

THE MUSIC BAG

Bojangles: Man for Our Season

BY THE MISSION SINGERS

There's a story about a man who had been wrongly imprisoned and who had a dream in which he found himself the executioner of the king who condemned him.

The king pleaded for mercy: "Surely your own suffering has taught you the meaning of mercy?" The prisoner, before swinging his sword, replied: "Your majesty, the only thing suffering has taught me is the uselessness of suffering."

Mr. Bojangles, sung by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, gives the lie to that story. The song pictures how suffering and failure can make a person better than he could ever have been if he had somehow managed to avoid all sorrow.

Mr. Bojangles is a three-minute, 35-second song that tells the same story as an entire movie such as Zorba the Greek.

Zorba is a "modern pagan" who truly enjoys life because he has found that suffering need not be destructive but can help him find a concrete meaning in life.

Bojangles and Zorba look for pleasures; they despise pain. But their main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain; but rather to see a meaning in their lives.

Bojangles is a living magnet. People see in him a depth and meaning that is so often missing in their own lives and are drawn to him. When they see Bojangles dance, they know

he's saying something about life that can't be said in words.

"I heard someone ask him, 'Please, please, Mr. Bojangles, dance.'" Tell us about life, help us see how we can live too. Help us understand how you can dance so beautifully even though you seem so sad. What is the secret you hide in that laugh?

"He talked of life, he talked of life, laughed, clicked his heels and stared." Life for Bojangles is losing man's best friend, standing at cheap county bars, picking up loose change and spending it on beer. Life is dancing, jumping up so high and then lightly touching down. Life is minstrel shows and county fairs.

Does sorrow, suffering around us, have any meaning? If not, then ultimately there is no meaning to survival, because a life whose meaning depends on a quirk of fate (whether or not, for example, you're born in a mansion or a slum) would really not be worth living at all.

Mr. Bojangles is a man who in his own life answers those questions. His life finds meaning in his dancing. None of us can take that meaning for ourselves, because each person has to find his own purpose. And there'll never be a time when we should not fight strenuously to avoid failure and suffering. Suffering is evil.

But it's a part of life, and if we know how, we can find a meaning to our lives despite that suffering. Mr. Bojangles can only offer an example, but this he'll gladly do if only we'd ask, "Please, please, Mr. Bojangles, dance."

MR. BOJANGLES

I knew a man, Bojangles, and he'd dance for you in worn-out shoes:
Silver hair, ragged shirt and baggy pants, the old soft shoe.
He jumped so high, he jumped so high, then he lightly touched down.

I met the man, he sailed in New Orleans, I was down and out.
He looked to me to be the eyes of old age, as the smoke ran out.
He talked of life, he talked of life, laughed, clicked his heels and stared.

He said his name — Bojangles — and he danced slick across the sail.
He grabbed his pants in his favorite stance fore he jumped so high, then he clicked his heels.
He let go a laugh, he let go a laugh, shook back his clothes all around.
Mr. Bojangles, Mr. Bojangles, Mr. Bojangles, dance.

He danced for those at minstrel shows and county fairs throughout the south.

He spoke with tears of fifteen years how his dog and him travelled about.
The dog up and died, he up and died; after twenty years he still grieved.

He said he danced now every chance in honky-tonk, for drinks and tips.

But most of his time was spent behind those county bars beside drinks of beer.

He shook his head, and as he shook his head, I heard someone ask him, "Please, please;

Mr. Bojangles, Mr. Bojangles, Mr. Bojangles, dance."

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Pianist Overcomes Even Broken Strings

By FRANK CROCIATA

The attraction of the 10th Philharmonic concert was to be the Rochester premiere of assistant Boston conductor, 26-year-old Michael Tilson Thomas, but a 30-year-old pianist from Argentina stole the show. Bruno Leonardo Gelber overcame broken strings (f-natural) and off-stage noises to play a masterful performance of the Brahms B-flat Piano Concerto. Gelber is a romantic of the grand manner, with ample technique, power, and sensitivity to give the Brahms concerto the grand conception that it requires. His tempi were brisk and he dominated the concerto.

After the string broke, a replacement was brought on stage that seemed a bit worn and out-of-tune. Gelber had to overcome difficulties with the instrument in the andante third movement. (It was just two years ago, in the same movement of the same piece, on the same stage, and probably on the same piano, that Andre Watts capped a poor performance becoming hopelessly lost.)

