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French pianist Lise de la Salle shows talent beyond her years

By [Lloyd Dykk](#)



A Vancouver Recital Society presentation. At the Vancouver Playhouse on Sunday, November 22

When the French pianist Lise de la Salle first visited the Vancouver Recital Society in 2007 she was still in her teens and **the audience made such a big noise about her that she was brought back to the Vancouver Playhouse on November 22.**

It didn't take very long to see what the noise was about. De la Salle is now 21, and her playing suggested she's still way beyond her peer group, as it was when she was a 13-year-old performing at the Louvre. **This is an artist of astonishing maturity. Everything she played seemed to grip the audience, and not because it was flashy.**

She played two works by Ludwig van Beethoven, one of them the *Piano Sonata No. 26 in E-Flat Major, Op. 81a*, whose French title, *Les Adieux*, chosen by the publisher, apparently bugged a German composer who'd much have preferred *Das Lebewohl (The Farewell)*. The sonata is a programmatic treatment of Beethoven's temporary separation from his friend and benefactor, Archduke Rudolph, and ranges from desolation in the first movement to wild exuberance on his return in the third. This rather revolting program needs to be tempered by an awareness that fulsome gratitude was what lower-class musicians were expected to show for the indulgence of their aristocratic superiors.

This isn't the trickiest sonata of the bunch technically but it's important to measure the leaden pauses for emotional plausibility, and likewise, the impetuous surge of figures in the joyous finale. **La Salle gave this transparent sonata an endearing feeling of trust and openness.**

Then she played another misnamed piece, the so-called "*Moonlight*" *Sonata*, properly known as *Piano Sonata No. 14 in C-Sharp Minor "Quasi una fantasia", Op. 27, No. 2*, which was brave in that nobody plays it, because it's too popular—yet we're all dying to hear it. Its popular title is a misnomer, since Beethoven would never have chosen it, either. To me, the sonata suggests less moonlight than an echo of the baroque in that calm pattern of wonderfully harmonized triplets repeated over and over.

De la Salle played that unforgettable first movement softly, as it should be, and with minimal staccato. She followed great tension with a brief middle movement—a flower between two abysses, as Franz Liszt described it—then the electrifying and treacherous onrush of the third movement, which gave her no trouble at all.

The half-hour of Robert Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes*, complete with the five posthumous variations that earlier pianists usually omitted, topped the program perfectly, right down to the *Presto possibile* chordal variation, one of the toughest in the book. The prize of the program, this was inward-sounding Schumann, a quality without which it isn't Schumann at all.