

MAGAZINE
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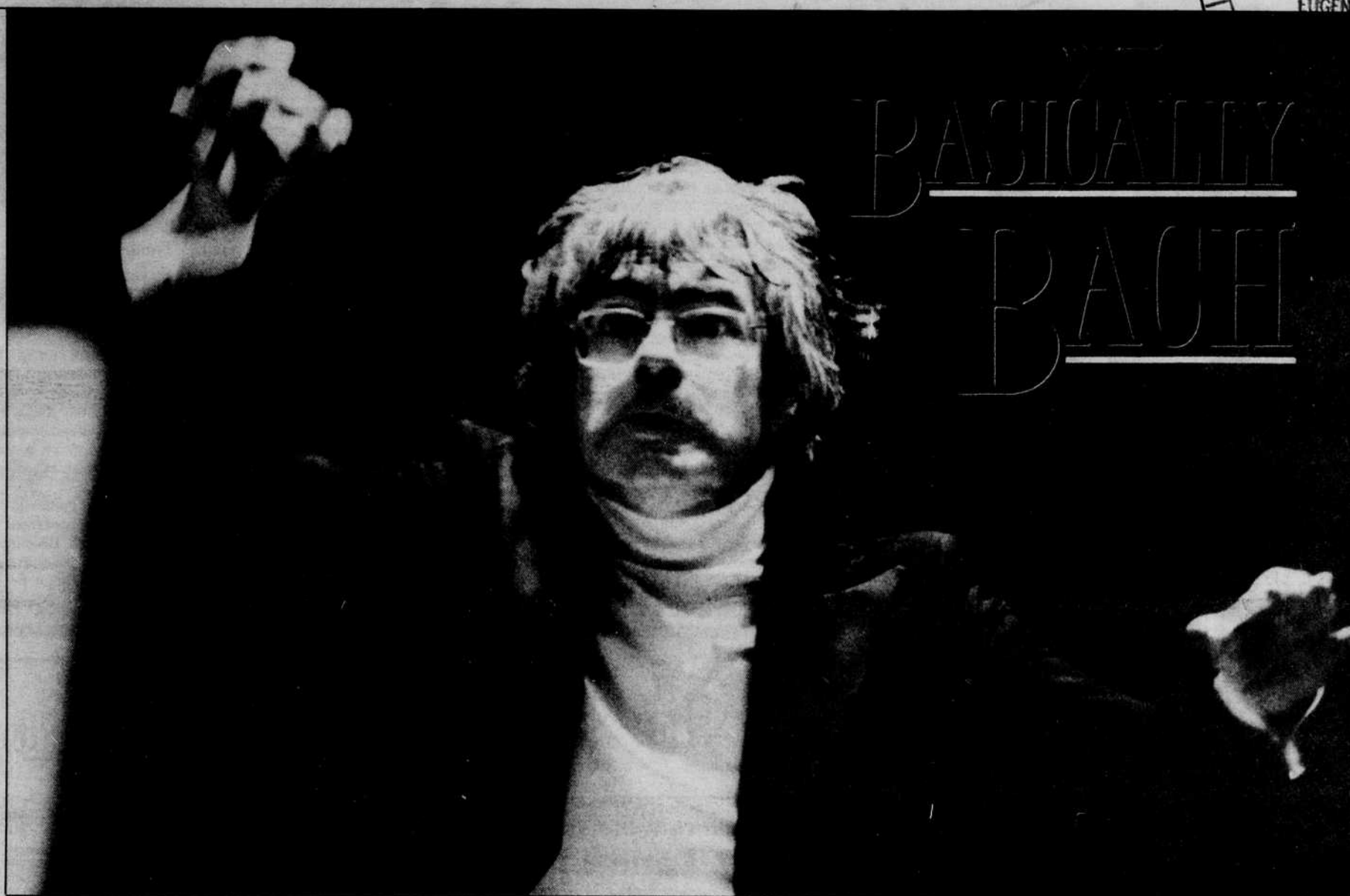
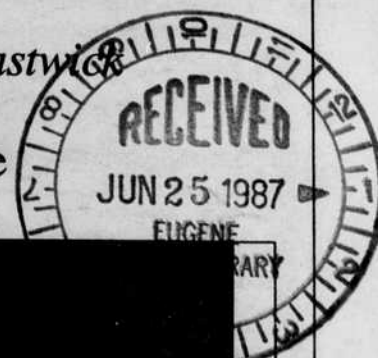
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what's HAPPENING

