



Mezzo-soprano Linda Maguire saves day



LINDA MAGUIRE: Went through all eight songs in a fully engaged way.

BY WILLIAM LITTLER
MUSIC CRITIC

A sleepy Linda Maguire answered her phone at 10 a.m. Saturday morning. It was pianist Inna Perkis on the line, asking if she could save the day.

The day in question was just over 28 hours away, when the Off Centre Music Series was scheduled to present the last of this season's salon concerts at the Arts and Letters Club.

A significant portion of this all-Schubert concert was to be devoted to eight of the master's most famous songs.

They were all to have been sung by mezzo-soprano Anita Krause. Only Krause had suddenly come down with laryngitis.

Luckily, Maguire had the songs on hand and within two hours was already on the Elm St. stage of the Arts and Letters Club, rehearsing with Perkins.

"I had sung a couple of them when I was a student at Oberlin," she recalled later, "but I didn't know the others as well as I thought I did."

She could have fooled her listeners. And did.

Beginning with "Ganymed" and ending with the famous "Serenade," she went through all eight songs yesterday afternoon in a fully engaged,

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text-conscious way, with a sensitively supportive Perkis at the piano, and truly did save the day.

Nor was it the first time.

She had once sung the courtesan Giulietta in a Canadian Opera production of Offenbach's *The Tales Of Hoffman* on a few days notice and on another occasion was called in the morning to sing Handel's *Floridante* that very evening with Tafelmusik.

"I guess it's my specialty," she laughed.

The concert went otherwise pretty well as planned.

Honoring Schubert has become an annual event for the Off Centre Series (the concerts are called Schubertiads, as in the composer's native Vienna) and this time, in addition to plying their audience with songs, Viennese pastries and coffee, Perkis and her husband and fellow pianist Boris Zarankin filled the program with some of the master's instrumental music.

With 10-year-old pianist Atene Anraku offering a couple of *Moments Musicaux* as an aperitif, the instrumental program included some of Schubert's dance music for piano four

hands (zestfully played by the Zarankins) and the *Duo For Violin And Piano, Op. 162*, in which Boris Zarankin teamed up with the associate concertmaster of the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra, Vladimir Pritsker.

In between, McMaster University's Alan Walker offered a sympathetic tribute to the composer and Lisa Lambert read English translations of the German song texts.

An offbeat format for an afternoon concert? Surely, but that is what makes this salon series so attractively different.

And it's particularly suitable for presenting the music of Schubert, whose career revolved largely around domestic music-making.

On tap for next season?

Another series of six concerts, beginning Oct. 4 with a Mediterranean program featuring the fast-rising soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian and including subsequent programs featuring such artists as Toronto Symphony Orchestra principal violist Steven Dann, Vancouver-based pianist Robert Silverman and the Russian coloratura soprano Victoria Taranova, who will be making her North American debut.

Oh, yes, the coffee and pastries will be back as well.