Thomas began with a standard performance of the Beethoven 7th Symphony, the "Dance" symphony. I'm tempted to dismiss him with the classical critical line, "Oh yes, he's

very good, but he's no Michael Tilson Thomas." Actually he knew the symphony quite well, but his podium work was a little naive. He conducted as he would the Boston Symphony, and you cannot do that here.

As has been the case for nearly all season, the violas have played most beautifully, and here the violins and woodwinds also were well prepared.

Thomas conducts with large dramatic gestures, and he can't quite control them yet. He seems to know the works he conducts quite well, though he makes no pretense of profundity. Only a year has passed since he was called to substitute, in mid-concert, for ailing Boston maestro, William Steinberg.

His rise has been meteoric, though I don't think anymore deserved than many others his age and older. Once he stops his Bernstein-style dancing, and begins to grapple with the problems of the symphony orchestra and the musical score, music will be richer and so will he.

Thomas will conduct the orchestra twice more, on March 4, with soprano Beverly Sills as soloist, and March 11. On Thursday, Feb. 28 Walter Hendl will conduct the Philharmonic in an all-Straus program.

COURIER / WORLD

Prelate Claims Two Were Tortured

Sao Paulo, Brazil — (RNS) — The Archbishop of Sao Paulo has accused political police of torturing a priest and a social worker before charging them with subversion.

Archbishop Paulo Evaristo Arns, newly appointed to Sao Paulo, had posted on every church door in his diocese on Feb. 7, an 11-point statement charging that Father Giulio Vicini, and his assistant, Miss Yara Spadini, were "ignominiously tortured by the political police of our city, as the Vicar General of the southern region and we were personally able to verify."

His statement said the priest and social worker were held in "high esteem" in the region where they worked. It added that Roberto de Abreu Sodre, governor of the State of Sao Paulo, had promised to allow a doctor chosen by the bishop himself to examine the two prisoners, but "up to now, we have not been permitted to carry out the examination."

Church-State Talk in Prague

Vienna — (RNS) — A Catholic delegation headed by Archbishop Frantisek Tomasek, administrator of the Prague archdiocese, met with Czechoslovakian officials to study church-state relations.

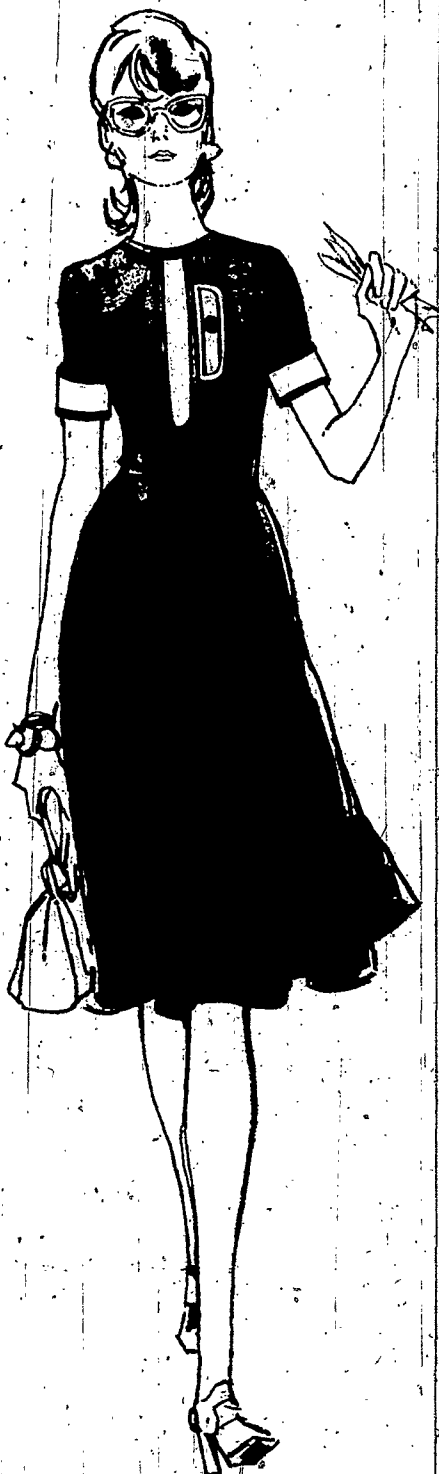
In an interview reported by a Catholic press agency here, Archbishop Tomasek said he considered personal contacts the best way to settle disputes and stressed the necessity of "closer collaboration" between Church and state.

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