Guide to Local Arts, Entertainment & Events

INSIDE:

- Opening the Downtown Mall to traffic
- Windsurfing
- Film Reviews: *Roxanne*
Witches of Eastwick
- Best of June Video Releases
- Interview with a Bicycle Ace



Helmuth Rilling

Photo by George Lewen

by Karen Kammerer

"Guten Tag. I am Helmuth Rilling. We do Bach, yes?"

That was our introduction in 1970 to a gentleman who has since become a little grayer, a little leaner, but still a master teacher/performer/conductor. Who would have dreamed when Royce Saltzman invited Helmuth Rilling to conduct a choral and organ workshop at the University of Oregon Music School's summer session that in 17 short years the concerts would be heard via satellite broadcast by 20 million people in North America, 13 countries in Europe, and around the Pacific Rim from Korea and Japan to China, Australia and New Zealand?

Saltzman met Rilling in Stuttgart during the 1968-69 school year when the University's International Center for Music Education students visited Rilling's rehearsals and choral concerts. Out of this brief meeting came an invitation to Eugene the next

July for a Workshop: Choral Conducting and Organ Playing.

This session focused on analysis and performance of vocal scores by Heinrich Schutz, Johann Sebastian Bach, Johannes Brahms and 20th century composers Johann Nepomuk David and Milko Kelemen. The two contemporary pieces, written in 1958 and 1964, were new sounds to the singers, involving atonalism and nearly bar-less voiced sounds. Years later, Rilling smiled at the memory of that concert: "Never have I heard so many wrong notes in such small pieces."

But the meat of the workshops was analysis, particularly of the Bach and Brahms. It was clear that the Music School had a prize on its hands. "A rehearsal with Helmuth is like a graduate course in Baroque music," as one singer said. Rilling was astonished that we came to rehearsal without pencils. "How can you remember unless you mark, yes?" His command of English then was about equal to our command of German: tenuous. He would stop the choir for correction, be at a loss

for the words to say, and just call out, "Diction, diction!" Later, as his English improved geometrically (and our German arithmetically) he again would smile in recalling these rehearsals, saying, "Diction! was *always* the right word—your German was terrible!"

Those early Workshops were small, dubbed the Saltzman Pickup Band, consisting of members of the conducting classes and locals called to fill out the parts. A common sight was of Royce Saltzman going from practice room to classroom to other choir rehearsals inviting summer school students to "come by and read with us." To make it seem real, the final performance was opened to the public, and students and public school teachers there for the summer who played instruments were added for accompaniment.

From that first Workshop, subsequent summers were organized into a Choral Workshop and Baroque Festival (1971), a Summer Festival of Baroque Music (1972) and the Summer Festival of Music (1973-80) until

1981, when the events became The Oregon Bach Festival. Those who attended through the early years referred to these annual summers as The Rilling Festival, but with the adoption of its current title, it became clear just who it was we were coming to learn from: "the old Bach," Johann Sebastian himself.

The School of Music in 1970 was a much smaller place, and space not easy to find. Rehearsals and performances were put in nearby churches and in the unventilated recital hall. It was not yet Beall Hall, and still housed the old Reuter organ, affectionately called the "roto-Reuter" because of its unpredictable wheezes when the pipes got overheated behind the heavy fabric drapes.

To cool the rehearsal locations, Saltzman would go to the churches in the morning to turn on their lawn sprinklers so that by mid-afternoon the choir could sing with the doors shut to keep out the traffic noise from 18th Street, then a truck thoroughfare.

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