

Louis Lortie: A Contemporary Classic

The word is out: Montreal's Louis Lortie is one of the finest pianists around today. Since he won first prize at the prestigious Busoni Competition in 1984, Lortie's international career has taken a quantum leap.

A pianist of wide and various abilities, he displays great rhythmic freedom, immense contrasts and an appealing exuberance. But best of all, Lortie makes his piano sing — sometimes at the height of its power and at other times in an almost seductive whisper. To do all this requires an uncommon command of technique and a confident approach to the flow of music — assets that Lortie possesses to the full.

Louis Lortie made his début with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra at age 13. Three years later, he took first prize in two of Canada's leading competitions: The Canadian and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) National Competition.

After his brilliant Toronto début in 1978, Lortie was invited to perform as guest soloist with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra during its historic tour of the People's Republic of China. His captivating performances moved the Chinese to ask for his return in 1983 for a much-publicized concert series with the Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra and for recitals in Shanghai and Beijing.

The following year, Lortie placed as a finalist in England's renowned Leeds International Competition where he received accolades

from critics and audience alike. Later that year, he took the gold medal at the Busoni Competition in Italy.

Since that time, Lortie has launched a career that is truly international in scope. In addition to regular orchestral appearances and recitals in his native Canada, Lortie has

Lortie, now 30, consistently gives performances that are hailed the world over. "Spine-tingling," wrote London's Geoffrey Norris in the *Telegraph*. "One of those thrilling occasions when technique, artistic imagination and an obvious love for the music all came together in a reading of rare refinement and distinction."



Sylvain Giguère

Louis Lortie: A pianist of wide and various abilities.

made annual tours of Europe and the United States. He also has several recordings to his credit — on CBC and Chandos labels — which have found him new audiences in many parts of the globe.

Albert Goldberg of the *Los Angeles Times* agreed when reviewing Lortie's earlier concerts at Ambassador Auditorium. "By any measure, Lortie is an extraordinary pianist. Even in the age of Horowitz, he sports breath-taking technique . . . Lortie is a poet as

much as a virtuoso and he manifests the rare quality of commanding an audience's silent and undivided attention."

But rave reviews are just half the story. From London and Beijing to New York and Milan, Lortie's brilliance always succeeds in stunning the crowds that assemble to hear him play. Yet Lortie is not showy. If anything, this artist deals in cool, effortless understatement and knows just how to capture the imagination of his listeners without resorting to flashy, flamboyant tricks.

While things look very promising for Lortie's career, the talented pianist remains quite humble about its prospects. "You have to keep fighting to keep your place," he explains. "But most of all, you have to be careful not to rest on your laurels, as things can, and do, change very quickly."

Lortie appears to be pacing his career with considerable thought. This comes as no surprise because for Lortie there is more to life than just his music. "There is breathing, loving, reading, eating, spending time with friends," he says. "I would be miserable if I only had my career. I need all the rest for nourishment."