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Pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy overcame a piano and the audience during a concert at the Arlington Theater.

# Ashkenazy wins fight with piano

By Hillary Hauser  
News-Press Staff Writer

The brilliant, internationally acclaimed pianist Vladimir Ashkenazy came to town Wednesday night, to give Santa Barbarans a taste of his soul-filled music-making.

In return, Santa Barbarans sabotaged him from start to finish.

First off, the Arlington Celebrity Series organizers provided Ashkenazy a piano that couldn't have been worse. It was an old rattletrap that buzzed, clanked and twanged, and by the time the first Beethoven sonata had come to its rousing finale, it was so hopelessly out of tune that only a magician could have made it do what it was supposed to do.

### A good sport

But besides being a good sport, Ashkenazy has a little magician in him, too. Never giving up (and at least one pianist has chopped up a piano on stage with an ax) Ashkenazy proceeded good-naturedly.

However, his good nature was not rewarded by good behavior from his Santa Barbara audience.

Here was Ashkenazy, doing his ethereal, magical best with Beethoven sonatas Opus 53 ("Waldstein") and Opus 57 ("Appassionata") and here was the audience, insisting on an uproarious applause after each of the first movements.

Whenever this happens, the effect is similar to yelling at a poet who pauses between stanzas — and some pianists leave one hand on the keyboard in an attempt to keep it from happening.

Ashkenazy smiled at the outbursts and went right on with things.

### Piano rebels

A small man with a huge sound, he conveyed so deeply Beethoven's rebellious hammering, his doleful resignation and final soaring back to life and resolve.

By the end of the particularly stormy "Appassionata," however, the Arlington piano was in full rebellion. Since it was intermission, there was hope that a piano technician could perform a quick tuning of a few of the particularly offensive notes.

No such luck — (Why was this, Arlington?)

Then, the lighting technicians got into the act. After intermission, Ashkenazy sat down to play the Schumann Arabeske, Opus 18, and Carnival, Opus 9, and they turned

## Review

the lights out on him.

After he sat in the dark for a moment, the lights came back on. Ashkenazy, still a sport, sat straight up in feigned, wide-eyed surprise, looked up at the lights, and clapped his hands, thank you.

### Poise, grace, passion

That joke over, the pianist embarked on the calm seas of the beautifully pure Arabeske, and from there, into the multi-faceted Carnival.

Throughout, there was poise, grace, pathos and passion — and every note of the two-line octave of the keyboard had attained new heights in twang. It was difficult to concentrate on what the artist was trying to do.

It was frustrating, infuriating and disappointing — there was art under all that camouflage, and we could only get hints of it.

Throughout it all, Ashkenazy was the picture of charm and grace. He even offered an encore — perhaps a final attempt to right things.

It was the tender Schumann Trau-merel.

### Gesundheit

In the middle of this quiet, heart-felt prayer, someone — unbelievably — chose the most silent moment of the piece to blast out into the theater the loudest, most unmitigated and unrestrained sneeze the town has ever heard.

It was the final blow.

One forlorn music lover who had apparently traveled from Los Angeles to hear Ashkenazy was overheard leaving the theater saying, "Now I understand why these people are called Santa Barbarians."

There is no excuse for what happened at the Arlington Wednesday night. Mr. Ashkenazy, wherever you are, we hope you'll come back and try us again — when we've located our manners and the decent instrument you deserve.

# Review of piano concert off-color or on target?



Vladimir Ashkenazy

Editor, News-Press: Encore! Encore!

Hillary Hauser's review "Ashkenazy wins fight with piano" could not have been more in tune. For openers, I hope someone from the Arlington has the manners to send a note of apology to Mr. Ashkenazy.

JoAnn Habermann  
Santa Barbara

## No sneezing matter

Editor, News-Press: I, too, was disappointed with the quality of the Ashkenazy concert.

I questioned my wisdom of purchasing tickets way last summer when announcements came out, of paying \$25 each — sound unseen — for two tickets 23 rows back, of trying to muster my attentiveness on a tired Wednesday evening, and of trying to listen to anything worthwhile at the Arlington.

I was not disappointed in Ashkenazy. He was brilliant, despite the problems.

I concur with Hillary Hauser's comments about that poor piano and the untimely clapping, but to fault someone for sneezing is really reaching for criticism. People don't sneeze on purpose. Coughers can get up and leave, but you can only hold your nose for so long!

I felt sorry for the man who submitted to his outburst. The fact that he was in attendance proved he was a music lover, not

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**In a review of Vladimir Ashkenazy's Feb. 26 performance at the Arlington, News-Press writer Hillary Hauser praised the internationally acclaimed pianist for enduring with charm and grace an out-of-tune piano, but she criticized the audience for its behavior. Here are some reader views on the issue.**

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a concert saboteur, and I imagine he was painfully embarrassed.

I suggest the News-Press staff keep their criticism to things which might be improved, and not focus on the uncontrollable foibles of concertgoers. After all, to pay that kind of money to have that kind of concert experience is something to be sneezed at!

L. Rose  
Santa Barbara

## Critique 'ludicrous'

Editor, News-Press: I must protest the use of the word "review" attached to the article about the Ashkenazy concert. If Hillary Hauser finds it necessary to write an article of this kind, it is up to her; if the News-Press chooses to print it, that is its right; however, to call it a "review" is ludicrous.

Joan Rutkowski  
Santa Barbara

## Humor us humans

Editor, News-Press: With a little bit of humor:

Ashkenazy brought forth a truly noble performance. Profession-

al pianists give so much time and energy to their art. But they are also attune to the business of living — with its constant crescendos and diminuendos — in other words, lights that go off, questionable tuning and that "unforgettable sneeze."

I think that it is inevitable that the audience and the artist will always be subjected to those human flaws that plague us at all concerts (e.g. programs rattling or a pedal that does not work.)

Todd Crow, now Chairman of the Vassar College music department, and a native Santa Barbaran, gave a recital at Vassar Hall in the spring of 1981. During his first selection a mouse skittered across the stage and decided to sit under the piano for several measures. You can imagine the vocal response from the audience! The artist remained assumably unaware of his visitor and the audience merely responded characteristically to the situation. It's called human nature.

No one can tell me that our Santa Barbara sneezer does not have an interesting sense of timing or that the audience lacks in enthusiasm (take note, program printers, here is your chance to remind the audience of applause etiquette). Santa Barbarans are the greatest. They turn out and support the arts and what else could an artist want.

Gail Embree  
Santa Barbara