

Rising classical star

By THOMAS BAUER

Halifax audiences appear to be favourably disposed towards visiting pianists. A sold-out crowd packed the Dunn Theatre last Thursday to witness the talents of Montreal pianist Louis Lortie.

Only one week earlier Columbia recording artist John Browning played two well-played two well-received concerts in Halifax. If Browning counts as one of the piano's elder statesmen, Lortie is surely one of the rising stars.

Only 27 years old, Lortie has garnered critical acclaim both in Canada and abroad. By the age of 16, Lortie had already won two major Canadian music competitions. He has toured extensively by himself and as featured soloist with the Toronto Symphony. His premier album will be released

soon on the Chandos label.

Despite his youthful appearance, Lortie shows considerable maturity as a musician. His program on Thursday featured works by Maurice Ravel during the first half, and Frederic Chopin during the second half. The Ravel selections included the well known "Pavane pour une Infante Defunte" (also called the Pavane for a Sleeping Child or Dead Princess), and "Jeux d'Eau" (Water Fountain). Both pieces were played with a consummate ease and clarity which left the audience entranced.

My favourite work in the evening's performance was "Le Tombeau de Couperin", an elegy to the French Roccoco harpsichordist Francois Couperin. This suite of six pieces, also arranged

by Ravel for orchestra, was played with the sensitivity and bravura demanded by the piece.

The second half of Lortie's program consisted of four Scherzos by Chopin. These works are more technically demanding than the Ravel pieces, and one or two misplaced notes in the first Scherzo indicated that Lortie may not have made the necessary transition during intermission. However, he quickly regained the relaxed composure so evident in the first half of the concert. By the end of the last Scherzo his fingers were flying across the keyboard.

The audience clearly enjoyed this virtuosic display, for they soon called the performer back for two encores. Unfortunately these encores were unannounced, though I will hazard a guess at



"his fingers were flying"

more Chopin and Liszt. What is certain is that Louis Lortie, in his Halifax debut, confirmed his stature as one of Canada's leading young proponents of classical music.

Piano enthusiasts may wish to take note that one of Lortie's peers, pianist Angela Hewitt, will also be appearing at the Dunn Theatre as part of the Debut Atlantic series.

THE DECLINE OF SEX

By HEATHER HUESTON

"In times of decline people are always reminiscent of the 'good old days'... Young people are preaching to come back to a more traditional life... that's what they hope for when they see the dilemma that faces their parents... but they will never achieve that because in order to do that, they would have to be Catholic or Protestant as were their grand-parents. If its not sustained by a whole vision, it won't work."

Director Denys Arcand made *Le declin de l'empire americain* to discuss some things he's been thinking about — like why people can't stay married anymore, why they sleep around so much, and why everybody kills themselves trying to find personal happiness.

The characters in the movie, a group of comfortable history professors, don't talk about much besides sex and themselves, but that's Arcand's point as he makes clear in the beginning of the film. One of the professors, Dominique,

explains the thesis of her book. During the downslide of an empire, people become more self-centered. (It's also the time when women come to political power, a comment made by one of the men and one Arcand may or may not agree with.) Eight intellectuals sitting around talking about sex may sound grim, but the talk is full of snickering and trading pet peeves about the other sex.

The men, Remy, Pierre, Claude, and Alain, spend the day preparing dinner at Remy's country house while

the women, Dominique, Louise, Diane, and Danielle, are working out at a Montreal health club. The twist on sex roles is the only concession made in the war of the sexes. When the two sides meet later for dinner, they advance toward each other like opposing armies.

The men sound like travelling salesmen the way they swap stories: how many women they've had, how pick-up conversation is so bad you have to "really want to get laid", and women — what it's like to live with them (ugh). Remy is a pudgy sex-driven comic who's slept with almost every woman in Montreal including his wife's sister. He loves his wife but needs to rack up conquests. Pierre is separated and cynical about love which he equates with sex ("when I get hard, I'm in love"). When Alain, the young grad student, says he's not like Remy and Pierre, he doesn't need to fuck a new girl every day, Pierre explains that age leads to vice. After your career is set, what else is there? Claude, the gay representative, may have AIDS and is hooked on the thrill of cruising, even though one of his friends got stabbed. In a mock comparison of gays and straights, Remy labels himself and Pierre "classic heteros — big nose, overweight, ravaged skin." It's true, and you wonder why they get so much action.

Alain doesn't say much and neither does Danielle, the young undergrad Pierre met in a massage parlour. Arcand doesn't seem to be speaking for them so much as for his own, older colleagues who've been through the sexual revolution mill.

The women trade their own

stories — how to deflate a man's ego ("With you, Roger, it's love, but with Benoit... it was purely sexual")

Louise, Remy's wife is funny, warm and a traditional wife. She's not set up to be the prude, but she does blunder into lives not so well-ordered as she imagines her own to be. When Diane, a divorced professor (who's currently in an S & M relationship), is worrying about how having kids has delayed her career, Louise reassures her that having children is an accomplishment that Diane can treasure. As Diane stares at her, the scene flashes back to Diane's daughter catching Diane and Remy in bed and screaming "Make him leave, Mommy! Make him leave!" (There are no kids in this movie. When Danielle tells Pierre she wants to have his baby he refuses because intellectuals make lousy parents. "Look at Remy's kids and Diane's — disasters!" This movie isn't talking about how to live together, it's about how people can't.)

It's Dominique who bursts Louise's bubble, partly out of resentment of the only married couple, partly because she can't stand "blindness". She tells the group that she's slept with Remy. The group breaks up for more individual self-examination. The morning after is tentatively hopeful, although Arcand maintains his distance and doesn't promise anything. The final scene is the house in winter, deserted and blanketed in snow.

Le declin de l'empire americain is at the Cohn February 8 for a benefit screening for the Motion Picture heritage Fund. It opens at Wormwoods Theatre February 13.

