

Bach, Beethoven and the Boys were bad . . . sometimes

Most of the time I am drowning in a sea of children's books, but once in awhile a 'big people's' book rescues me.

David W. Barber came at a critical time in my life. No, that would be exaggerating somewhat, but he did

appear at the right time of the month.

You see, certain people who shall remain anonymous expect me to attend the next show the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra brings to town. That's not all "they" expect

me to do. Then I have to write something about the concert for the newspaper. That's pretty pathetic, since I know little or nothing about music.

With expert guidance provided by Mr. Barber's book, *A Musician's Dic-*

tionary, I shall approach this task with new confidence.

Mr. Barber tells me that the crowd of musicians who show up for any performance are "individuals bent upon producing sound or noise by means of scraping, hitting, beating, or blowing into an object made of wood, brass or catgut."

Mr. Barber goes on to say that they wear ill-fitting tuxedos or black dresses.

The conductor, I learn, is the person at the front of the orchestra with his back to the audience ("usually out of embarrassment", claims Mr. Barber). "His primary function is to imitate a windmill, for the esthetic effect" and "his chief weapon is the baton, which everyone is pretending to watch carefully."

And where would the musicians be without the invaluable music stands? They unfortunately have a tendency to fall over — of their own accord, of course. They come in two sizes — too high or too low — and they're always broken.

I picked up some audience etiquette from Mr. Barber too. Sometimes, chides Mr. Barber, we applaud at the wrong time — oops, sorry. There's nothing like between-the-movements applause to kill the mood of a piece.

And talking about pieces, they're put together by composers. Accord-

Book Review

with ESTHER CALDWELL

ing to Mr. Barber, "all of their wishes regarding notes, tempo, expressions, and so on are carefully taken down in the score, and then ignored." Thank goodness most of these guys are dead.

David Barber could barely contain himself with a dictionary, so he produced his insightful *Bach, Beethoven and the Boys*. Mr. Barber claims his book is "music history as it ought to be taught." He provides readers with such personal glimpses of these composers that their actual compositions will forever pale in significance. Are we to believe these gossipy tidbits?

Mozart's abrasiveness and tactlessness lost him many friends and lucrative positions. Besides that, he gambled away his money on cards and billiards.

His wife, Constanze, cleaned up his financial mess after his death and married a diplomat whose epitaph reads: "Here lies Mozart's widow's second husband."

Beethoven sure didn't win any personality contests either. His quick temper chased away his servants. He was a boor and a slob and on those rare occasions when he shaved, he cut himself.

Mr. Barber is quick to admit that despite their minor flaws, these composers were towering geniuses. (Both men stopped growing when they reached 5 feet 4 inches.)

When Stravinsky first appeared on the music scene, he "made a big splash", but Mr. Barber speculates that he became less and less controversial as we got used to him. In his later years, the Russian-born Stravinsky became an American citizen. On one occasion, the Boston police tried to fine him \$100 for writing an arrangement of *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

There is one disappointing feature in Mr. Barber's book. He failed to include any Spaniards. And it's their music you'll be hearing on Friday, Jan. 26. Thanks to Milton Arts Productions, the musicians of the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra are driving to Milton to perform at the Milton Baptist Church (corner of Thompson and Nipissing Roads). The concert begins at 8 p.m. Tickets are available at the door — \$15 for adults and \$10 for students and seniors. (Phone 878-4604 for more information.)

□ Firefly Books in Toronto distributes *A Musician's Dictionary* (\$9.95) and *Bach, Beethoven and the Boys* (\$12.95).



