Larry Weinstein's
Ravel

More than a decade after Bo Derek's passion for "The Bo Derek" hit the big screen, and at a time when Charles Dutoit and the Montreal Symphony Orchestra have made numerous award-winning recordings of Ravel's music, it's difficult to imagine that his music was ever unprepared for his use of the jazz idiom in serious music. In 1927, when he took a whirlwind tour of North America. The United States, the land where jazz was born, welcomed him with open arms. This is particularly poignant given that only five years after, after a car accident, Ravel was unable to compose. Weinstein chose to end his career with the haunting Adagio Assai, again from Capriccio for Piano and Orchestra, as if in respect for those sad, useless years before his death.

Larry Weinstein won a well-deserved Odeon Trio, and Victoria de Los Angeles, for "The Bolero", but my favorite scenes were those from the opera, La Valse, superbly choreographed by and featuring nine pairs of elegantly clad dancers. But my favorite scenes were those from the opera, L'Enfant et les sorciers, where a grandfather clock, a teacup, and a teapot come to life to the exquisite horror of a little boy who's been rude to his mother. Staged specifically for the film, these visual passages provided a focus of much of the composer's house, she says that he was not one to show his feelings. And another friend reveals that "it's quite possible that artists or musicians have the ability to express themselves in art because they can't express themselves in life."

What we do discover about Ravel is this: he was an innovative, provocative composer with an elegant, beautiful film. From the musical "La Valse", to the haunting Adagio Assai, Ravel's music is a collage of interviews with friends, including Alicia de Larrocha, Monteion Symphony Orchestra, the Orford Trio, and Victoria de Los Angeles, for "The Bolero", and Orford Overture, which include dance or opera: the softly-lit, elegant, beautiful film.

As enigmatic as Ravel's private life, his death, "Des Amis Pour La Vie" is a story of six elderly friends who decide to live in a communal fashion so as to ward off the loneliness, bitterness, and indignity that old-age threatens. They quickly become immersed in living nostalgia for their friendships, and just as quickly, they become the target of an anonymous letter writer who aims to break their pleasant arrangement apart.

After they receive a few letters, unrest sets in as the six friends search in their minds for identity of the person who is sending these enigmatic messages. As the story unfolds, we learn that Françoise, the widow who owns the house where they all live, is, in fact, not a widow. Her husband, Charles, suffered a stroke and was partially paralyzed and unable to talk, but he has been living for the past several years in a hospital, wanting his friends to believe he was dead for fear of their pity. Charles is now confronted with the fear of losing his wife to the new living arrangement with those whom he feared, and thus the letters.

All this intrigue remains a secret that Françoise tries to keep, but Alex, one of the six, reveals the secret by following her to the hospital one day. Alex confronts Françoise, and, through their discussion, that which was the impulse for the communal arrangement shines through as the solution to this painful situation. Support and love, which Charles needs and yet has rejected, are the answers. The end of the film has Alex bringing Charles home to live amidst communal affection. "Des Amis Pour La Vie" is an admirable film because, in a dramatic contemporary context, it discusses very real problems that are faced by our elderly. This subject, in the television and film world of smooth, unblemished, and uneducated heroes and heroines, is refreshing. What the film proposes in terms of lifestyle—communal old-age rather than institutional old-age—is interesting, though it is a product of the author's imagination. Called "Le Rendez-vous du Cinéma Québécois" by admitting that she knew of no such living arrangement amongst the aged, but believed it to be a plausible lifestyle, especially for those communally oriented former long-hairs from the '60s. By offering this suggestion, the filmmakers...