim give dazzling, spirited performances. Rubinstein's Rachmaninoff is classic, and his recording, with Fritz Reiner conducting, is still available on RCA. A recent, rather meditative interpretation by the always interesting Vladimir Ashkanazy is available on London. But Anievas and Ashkanazy have sets of the four Rachmaninoff concerti plus the *Rhapsody* which are worth investigating if you really like the composer. All single records mentioned above contain some late Romantic concerto on the other side.



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honorable mentions in this category include *Taxi Driver*, *Passion*, and *La Tete De Grande St. Onge*. Special awards go to Bob Macoritt of the Saskatchewan Roughriders, for his dramatic performance in the Western Final this year, and to Joe Clark, for his impression of a political leader. Clark has been so good at this, I almost believed a friend of mine when he told me Clark was the leader of that other federal

To conclude this semester's offerings, the final installment of the Great Trivia Contest. While being actually overwhelmed by responses, there is a tight race in the making here, as we reach the home stretch. (Seating fans, take note.) Oh yeah, Merry Christmas,

was the Edmonton Eskimo in 1968? (Fooled all you types, eh?)

was the Third Rail's one only single hit?

did "Next Plane to London"

bring in responses to *The Way*, Room 282 SUB.