

MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

PIANO

The New York Times

MUSIC REVIEW

Trading Arcana for Haydn

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Published: November 6, 2007

Marc-André Hamelin has built a devoted audience by performing difficult piano music, both recent and arcane, demonstrating a solid, often dazzling technique, as well as a thoughtful musicality that reveals the poetry within the virtuosic glare. At his recital on Sunday afternoon at the Rose Theater, he did something different. Leaving his more peculiar specialties aside, he played a program of familiar works, starting with a crisply articulated, if slightly puzzling, account of Haydn's Sonata in B minor (Hob. XVI: 32).

What the reading had going for it was a dynamic suppleness that drew the music out of the realm of Haydn's fortepiano without pulling it too far into the 19th century. Even in the stormy finale, which points toward music Beethoven would be writing 25 years later (he was a child when Haydn wrote this work, around 1776), Mr. Hamelin deferred to the limits of Haydn's sound world but pushed against them all the same. This fluidity did not extend to rhythm: at times the phrasing seemed squarer and more rigid than it needed to be.



Hiroyuki Ito for The New York Times

The pianist Marc-Andre Hamelin performing at the Rose Theater.

That objection vanished in Chopin's B minor Sonata (Op. 58), to which Mr. Hamelin applied a rubato that, while by no means extreme, let the music breathe naturally in the most lyrical sections and catch fire when the score demanded drama, volume, rich sonorities and overt finger power, as in the finale.

In Debussy's Préludes, Book II, Mr. Hamelin maneuvered mostly around the gentler side of his expressive range. Even at muted, sometimes whispered, dynamics, he was at no loss for coloristic variety. He evoked the atmospheric, mysterious gauziness in "Feuilles Mortes" and the delicate, dark-hued textures of "La Terrasse des Audiences du Clair de Lune" with a watercolorist's subtlety.

But Mr. Hamelin was at his best when Debussy set his mood studies aside and suggested more vivid imagery. He captured both the Spanish inspiration and the French sensibility of "La Puerta del Vino" and gave "Bruyères" a bluesy edge, certainly a novel touch.

"General Lavine — Eccentric" and "Hommage à Samuel Pickwick, Esq., P.P.M.P.C." were characterized in bold, sharp strokes and with understated but effective humor. And he played the cascading "Feux D'Artifice" as the technical showpiece it is.

For his encore he returned to his home turf, pulling out a quirky, obscure showpiece, Charles Trenet's "En Avril à Paris" in an arrangement by the pianist Alexis Weissenberg. This seems to be a favorite of Mr. Hamelin's at the moment: he also played it at the International Keyboard Institute & Festival at Mannes College the New School for Music in July.

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