

## André Laplante *with the Winnipeg Symphony*

*"call him the great communicator...he translates the notes on the page into memorable musical experiences of great substance"*

### WSO's 66th season begins with top-drawer talent

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There's always an aura about opening night. The Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra's 66th season kick-off Friday night was no exception. On the program were two surefire audience pleasers, Rachmaninoff's iconic Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor and the majestic The Planets by Gustav Holst. Topped off by a top-notch guest artist -- Canadian veteran pianist André Laplante and you've got some definite anticipation going for you.

Making the evening even more festive was a heartwarming performance by 100 children from the WSO's Sistema Winnipeg program. Attired in rainbow-coloured T-shirts, the youngsters sang and played the theme from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony on violins, violas and cellos, earning a rousing standing ovation.

#### Laplante Plays Rachmaninoff

Laplante then came onstage, his flowing white hair tied back in a tiny ponytail. He is a cerebral artist, more concerned with getting the intended musical message across than on impressing audiences with his technical prowess (which is nonetheless impressive).

You could call him the great communicator - - as he translates the notes on the page into

memorable musical experiences of great substance to his listeners.

This was demonstrated immediately by the patient, lyrical opening theme, accompanied by a lonely-sounding bassoon. Laplante took command of the instrument, mastering the myriad notes. As the music changed, a story unfolded, Laplante the gentle, sensitive and always expressive raconteur and we sat attentively, wide-eyed, ears perked up. From pastoral to romantic to fiery, the fluidity of his playing made this work accessible and mesmerizing.

Laplante's hands move gracefully, criss-crossing one another, elegant and tidy. His cadenza was powerful without going overboard -- as some pianists tend to crash in their excitement.

Only a few small synchronization irregularities emerged in the first movement; conductor Alexander Mickelthwate for the most part keeping the orchestra where they needed to be.

The opening of the Intermezzo featured a rich-toned solo by new acting principal oboe, Beverly Wang. The piano line was full of subtleties -- you could hear the thoughts emanating from the keys. Laplante's touch is never ponderous, yet he has the ability to make the instrument as dense and full as an entire orchestra.

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## Artist Management

There were some delightfully spirited and playful sections before it all ended with an ultra romantic finalé. Only the most versatile of artists could play this constantly shifting work with such effectiveness.

After intermission, a beefed-up WSO played a rousing rendition of The Planets -- seven movements for seven planets, and what dramatic depictions they are. Holst claimed it was the astrological meanings of the planets that motivated his composition, but there are references to the Roman gods as well.

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<http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/arts-and-life/entertainment/music/wsos-66th-season-begins-with-top-drawer-talent-224682482.html>