

HUGO D'ALTON

On the enfant terrible of the orchestral world

George Clinton



The name Hugo D'Alton has been known to me ever since my father, who was an orchestral violinist, took up the mandolin as a doubling instrument and joined ENSA during the war. 'You should hear this chap Hugo D'Alton play the mandolin, he plays like lightning' said my father, who was struggling to get some sort of plectrum technique together prior to going on tour with Troise and his Mandoliers. . . . 'and he's a bit of a boy too,' he added, and as I was a little boy my father didn't bother to explain what a 'bit of a boy' meant, but later on it became clear that Hugo D'Alton was simply an individualist - fiercely so. Some years ago I became pally with his brother 'Tiger', who was a photographer, and a keen guitarist. 'Oh yes', said Tiger, 'Hugo kneels to no man. Last week he was at a recording session and the MD insisted on rehearsing the band for ages and in the end Hugo got up and said "I know my part. when you're ready to record let me know - I'll

be in the pub.'" 'Mind you' said Tiger, 'he knew I was in there waiting for him.'

When I went to see the mandolin's doughty champion at his home in Hampstead Garden Suburb he had recently returned from a five week holiday in Canada and was getting his fingers into shape playing through a Partita by Bach.

'It's the first time in my life I've ever gone away without my instrument, and boy, am I paying for it now,' said Hugo as he turned the page. Although it's true his fingers stumbled a bit, and he reiterated one or two runs, I was astonished at the facility of his left hand to dig out such dense music from such a tiny fingerboard; the more so since he was sightreading. When he had finished the Chaconne I asked him if this piece was as much a *tour de force* for mandolin as it was for guitar.