

# Montreal Symphony gives impressive performance

By Avigdor Zoromp  
special writer

Montreal and the province of Quebec are in the headlines these days because of the language question. While this linguistic war is raging, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra is spreading a most unusual language.

To English speaking audiences it is known as the Montreal Symphony Orchestra. Under present conditions, it would run into problems if it were to display this title publicly in its home city, where it is the Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal, OSM. Regardless of the official name, its sound the same — excellent.

This legacy of excellence includes Maestro Charles Dutoit, who has been the music director of this orchestra since 1977. The OSM and Maestro Dutoit performed at Orchestra Hall on the international series this month.

The major works on the program — Ravel's Piano Concerto for the Left Hand and the Symphony No. 5 by Mahler — constituted another link in this chain of

excellence. These were preceded by the shorter, but vibrant, "Le Corsaire" Overture by Berlioz.

When an orchestra and its conductor have genuine sense of quality, they don't need theatrics to display it. This, indeed, was the dominant feeling at this performance. Judging by the intense reaction following each work, this perception of quality and excellence wasn't an isolated phenomenon.

Pianist Louis Lortie, soloist in the Ravel concerto, isn't well known here, but his level of quality matched that of the others. In this concerto the left hand alone creates sound normally generated by two hands. The leaping chords, the resounding arpeggios with the more tender text wove a continuous, refined fabric. The final cadenza appeared as a natural culmination of the previous material rather than as a separate show piece.

Lortie, who was born in Montreal, must have a special appreciation for this cherished orchestra. He is definitely of high international caliber and deserves to be heard more often.

Each of Mahler's symphonies has a unique universe. The Symphony No. 5 is no exception. Among the performances of it I have heard, this one had less emotional displays, but it was no less effective. There was little "schmalz" — or exaggerated emotionalism. But, there was always the sense of the deeper meaning and significance. The impact of the march in the opening movement was driven home with its steady, but ominous pulse, without being too drawn-out. Few orchestral sounds can match the effectiveness of a well polished, clear, but intense fugue, as was the case here in the final movement.

There was good proportion and balance throughout this work. The adagio was lyrical without being too emotional. The failure of the harp to come through clearly, was one of the few exceptions to the high level of balance.

The OSM draws sell-out crowds in many cities. Our community has yet to come into its own in this respect.

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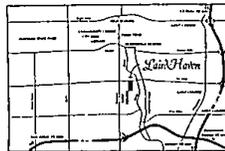
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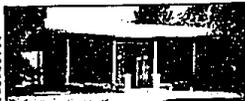
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