

MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

PIANO

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Seattle Symphony has Schubert on its Liszt

By **John Sutherland**

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Guest Conductor Dennis Russell Davies continued his mini-tenure with the Seattle Symphony this week with an interesting set of pieces by Franz Liszt, Franz Schubert and both together. We had Liszt for orchestra only, Schubert transcribed by Liszt for piano and orchestra, Liszt's original composition for piano and orchestra, and just plain Schubert, un-Liszted.

For all of the program's apparent unity, the depth of the compositions varied hugely. While all the works were performed flawlessly, the opening piece, Liszt's "Mazeppa" Symphonic Poem, is as predictable as it is boisterous. There were certainly highlights, such as the wind-down to dramatic silence, with only the faint tap of Michael Cruso's timpani. But even in its bold, Romantic declarations, this work was just an appetizer for what lay ahead.

The music got very strong when pianist Marc-André Hamelin walked onto the stage. Part of it was certainly the performer, but the compositions he played were also much richer. The first of these, Schubert's "Wanderer Fantasy," transcribed for piano and orchestra by Liszt, began very simply: the orchestra stated the theme, and the piano repeated it. But from then on, it became a true and wonderful collaboration, with a real master at the keyboard.

Hamelin was a revelation. Unlike some performers of Liszt, he achieved an enormous dynamic range without a lot of physical flailing. Everything he did was right; not merely correct, but truly, deeply, musically right.

Hamelin returned after intermission for a more typical Liszt showpiece, the famous "Totentanz" ("Dance of Death"). While the Schubert transcription was pure gorgeousness, this work goes to all the Romantic extremes for which the composer is known. The pounding, fatalistic theme on the bass end of the piano is immediately surrounded by the spectacle of full-keyboard glissandos, but it also moves to lighter, dreamlike touches throughout the piece. **Hamelin was brilliant at all of it.**

The program ended with the reduced-size orchestra, sans piano, for Schubert's Symphony No. 3. This youthful work was a pleasant return down from the mountain of Romantic extremism. Davies, who is best known for his work with orchestras of this size (such as the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra), seemed right at home with this work. **But the peak of the concert was undeniably in the center.**

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