

Classic performance in a pop-mad world

LIONA: SUPERSPECIAL
CBC: 9 p.m. Oct. 23

Once upon a more harmonious if less musical time, the Boyd Gang was a group of Toronto tearaways with a distressing penchant for breaking into banks and out of jails. That was a full quarter-century ago, just about the time the CBC was launching its television service. Now there's a brand-new Boyd Gang—the fans and friends, both near and far, of classical guitarist Liona Boyd. Among the members: the Queen, Pierre Trudeau and his kids, Jimmy Carter, folk/pop star Gordon Lightfoot and most of Boyd's fellow guitarists.

Membership in this new, less menacing Boyd Gang is only going to grow, thanks in part to the dear old CBC, which never fails to recognize Canadian talent after it has been hailed abroad. *Liona* is the fifth in this fall's series of hour-long *Superspecials*, the principal output of the corporation's oft-maligned TV variety department. It's a very ordinary show, graced by a very extraordinary star who manages to maintain her pose and dignity despite a stilted, often silly script and an odd assortment of guests (country star Chet Atkins, the Canadian Brass, dancers Frank Augustyn and Veronica Tennant, pianist Hagood Hardy and the astonishingly inept singer David Clayton-Thomas). *Liona* is worth watching, though, because of its elaborate production values and Boyd's own virtuosity. She is splendid, and the show is bound to win her new fans.

If one discounts her looks—and one should not, because she is a striking young woman with thick, reddish-blond hair, dark blue eyes and a starlet's shape—Liona Boyd ought to be an unlikely celebrity. She is a classicist in a pop-mad world, a serious musician more at home with the white-tie-and-tails set than the denim crowd, a girl who as a teen-ager was entranced by guitarist Julian Bream rather than swept away by rocker Mick Jagger.

And yet, as soon as she takes her chair in the chic Toronto restaurant known as Fenton's (Boyd eats heartily but eschews most meats, prefers fruit juices to wine, hates cigarette smoke), the waiter arrives and begs her to autograph a menu. At the age of 28, after 14 years of dedicated study under such masters as Toronto's Eli Kassner and the renowned Alexandre Lagoya in Par-

is, after endless concerts and countless miles (Europe, New Zealand, Latin America), after a clutch of modestly successful solo albums, Boyd has become a major Canadian music star.

Liona, leader of the Boyd Gang:
"Listen to my friend," said Lightfoot

Of course, it won't make her rich in the way that Lightfoot, who gave her career a tremendous lift by using her as an opening act and adjuring his funky followers to "listen to my friend," is rich. Or in the way that The Band's Robbie Robertson, producer of *The Last Waltz* and no mean guitarist himself, is rich. The Lightfoots and Robertsons are into mega-dollars and sell records by the million, while Boyd is into a comfortable income (her concert fees range from \$1,000 to \$8,000, depending upon the size of the hall and the sponsor) and counts her record sales in the thousands. But she accepts this and, unlike many highly trained and proficient classical musicians, refuses to dispa-



AL GILBERT

rage either the music played or the money made by her pop counterparts.

"There's such a total difference between the classical and pop worlds," she laughs in a soft voice that has just a dash of lisp and more than a dollop of county English (she was born in England, came to Canada at 7, went back to England at 10, then returned to Toronto at 12 and has called Canada home ever since). "It's not just the music or the audiences. At a classical concert they offer you Coke. At a rock show it's more likely to be coke."

Boyd knows both worlds, and seems

to be trying to keep one foot in each. This month, for example, she is playing a concert series in Chile. Next month, she's off to Nashville to cut an album, a guitar quartet with her friend and fan, Chet Atkins, the brilliant and durable country guitarist who is also a vice-president of RCA Records. Next spring she is going on a 15-city Canadian concert tour. This fall her new album, *The First Lady of the Guitar*, is being released by CBS Records. "They expect it to go gold," she says, "which is almost unheard of for a classical record."

Boyd has seven guitars (by contrast,

Rolling Stone reports that Robbie Robertson has more than 200), which she alternates on whim, much as tennis stars do their rackets. She strums with her fingernails, which are not ever-long but very tough, and she makes beautiful music. She has a marked preference for Spanish pieces (her father, a teacher/sculptor, was born in Spain; the family once spent a year in Mexico), but can play almost anything; aspiring composers frequently send her new pieces. On her TV special she plays a broad range, including the romantic Satie composition *Trois Gymnopédies* which, she says, is the prime minister's favorite.

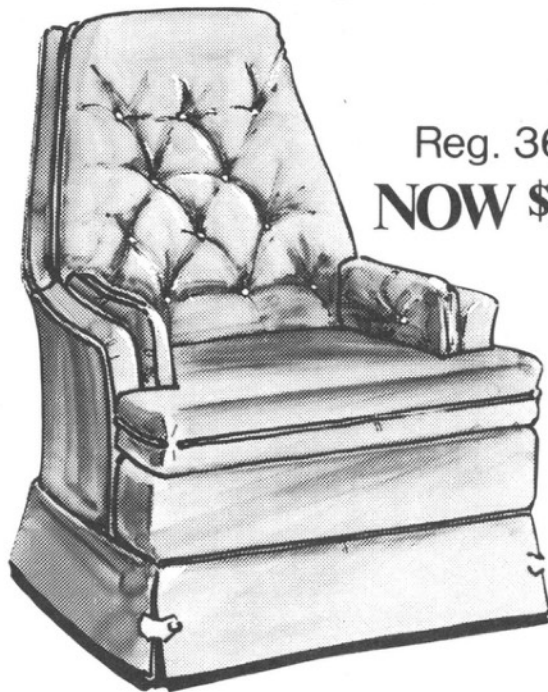
Her friendship with Trudeau has certainly spiced her recent publicity, although she doesn't try to trade on it and will discuss it only reluctantly. They first met at Trudeau's summer house, Harrington Lake, where Boyd had gone for the day as a guest of Toronto MP Robert Kaplan. Later, Trudeau dropped into one of her concerts and became an instant guitar fan. "He can't play, though," says Boyd with a smile. Later still, Trudeau was giving a small dinner at 24 Sussex Dr. for the Queen, and invited Boyd to play—but not dine. "I came on in my usual time slot, between the buffalo steak and the *mousse à l'érable*." Today she calls Trudeau "Pierre," has pet names for his three sons, and says they all "get together from time to time . . . He comes to my concerts." Perhaps significantly, Boyd made a point of watching Henry Champ's CTV interview with Margaret Trudeau earlier this month (Oct. 1). Her comment: "Poor Margaret . . . I just hope she gets her head together."

As for President Carter's membership in the Boyd Gang, she explains: "I'd heard he liked the guitar so I sent him one of my albums. He sent me back a very nice letter. More than the usual thank-you note. He said he liked my music, and played it quite often."

Boyd is still single: "I have a lot of nice friends, but I'm still looking for Mr. Perfecto," she says. "Actually, with all the touring I do it's hard to sustain relationships." The guitarist *studies*—up to six hours a day, practising in airports and hotel rooms as well as at home, pursuing the dream she's had ever since she went to Eaton's Auditorium at 14 and heard Julian Bream. "He absolutely changed my life," she says now. "I was stunned by his playing. I knew then and there I wanted to be a classical guitarist." A final irony: Bream and fellow guitarist John Williams are giving a concert at Toronto's Massey Hall on Oct. 23, the same night as Boyd's TV special. Says Boyd: "I'll be at Massey Hall. I've already seen the *Superspecial*."

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