

# MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

## PIANIST

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Music Review | Marc-André Hamelin

### A Homespun Mendelssohn and a Liszt Knuckle-Buster

By STEVE SMITH

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For all that the Canadian pianist Marc-André Hamelin has been typecast as a performer of near-superhuman technical prowess, his latest New York recital, at the 92nd Street Y on Wednesday night, opened with a tone of decided understatement. Mendelssohn's "Lied ohne Worte" ("Songs Without Words") are the antithesis of flashy: homespun and lyrical are more apt descriptions.

Mr. Hamelin's program included four of these works: Op. 19b, No. 1; Op. 38, No. 2; Op. 19b, No. 4; and Op. 53, No. 6. Each was marked by phrasing of breathlike flexibility, as winsome melodies rang out over rippling accompaniment and tasteful counterpoint. The last, in which a jaunty tune floated above a shimmering flutter of busy rhythms, provided a suitable transition to the trickier works that followed.

The bulk of Mr. Hamelin's program was devoted to Liszt, initially in his guise as the vessel of themes and ideas from other composers. Liszt the prodigious showman was represented by his "Réminiscences de Lucia di Lammermoor," a flashy, impetuous gloss on two seductive themes from the Donizetti opera. Thoughtful transcriptions of the Schubert songs "Ständchen" and "Ave Maria," with each repeated verse ornamented more ornately than the last, demonstrated Liszt's advocacy for his fellow composers.

Mr. Hamelin's playing was at its most frenetic in "Hexaméron," a finger-busting trifle in which Liszt stitched variations on a banal theme from Bellini's "I Puritani," composed by his fellow virtuosi Thalberg, Pixis, Herz, Czerny and Chopin, into a boisterous framework of his own devising. Garish and even a bit silly, the piece was redeemed by Chopin's ruminative depth and Mr. Hamelin's acumen.

After the intermission came unalloyed Liszt: the three "Sonetti del Petrarca" from "Années de Pèlerinage: Deuxième Année, Italie" and the same collection's coda, "Venezia e Napoli." One could imagine renditions that smiled a bit more freely. But Mr. Hamelin's exacting execution yielded thrills of its own, nowhere more so than in the quietest passages of the Sonetti Nos. 47 and 123 and "Gondoliera."

The clamorous audience was granted two encores: Mr. Hamelin's rangy, ingenious left-hand transcription of Tchaikovsky's "Lullaby" and a dazzling rendition of Debussy's fitful "Feux d'artifice."

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