

Andre Laplante — a hero returns

by Moira Matthews

When pianist Andre Laplante won the silver medal at the 1978 International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, he was a virtual unknown. On the strength of this award, the young man from Rimouski has gone on to prove why he was Moscow's favourite, earning praise for both sensitive musicianship and flawless technique. These attributes were very much in evidence when Laplante played in Halifax on Monday night.

Laplante is a pianist of the Romantic school and his playing has a wonderful considered, inward quality. His interpretations are warm and poetic. This sometimes emerged in surprising ways. For instance, Laplante opened the recital with a Haydn sonata which I think would have been quite a revelation to the old master if he had the good fortune to hear it. Laplante made maximum use of the resources of a modern Steinway to achieve contrasts of sound and style which never would have been possible on an original instrument. The sonata was suffused with Romantic colour; perhaps this was the way Beethoven would play the sonata when he wanted to shock his staid old teacher, Haydn.

I thought Laplante would probably be particularly suited to Chopin, not least because he looks like him. He has the thick hair, swept dramatically

back, and the trail, consumptive stage presence which used to make women faint in the aisles. In this supposedly least romantic of ages, people seem to be flocking to the concert halls to hear reincarnations of Romantic musicians play Romantic works. I would advise anyone who wanted to be a success on the concert stage to find a Romantic figure to resemble.

I was not disappointed with Laplante's rendition of Chopin's B Minor Sonata. The main impression given by Laplante was not Romantic sweetness but strength. The sonata had sweep and expansiveness and a lyrical beauty. Long melodic lines sang out to the back of the hall. This was especially well done in the quieter passages and one wished there could have been more of them.

Laplante's performance of Ravel's fiendishly difficult Gaspard de la Nuit was particularly interesting because it was played a few weeks ago in recital by Dalhousie's William Tritt. Both performances were remarkable. Tritt's was a technical tour de force; at times, the sounds seemed to have nothing to do with the keyboard, but to come from the air, like the spirits the music describes. With Laplante, on the other hand, one was always conscious of the keyboard, but only because of Laplante's intense awareness of the finest possible pianistic

sonority. Laplante's conception of the work's structure was revealed in every note, again showing the inward depths of this musician.

The Liszt pieces which concluded the recital stressed the virtuoso side of Laplante's style. The Petrarch Sonata was filled with quiet poetic sentiment. The Mephisto Waltz was an overwhelming contrast, played with extreme speed and wildness. At times it seemed too fast for Laplante himself, but the performance was full of tension and excitement. It is a favourite piece for showing off with, but that's fine, because Laplante obviously has technique to burn. And even the waltz had its sensitive moments.

Andre Laplante is a find-a-young musician who plays with feeling and skill. In an extremely competitive profession, he seems to be retaining the sensitivity and energy necessary for consistently beautiful playing.

by John Perkyns

The conquering hero returns to his homeland, brandishing his spoils, the Tchaikovsky International Competition's Silver Medal. Is Canada's own Andre Laplante, the favorite of the Moscow audiences, the prize winner of other competitions in Sydney, Paris, and Geneva, met with the welcome justly deserved by those at the top of their field? Well, maybe somewhere, but not here. The welcome put on by Halifax on Monday night amounted to a little better than half-full Rebecca Cohn Auditorium, a small concert hall by world standards.

For little more than the price of a movie you could have seen and heard a display that would have left you wondering why you paid ten dollars for that album with the same three chords in every song, or why you ever had to get loaded down with beer to enjoy anything.

I knew before I went that if Andre Laplante was in form, I would be impressed. He was. I was. But I was surprised to find that the technique needed for such clarity in monsters like Ravel's "Gaspard de la nuit" and Liszt's "Mephisto Waltz" was not what impressed me the most. Nor were the attention arresting liberties taken in the program opening Haydn Sonata, after which the gentleman sitting behind me remarked, "Boy! Sure is some piano player. I bet Haydn didn't mean that at all!"

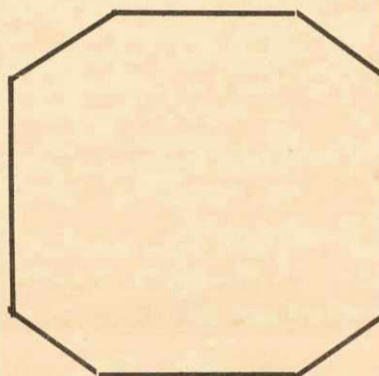
What seemed to me to be Laplante's most powerful attribute was his influence over the audience. The Allegro of the Haydn I enjoyed immensely. It seemed that everybody else did too, because the following Adagio achieved a

cough rating of 3, which I'm sure is a Cohn record. The proverbial best was yet to come. In the "Marche Funebre" movement from which Chopin's Sonata No. 2 gets its name, following the theme that Mick Jagger will be buried to, Andre Laplante played the gorgeous, simple second theme so quietly that only the front row of a regular Cohn audience would have heard it. But he made us into an unusual Cohn audience. We dared not move, lest we should miss anything. He broke his own record with a cough rating of 1. I have never heard an audience so manipulated.

A large part of Laplante's performance was visual. The man has lots of swept back hair which, with his uncomfortable walking across the stage, the face and tongue movements, and the audible puffing and blowing, give a delightful aura of eccentricity which must have accompanied Liszt himself when he walked on stage.

Has our hero a swelled head? There were no suave bows. They were not needed. He humbly accepted well deserved applause and we caught a glimpse of a smile on an exhausted face when we pushed for an encore.

Halifax insulted Andre Laplante by not selling out his concert. So many times I've heard it said that only second rate and over-the-hill artists come to Halifax. This man is exceptional. We must be talking through our hats when we say we want first rate performers. The only reason he knows Halifax exists is because he is a Canadian. If he doesn't come back I would be disappointed, but I wouldn't blame him.



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This week's movies

Thursday, Oct. 30 *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* will be showing in the McInnes Room. Sunday, the Italian film *To Forget Venice* is the presentation at the Cohn. Tuesday, the Art Gallery presents films on sculptors Alexander Calder and Mark Prent. Thursday, Nov. 6, the SUB movies will be *A Bridge Too Far*, a war movie with a gargantuan all-star cast, and *All The President's Men*, with Robert Redford as Bob Woodward, and Dustin

Hoffman as Carl Bernstein. Also on the 6th, the German film *Mabuse I* is in the MacMechan Auditorium. The German film *Caligari* plays in the same room Oct. 30. The NFB is showing films on drug dependency on Nov. 6 in their Barrington St. theatre.

Paramount 1 and 2 are holding over *The First Deadly Sin* and *Ordinary People* respectively. Scotia Square continues with *The Elephant Man* (recommended), while the Cove opens with Charlton Heston's *The Awakening*, which is also starting at Penhorn 3. Penhorn 1 has *Private Benjamin* (this week's top grossing film in North America) and No. 2 keeps *Raise the Titanic*. At Downsview I there's *Oh God Book II*; at 2 *The First Deadly Sin*; and at 3 *Smokey and the Bandit II*. Wormwood has *Psycho* Friday through Sunday, and *The Killer* on Wednesday Nov. 5. The Casino is opening with *Gloria*, and the Oxford and Hyland are holding over *Loving Couples* and *It's My Turn* respectively.

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