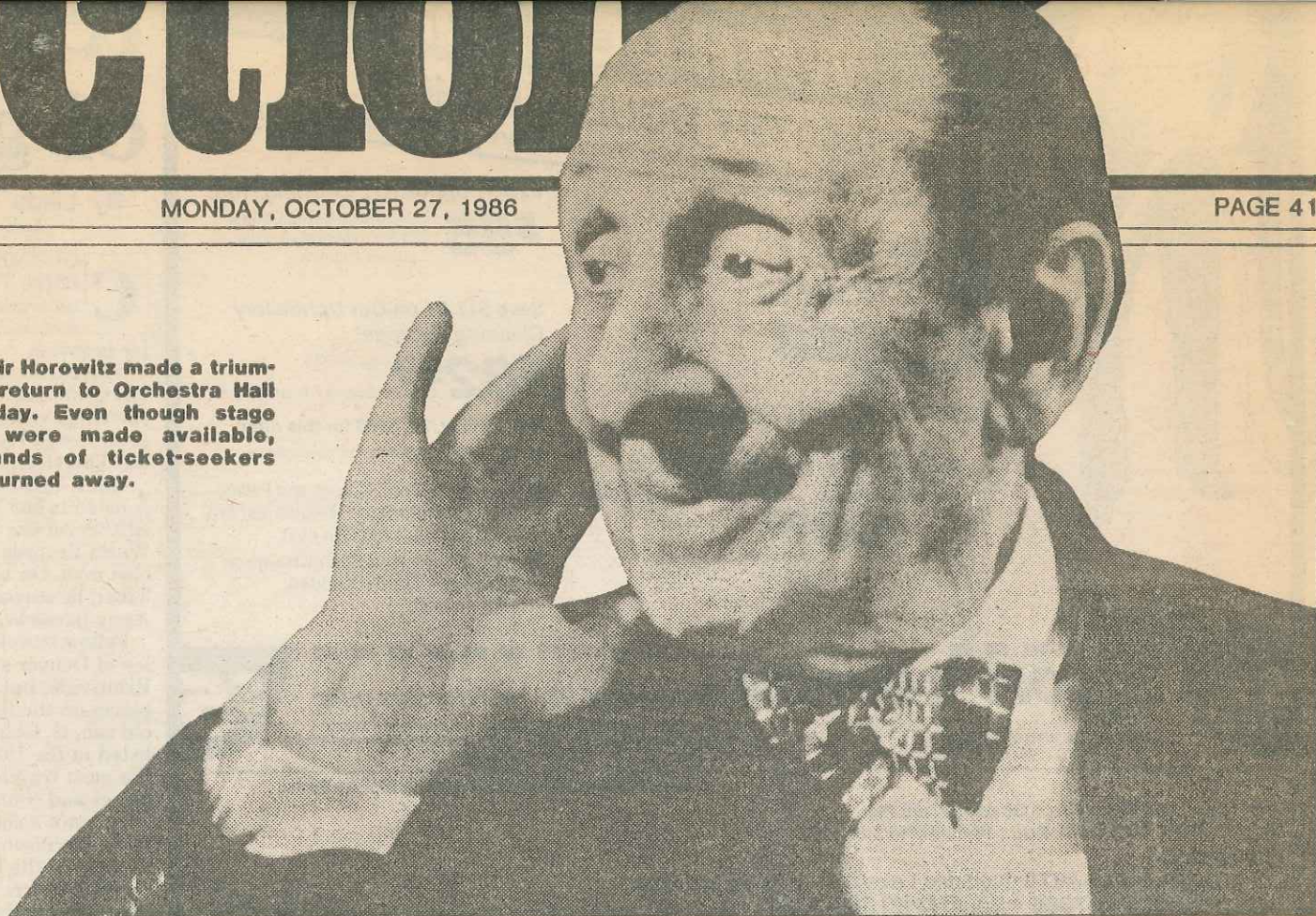


Vladimir Horowitz made a triumphant return to Orchestra Hall yesterday. Even though stage seats were made available, thousands of ticket-seekers were turned away.