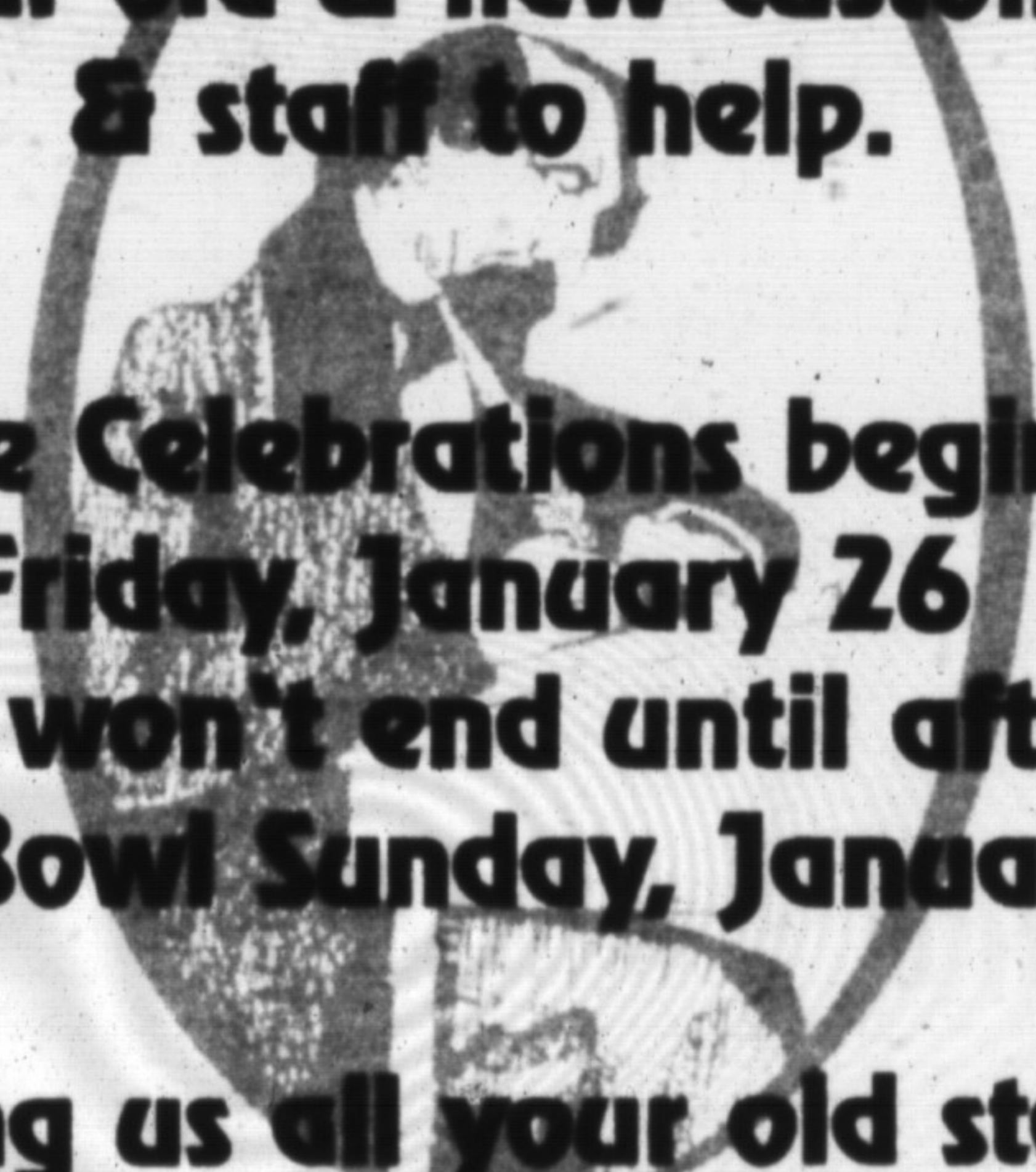
Photo by JON BLACKER

Major opening

It was a piece of video tape that Mayor Gord Krantz cut to officially open the Major Video store on Ontario Street on Saturday, Jan. 13. Mr. Krantz was assisted by Major Video president Vic Knox (right) who pledged 25 cents from each video rented in the store's first two weeks to the United Way of Milton of the mayor's behalf.

The Best Meeting Place in Milton is celebrating its 10th ANNIVERSARY

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The Celebrations begin Friday, January 26 and won't end until after Super Bowl Sunday, January 28

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