

Mischa Kottler receives ovations

By Avigdor Zaromp
special writer

Some people attain immortality through the legacy they leave for future generations. In a few cases, immortality comes with longevity, which is as close to literal immortality as one can get.

Mischa Kottler is one of the handful of living immortals who manage to maintain a healthy and refreshing spirit of youth.

Kottler's 90th birthday is being celebrated this season on various occasions. The latest one was the piano recital he gave at the Cranbrook House last week, as part of the Cranbrook Music Guild series. The actual date of Kottler's birth seems to be elusive — according to some sources it falls in March, according to others it is in September or later.

Kottler doesn't mind this confusion. He even encourages it — what better way is there to celebrate one's birthday and enjoy it more than once a year?

KOTTLER RECEIVED a standing ovation before the performance at Cranbrook House as well as at the end. "It is because of my age, not because of my playing," he said modestly.

He is wrong, of course. His more than half a century as a pianist and teacher prompted the sellout audience to accord him the first standing ovation, but the others were given for the unique quality of his performance.

The 19th century grand Romantic tradition was represented in the selections. The first part of the program was works by Chopin — three mazurkas, the Ballade in F minor and the Andante Spianato and Grand Polonaise. The second part featured works by Debussy, Liszt, Rachmaninoff and Ravel.

The few notes dropped in the excitement of the occasion weren't enough to diminish the impact. The Andante Spianato did prove to be a problem in some spots, but not due to permanent limitations.

I heard him perform it better within the last year and there is little doubt that he could and probably will perform it better in the future.

The art of fine musicianship is never compromised in Kottler's performances. The refined, singing touch is always there. In some of the other selections, daring and dazzling passages were played with apparent ease and sense of joy.

The Sonata by Ravel breathed with crisp freshness. The Rhapsody in C Major by Debussy responded with a sparkling combination of grandeur and mischief.

In addition to his astonishing pianistic capability, Kottler is a master of humorous anecdotes. How many of us realize that Chopin's "Minute Waltz" may have been inspired by the composer watching his dog wag its tail?

Kottler told a long anecdote involving the Polish pianist Paderewski which can be better authenticated. Kottler's rendition of

this piece, as one of his three encores, provided yet another personal wrinkle.

FOLLOWING the conventional version, he suddenly deviated from the notes, delving into a most daringly difficult arrangement in thirds. He said this arrangement was by a fellow named "Mikhail Reikott." These and other witticisms were only the tip of Kottler's refined, subtle humor.

A festive reception with birthday cake and balloons followed the program. Greetings on the wall were in English and Russian.

This brings to mind one more thing — Kottler is very fond of cakes. Following intermission, Nancy Mallitz, music critic, presented Kottler with a large framed picture from his recent trip to Vienna, where she was present. As she told of the exciting musical and cultural events there, he interrupted, "Don't forget the delicious pastries." How could one ever forget?

Kottler will be performing the Tchaikovsky Concerto with the Birmingham Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, April 9, at Temple Beth El of Bloomfield Township.

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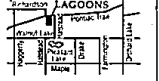
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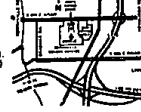
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