

MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

PIANO

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MUSIC REVIEW | MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

Festival's King of Keys Kicks Off With Haydn

By STEVE SMITH

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To the ardent pianophiles who flock to the International Keyboard Institute & Festival at Mannes College the New School for Music every summer, the Canadian virtuoso Marc-André Hamelin is royalty. Never mind that he played in New York most recently in late March, or that he will make his debut at the Mostly [Mozart](#) Festival next week. The line of patrons waiting to hear him in the Mannes Concert Hall on Saturday extended down a staircase, across the lobby and through a locker-lined hallway.

The concert began with two Haydn sonatas featured on a delectable recording Mr. Hamelin recently issued on the Hyperion label. The precision and clarity he brought to the brisk outer movements of the Sonata No. 23 in F suited the music's scampering gait; in between came an exquisitely molded adagio, during which time seemed to stand still. Mr. Hamelin's phrasing in the Sonata No. 41 in B flat underscored the bold peculiarity of Haydn's syncopated rhythms and unpredictable melodies.

"Sonata in a State of Jazz," composed by the French pianist Alexis Weissenberg in 1982, offered formidable Cubist allusions to popular forms. A tartly dissonant tango in three-quarter time was punctuated with glimmers of nostalgic melody; a spiky Charleston emphasized sharp-edged rhythms. Dense harmonies in a blues-inspired movement suggested a young Schoenberg brooding over the keys in an after-hours Harlem joint, while complex lines in the closing samba section swayed like a drunken mathematician.

An account of Chopin's Barcarolle, Op. 60, was a thing of breathtaking beauty, every texture and transition sensitively judged. But despite a tender introduction and passionate conclusion, some passages in the Ballade No. 3 sounded starched and curt.

Mr. Hamelin performed two works of his own devising. The Etude No. 8, "Erlkönig," was a vivid, Lisztian setting of a Goethe poem. (In his introductory comments Mr. Hamelin noted that the melody closely adhered to the German verse; a shame that printed texts were not provided.) The Etude No. 7 was a skillful arrangement for left hand of Tchaikovsky's "Lullaby."

Godowsky's Symphonic Metamorphoses on Johann Strauss Jr.'s "Wine, Women and Song" concluded the program on a note of flamboyant excess. Far more charming — and far gentler to its source — was Mr. Hamelin's sole encore: "En Avril à Paris," a selection from the obscure Belgian album "Mr. Nobody Plays Trenet." The Trenet in question, of course, was the French singer Charles. And Mr. Nobody? That turned out to be Mr. Weissenberg.

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