

# MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

## PIANIST

---

### THE TIMES UNION

#### Hamelin surprises at Union concert

By JOSEPH DALTON, Special to the Times Union

First published: Monday, March 19, 2007

SCHENECTADY -- The nearly unfailingly lush playing of pianist Marc-Andre Hamelin on Sunday afternoon at Union College was an arresting surprise. That's because the Canadian virtuoso is known for an athletic approach to tackling the most daunting scores as well as a taste for the most obscure of repertoire. His many recordings emphasize composers with music as daunting as their names imply -- folks like Rodion Shchedrin, Nikolai Kapustin and Karol Szymanowski.

Sure enough, the recital featured a genuine oddity in the Sonatina Concertante Op. 28 of Pancho Vladigerov, a Bulgarian composer who died in 1978. But the music itself was rather akin to Ravel and Debussy with a bit of Ives thrown in. There were long tangles of chromatic lines delivered with relaxed elegance. Gently boisterous folk tunes provided occasional momentum.

In fact, there was a romantic splendor to almost everything, even the early Beethoven that opened the program. Though quirky and lean, the Sonata in E Major, Op. 109 flowed out of Hamelin like Chopin. The ending, however, felt clipped -- as if there was no other way to stop the gush of sweet sound.

After intermission, three transcriptions of Liszt brought some welcome heft to Hamelin's playing. The "Liebestod" from Wagner's "Tristan and Isolde" began with a mighty roar in the bass before easing back into a melancholy mix that eventually crested higher and higher in intensity. A paraphrase from Verdi's "Ernani" evoked an old-fashioned virtuosity with grand tunes and big drama, though not much emotional content. A Polish folksong via Chopin closed the set.

After sitting down for his final piece, Hamelin turned to the audience and offered a warning that violence and unconventional playing were about to follow. "But I'm just doing what the composer asks," he pleaded.

The composer was Villa Lobos, and the piece, "Rudepoema," was more rude than poetic. A kind of pianistic "Rite of Spring," it was full of dense interlocking chords and pounding primitive rhythms. It climaxed when Hamelin struck the lowest notes on the keyboard three times with a clenched fist. Powerful, but not all that shocking, it was still good to hear Hamelin finally push some boundaries, both sonic and stylistic.

For an encore, he stepped into another totally different terrain. Playing his own transcription for the left hand of a Tchaikovsky lullaby, Hamelin offered the most sensual and alluring music of the afternoon.

---

*Colbert Artists Management Inc.*

111 West 57th Street, New York, New York 10019  
(212)757-0782 - Fax (212)541-5179 - West Coast (858)794-0182  
E-mail: NYColbert@ColbertArtists.com