## The greatest virtuoso

*Vladimir Horowitz triumphant again at 83*

### CLASSICAL MUSIC

By Robert C. Marsh

**I**f the spirit moves him and his rather special conditions are met, Vladimir Horowitz will come and play the piano for you. And because he is the pianist that many would prefer to hear over all others, he gets what he wants. Yesterday afternoon at 4 (the one appointed time he will consider), he was back at Orchestra Hall with a program of his specialties. More than 7,000 ordered tickets to the event, but only 2,500 or so could be admitted. Horowitz permitted stage seats, which he normally vetoes, and a broadcast over WFMT (98.7 FM).

At 83, he came to us fresh from triumphs in this country (he played at the White House Oct. 5) and, earlier this year, the Soviet Union. Slightly more than half his program was drawn from his Moscow recital. His return there in April, after an absence of 61 years, was broadcast on CBS-TV, and the recital can be heard on a Deutsche Grammophon recording. But to get him to Moscow—or Chicago—you have to arrange for the piano he prefers to play, his own 53-year-old American Steinway, his rather low but spacious piano bench, and a steady supply of his preferred food, Dover sole.

Old-timers will recall the years in which Horowitz visited Chicago annually and was a frequent guest with the Chicago Symphony. More than a third of a century has

Vladimir Horowitz, pianist, at Orchestra Hall Sunday. Two Sonatas, Scarlatti; Adagio K. 540, Rondo K. 485, Sonata K. 330, Mozart; Etudes, Op. 2, No. 1 and Op. 8, No. 12, Scriabin; "Arabesque," Schumann; "Sonetto del Petrarca" No. 104, Liszt; Valses-Caprice No. 6, Schubert/Liszt; two Mazurkas, Scherzo Op. 20, No. 1, Chopin.

passed since he last played a concerto in Chicago. His 12 years of exile from the recital circuit ended in 1965. In the mid-1970s, it looked, briefly, as if he might become a regular visitor again, but this was not to be the case. His most recent performance here was in 1983. He was not at his best that afternoon. The Moscow broadcast produced anticipations that he was back in prime form, and sure enough, he was. He looked great and sounded even greater.

The Horowitz sound is not a secret of the Horowitz piano. When touched by ordinary mortals, his piano sounds like any number of fine Steinways from its period. The sound is in Horowitz's fingers, wrists and lower arms. If you see Horowitz with his shirt off, he is solid muscle. It is the body of a matador, with one steel band lying over another.

He plays in the great old tradition of the Russian conservatories, in which it is forbidden to use the body's weight on the fingers to produce a larger sound. Everything comes out of the lower arm. It is a matter of touch and the subtle use of the sustaining pedal.

For a half century, critics have been finding a "new" Horowitz as his recitals change. But there is only one Horowitz, a miraculous, many-faceted artist who delights in surprising us and revealing the plurality of things that enter into his artistry. For years we were told that he played faster and louder than anyone else. In this recital, he chose, most of the time, to be quiet, to select moderate tempos, to stress pure musicianship over pyrotechnics. And then, at the close of the first half, in the Scriabin Etude Op. 8, No. 12, he showed us the fire-eating Horowitz of the past. Have no doubt, he is still, I am sure, the greatest virtuoso of all.

As close to perfection as mortal ears are likely to hear were the Scriabin, Schumann's "Arabesque" (and his "Traumerei" among the encores), and No. 104 from Liszt's "Sonetto del Petrarca." Here the combination of insight, articulation and the gift for song were synthesized on a transcendent level.

Throughout this recital, Horowitz was reminding us that, if few play louder than he, even fewer can make the lowest intensities of piano sound more powerful. His Scarlatti was light, bright, a study of quiet tonal shadings. His Mozart was not Austrian, but it defined the classical spirit and was filled with joy. And in Liszt's arrangement of the sixth of Schubert's Valses-Caprices, the spirit of the dance was triumphant.

