Proposition still crazy after all these years

By Sandy Yalka

The Proposition, an improvised musical, is now ten years old. That may not seem like a very important fact, but consider that a student generation is only four years. That means that The Proposition, the third longest running show in the world, has outlived two complete generations of students. Who else?

That is the very same question I asked five years ago, when it was first assigned for The Tech. I wrote a review of The Proposition on the occasion of its fifth birthday. The answer is the same now as then because it is genuinely entertaining, and as a topical improved revue, it has the ability to change with the times.

The Proposition takes its name from its format: the acros impromptu sketches of various kinds incorporating people, places and themes proposed by the audience. In other words not only are performances are alike, One night “cleaning the kitty litter” in the style of French, Italian and Swedish films may be performed, and the next “Sleeping Beauties” as an opera in the style (successively) of Dvorak, Jagger, Spike Jones and Beethoven.

How can they miss with variety like this?

The Proposition’s great strength lies in its ever-changing cast and always multi-talented cast. They do not only mime beautifully, but sing, dance and create an extraordinary variety of sounds. (Have you ever heard six people beautifully sound like an entire orchestra tuning up?)

The Proposal plays Friday nights at 8 and 10 at its original home in Inman Square. Right next door to Legal Seafood, and is currently presenting “Soap,” its very own version of “Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman.” In addition, the regular revue is now playing at the Charles Playhouse in Boston, Wednesday through Sunday evenings. This is a new, six-week experimental run, the first time outside of Cambridge, and will be extended if business warrants it. One great feature of the new location is that starting Feb. 22, Wednesday at the Charles will be “nickeled right.” Tickets for the Wednesday 8:30 pm performance can be purchased for only 50 cents starting at 7 pm that evening.

The Proposition is a phenomenon. For five cents you can be part of it. What have you got to lose? After 8,748 hours on stage they must be doing something right.

Songs From the Wood — Jethro Tull

By Claudia Perry

Jethro Tull’s latest release is a significant departure from his past efforts. The change can be attributed in part to band leader Ian Anderson’s flight from the city and life on tour to his country home outside London. The result, Songs From the Wood, is more pastoral than recent Tull efforts such as War Child and Minstrel in the Gallery. It exhibits a style that, although unmistakable, Tull is enhanced by the use of four-part harmonies, string synthesizers and portative organs. Using the aforementioned judiciously, the album is almost Elizabethan in influence.

The arrangement and structure of the disc are due to the appearance of David Palmer on many instruments. Palmer, who has written the band’s orchestrations since its inception, began taking an active role with their last release, Too Old to Rock ’n’ Roll, Too Young to Die. Here, taking a turn on synthesizer, piano and portative organ, Palmer gives the band a fuller sound than it has in years.

The opening cut, “Songs From the Wood,” begins with a hauntingly beautiful cappella vocal arrangement. Ian Anderson’s flute supplies an accent, without being overstepped. However, the arrangement does not center on Anderson as it has in the past.

“Jack-in-the-Green,” the next cut on this side, features Anderson performing on all instruments. Surprisingly, this does not sound like it was put together on a mixing board. Anderson, who produced this album, has an amazing sense of theater. This was admirably showcased in Tull’s recent small-hall tour. For the first time the band was able to establish audience communication.

This new direction in music is noticeable on this effort. These are the most personal songs that Ian Anderson has written in a long time, “Hunting Girl,” the penultimate track on this side, details a brief affair between a peasant and a rich estate mistress. Although the subject matter is never at best of business, it is set in a different era.

Jethro Tull’s penchant for unusual time changes.

To open the second side, “Velve Grease’s” interplay between piano and flute is quite arresting. Since piano is credited to more than one person on the liner notes, it isn’t clear who is responsible for the best on this cut. It is reminiscent of the music of the Cheifman, an Irish group which played traditional music from their homeland.

The next song, “The Wishbird,” features a remarkable performance on acoustic guitar by Ian Anderson, Tull’s lead guitarist, Martin Barre, could hardly be better. Anderson plays guitar like he plays flute. The feel is percussive and expressive. “Pibroch (Bag in Hand),” is the least impressive cut on the album. A combination of the randomness of War Child and the pretentiousness of Minstrel in the Gallery, “Pibroch” drones on through several uninteresting changes for nearly nine minutes. The listener feels relieved when it’s all over.

“Songs From the Wood” recalls a peaceful state of mind with its pastoral, lyrical images. Ian Anderson, Tull’s regular members of Jethro Tull artfully combine those images with well orchestrated rock rhythm and folk in an effort that surpasses any of the recent offerings. The band is in fine form showing the increased instrumental presence of David Palmer is a definite asset as on the last cut on this side, “Flute Midnight.” Anderson says that “it’s good to be back home with you.” If Jethro Tull keeps putting out albums like this, we’ll be pleased to have them back.

The legendary Doc Watson will appear in concert with Scott Terry and Browning McRee Saturday, Mar. 19, 1977 at 7:00 pm in the Berkeley Performance Center. Tickets will go on sale Monday, Feb. 28 at the Box office and Strawberries. Mail orders may be arranged by calling the box office, 286-1400, ext. 161.

Bertha Brecht’s and Kurt Weill’s musical comedy Die Dreigroschenoper, will be presented by Tu’s University’s Arena Theater Tuesday through Saturday, Mar. 1-4 at the Charles Playhouse on Summer Avenue. All performances are at 8:15 pm, except for a Saturday matinee at 2. Tickets Tuesday through Thursday are $3, with any student ID, $2; Friday and Saturday nights, $3, $2 and $1, and Sunday afternoon, $2. For reservations call the Arena box office at 623-3880.

Pianist Carol Commure will be in concert at the Community Music Center of Boston in a program of Bach, Prokofiev, Beethoven and Rachmaninoff on Thursday, Feb. 24, 1977 at 8:00 pm. The concert, free to all, will be held at the Community Music Center, 48 Warren Avenue, Boston. For more information, call 482-7944.

Note: This column, beginning with today’s issue, will be a regular feature in Friday’s Tech. Anyone with information concerning a cultural event, please send it to Katy Gropp or Liz Smith in the Tech.

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