



Avigdor Zoramp

# Borge uncorks humor in fine art

By Avigdor Zoramp  
special writer

The world of entertainment is replete with comedians with an impressive sense of humor. Those who also have a strong background in classical music are extremely rare. The two domains seldom meet. An unusual example of this awesome combination is Victor Borge, whose successful career spans half a century.

His appearance at Meadow Brook last Friday provided one of the few peaks in terms of the audience size and accommodating weather. At 83, Borge is still going strong on stage, radiating a sense of youthful mischief when the opportunity arises.

He was an inspiration to the audience as well as to the Pontiac-Oakland Symphony, which responded with better than usual quality of sound and artistic involvement.

Among the "straight" selections were a Slavic dance by Dvorak, led by the symphony's permanent conductor, Douglas Bianchi, and an excerpt from Rossini's "William Tell" Overture (renamed "William — to

Hell!" by Borge), led by guest conductor Ernie Jones.

THE DIFFICULTY of playing music "straight" was demonstrated by Borge, when he attempted to balance himself while lying straight on the narrow piano stool. For most part, his keen wit would emerge from the natural texture of the music, while still profoundly integrated with it.

Thus, he is capable of sneaking strains of "Happy Birthday" into music by Mozart, Wagner, Chopin and Rachmaninoff, among others. It is more subtle than a simple stylistic imitation — it creeps up on the listener before one realizes it, frequently sensing its presence only after it's over.

One of Borge's talents is his skill in combining musical and linguistic twists. Chopin's E flat major Nocturne, for example, becomes a "Knockout Turn" when the "Birthday" tune mysteriously springs from its rephrased phrases, then comes back to rest amid its lines with astounding equality.

MANY of Borge's routines are well prepared in advance, to be sure. This was evident from several jokes that I heard in his performance in Windsor last year. But he is equally capable of reacting spontaneously to unscheduled events.

When a loud airplane noise intruded during one of his routines, the strains of the Air Force hymn were suddenly in the act as if prepared in advance. His humorous references and mock chiding remarks toward late arrivals and those moving between the rows seem good natured and entertaining to the rest of the audience, but are bound to make those who engage in such conduct feel self-conscious — and perhaps reform their habits.

Playing "straight" could be, indeed, rather difficult, using Borge's interpretation or the "straight" meaning of it. However, Borge is a pianist with a most refined touch, as manifested by his "straight" selections.

This was evident in spite of some shortcuts in the third movement of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto, in which he avoided some of the technically more challenging passages.

Other selections — Rachmaninoff's popular Prelude in C sharp minor, an old Vienna waltz by Gertner and "Claire de Lune" by Debussy — underscored his refined tone and artistic touch.

FOLLOWING THE printed program, Borge thrilled the audience with "Phonic Punctuations," one of his favorite routines in which punctuation marks are translated into amusing sequences of micro-phonetic sound effects.

Humorists have proved repeatedly that humor could be an art. Victor Borge goes several steps further. He can convincingly demonstrate that art could be humorous — and still remain an art.

# Clarinetist to perform with Detroit Symphony

Virtuoso clarinetist Richard Stoltzman performs Carl Maria von Weber's Clarinet Concerto No. 2 with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra at the Meadow Brook Music Festival at 8 p.m. Thursday and Sunday, at the Baldwin Pavilion on the campus of Oakland University.

awarded the Avery Fisher Prize, joining such other eminent recipients as Murray Perahia and Yo-Yo Ma.

As a jazz performer he has been heard around the world, including three Carnegie Hall concerts with Woody Herman's Thundering Herd.

Stoltzman is known for his interest in new music and has had many new clarinet works composed for him. An exclusive RCA recording artist, his albums number over twenty and include both classical and crossover releases.

Many consider Dvorak's Eighth Symphony to be his finest. Composed in the idyllic setting of his new country home, the work was no doubt inspired by the beautiful Czech countryside. Dvorak thought highly of this work, which he conducted on many occasions; he chose it, along with his "Spatiat mater," to be featured works for his visit to Cambridge University in 1891, where he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Music Degree.

OTHER CAREER highlights include performing the first clarinet recitals ever given at both the Hollywood Bowl and Carnegie Hall, and becoming the first wind player to be

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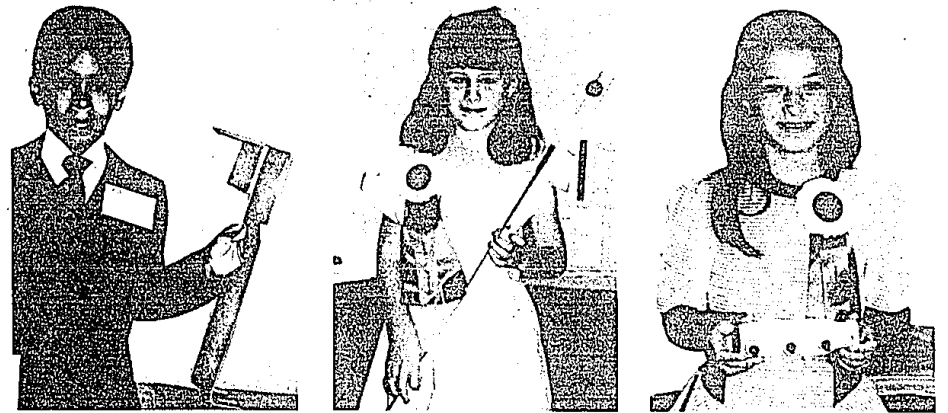
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