

André Laplante, pianist
Toronto Symphony Orchestra under Andrew Davis
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A masterful rendition of Beethoven's grandest concerto

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Toronto Symphony Orchestra André Laplante, piano, Sir Andrew Davis, conductor
At Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto on Wednesday

André Laplante and Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto*, the ideal pairing of master pianist and masterpiece, superbly supported by Sir Andrew Davis, himself a master accompanist among conductors, crowned the Toronto Symphony Orchestra's Wednesday concert at Roy Thomson Hall.

Laplante brought a breathing grandeur to this, Beethoven's grandest concerto; a grandeur offset moreover, by the most infinitely delicate finesse, all encompassed by a deeply perceptive rhythmic sense, which related every detail of the solo part to the whole.

Many gifted and highly trained virtuosi can manage the *Emperor Concerto*, but few can fulfill it with the lofty command and perfect discretion of Laplante. And with Davis on the podium, reading his soloist's mind, and the TSO paying rapt attention to both soloist and conductor, the music came alight from within, as it seldom does. The outer movements were brilliant without a touch of vulgarity, moving without a hint of mawkishness, sweeping and propulsive without febrility. The slow movement was sheer heaven.

The concerto, for once, occupied the second half of the evening. The all-orchestral first half was less successful, despite Davis's unimpeachable good offices and the Berlioz and Strauss orchestras - nearly twice the size of Beethoven's - producing the wider dynamic ranges of those later composers with much skill and fervour.

The pieces of music themselves may have been the culprits.

Berlioz's overture to his aborted early opera *Les francs-juges* (*The Frankish Judges*) is one of Davis's party pieces and he does it up thoroughly in the best English-Berlioz tradition, neatly, affectionately and zestfully, dotting every "i" and crossing every "t." But it's a scatty affair, its bizarre contrasts inadvertently almost, though not quite, comic. The great Berlioz had yet to appear.



Artist Management

And Richard Strauss's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* empties its bag with the first shake in its famous introductory "sunrise," then wades through a clotted orchestral orgy alleviated occasionally by challenging bits for individual players, but really foundering in a muddy fugue rising from the double-basses, through divided cellos, violas and on up to a kind of harmonic nowhere. It has to be rescued by a typical Straussian sugar lump of woodwind prettiness, which seems quite at odds with anything the great sage Zarathustra might have "spake."

Davis and the TSO gave it their best shot, but this listener survived unconvinced.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/arts/music/a-masterful-rendition-of-beethovens-grandest-concerto/article1353317/>