Listening to Horowitz is listening to history. He takes us back to a musical world that, except for himself, is largely gone. I was pleased so many of his listeners were young people. Opportunities for time traveling are always rare. We should savor them.

# Overnight Chicago

## Vladimir Horowitz's virtuosity shines through the master's gentler style

By John von Rhein  
Music critic

It is never wise to write off an old soldier, particularly if the old soldier happens to be Vladimir Horowitz. When the celebrated pianist gave his most recent Chicago recital three years ago—a performance that found him with powers sadly diminished—some observers seemed ready to pack him off to a retirement home for tar-nished living legends.

The doubters did not reckon on the legend's amazing resilience. The Horowitz who returned to Orchestra Hall on Sunday afternoon may have looked slightly frailer, but when he eased into the opening measures of a Scarlatti sonata, sending liquid trills rippling through the hall with bell-like clarity, his 82 years seemed to melt away and suddenly we were hearing the Horowitz of old—if not at the very top of his Indian-summer form, then remarkably close to it.

Those who witnessed past Horowitz recitals might have known what to expect: the famously idiosyncratic phrasings, the errant tempos, the pedal effects that only he can achieve, the bursts of titanic virtuosity. Through it all Horowitz wore a gentle smile, looking rather childlike as he waved to the crowd, clapped his hands and gave little shrugs whenever his keyboard conjuring drew the wanted response. One trusts that the effect was as potent for the thousands who were listening to WFMT's live radio broadcast as it was for the crowd who packed the hall and stage seats.

Any Horowitz recital is one part fireworks, one part sleight-of-hand, one part poetic evocation. Horowitz being Horowitz, the old mannerisms—

and the diablerie, too—were never far beneath the surface. But this time the wild beasts were tamed by a gentler muse. Sunday's concert found the great pianist in a generally more introspective mood than before—less prone to indulge in nervous and fiful attacks or aggressive distortions of line. In their place was a lyrical sensitivity, a limpid and beautifully proportioned pianism, a seamless, purring legato of the sort no other pianist can duplicate.

Perhaps the most fascinating items on the program were the ones new to Horowitz's local repertory.

Mozart's Adagio in B minor [K.540] and Rondo in D [K.485] were unfamiliar to these ears, and with the Mozart C-Major Sonata [K.330] proved to be a marvel of fleet, perfectly regulated articulation. Stylistically, Horowitz's Mozart remains very much of the old school—all those unwritten ritards and *diminuendi*, accented inner voices and added notes that would be anathema to today's pianists. But that's their problem; I found the tonal beauty of these lapidary performances impossible to resist.

Scriabin's music has long been a Horowitz *cause célèbre*, and his accounts of two contrasting etudes—the delicately Chopinesque Op. 2 No. 1 and turbulent Op. 8 No. 12—were characteristic of him. His roaring assaults on the bass register of his well-traveled Steinway in the D-Sharp-minor piece may not have always found their target, but the playing was exciting in the big Russian manner, making one regret that Horowitz had not seen fit to include more Scriabin and some Rachmaninoff, too.

The Romantic works on the second half found him by turns in sportive and poetic fettle. Three



Vladimir Horowitz

Horowitz specialties—Schumann's "Arabeske," the Liszt "Sonetto del Petrarca" in E [No. 104] and Chopin's B-Minor Scherzo—framed a recent addition to his musical arsenal, No. 6 of the Schubert/Liszt "Soirées de Vienne."

He dispatched this latter piece with a wonderfully airborne charm—it is, after all, a Viennese waltz. The scherzo, its tempestuous opening section carefully controlled, was shaped with an almost palpable dramatic tension and plasticity, nicely set off by two Chopin mazurkas.

After awarding his adoring public two of his signature encores, Schumann's "Träumerei" and Moszkowski's "Ettencelles," Horowitz wiped his brow in mock exhaustion and bade everyone farewell until next time, which I suspect will be soon.