

SAN
FRANCISCO
PERFORMANCES



presents

MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN, piano

Wednesday, November 2, 2011, 8pm

Herbst Theatre

BERG

Piano Sonata, Opus 1

LISZT

Piano Sonata in B minor, S.178

*Lento assai; Andante sostenuto;
Allegro energico*

INTERMISSION

HAMELIN

Theme and Variations (Cathy's Variations)
(2007) [World premiere]

Variations on a theme of Paganini (2011)
[North American premiere]

Étude No. 8—*Erlkönig* (2007)

Étude No. 11—*Minuetto* (2009)

Étude No. 12—*Prelude and Fugue* (1986)

The Shenson Piano Series is made possible by Fred M. Levin and Nancy Livingston, the Shenson Foundation.

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Marc-André Hamelin is represented by Colbert Artists Management, 111 West 57th Street, New York, NY; 212.757.0782; www.colbertartists.com

Hamburg Steinway Model D, Pro Piano San Francisco

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Photo: Fran Kaufman

Artist Profile

San Francisco Performances presents Marc-André Hamelin for the seventh time. Prior concerts include his San Francisco recital debut in 2003, followed by recitals in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009; in 2008 he was featured in a documentary film screened by SF Performances after which he performed a short program.

Pianist **Marc-André Hamelin's** unique blend of musicianship and virtuosity brings forth interpretations remarkable for their freedom, originality and prodigious mastery of the piano's resources. Long known for his bold exploration of unfamiliar pianistic terrain, Hamelin has increasingly turned his attention to the established masterworks of the piano literature.

Hamelin begins 2011/2012 at the BBC Proms with a late night recital of Liszt works and with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales performing Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme by Paganini*. He debuts with Berliner Philharmoniker in performances of Szymanowski's Symphony No. 4, and appears with the Basel Symphony Orchestra, the Danish Radio Orchestra and the Helsingborg Symphony. In North America he performs with the symphony orchestras of Chicago, Montreal, Quebec and Seattle; he also performs the epic Busoni Piano Concerto throughout the season, in dates with the Rundfunk Sinfonie Orchester Berlin, the Orchestra Symphonique de Trois-Rivières and the New Jersey Symphony and Jacques Lacombe at

Carnegie Hall for the Spring for Music Festival.

Highlights of his 2011/12 North American recital appearances include dates in San Francisco, Philadelphia, Washington, Toronto and Montreal. He also performs internationally at London's Wigmore Hall and at the Lucerne Piano Festival, and in Denmark, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Russia and Sweden. Hamelin returns to Asia for appearances with the Singapore Symphony and Hong Kong Philharmonic, and recitals in Hong Kong and Seoul.

In recent seasons, Hamelin has performed with orchestra and in solo recital at New York City's Lincoln Center; in recital and in chamber music on the various stages of Carnegie Hall; and on an international tour of the Schumann Piano Quintet with the Takács Quartet. The Pro Musica Society of Montreal paid tribute to Hamelin with a six-concert series, "The Art of Marc-André Hamelin."

A prolific recording artist, Hamelin's recent releases include a critically acclaimed solo disc of works by Liszt, and Reger and Strauss concerti with the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin for Hyperion Records. An album of his own compositions, *Hamelin: Études* and other works, received a 2010 Grammy® nomination (his ninth) and a first prize from the German Record Critic's Association; the works are published by Edition Peters. His complete Hyperion discography includes concertos and works for solo piano by composers such as Alkan, Busoni, Godowsky and Medtner, as well as brilliantly received performances of Brahms, Chopin, Haydn, Liszt and Schumann.

A resident of Boston, Marc-André Hamelin is the recipient of a lifetime achievement prize by the German Record Critic's Association, and is an Officer of the Order of Canada, a Chevalier de l'Ordre du Québec and a member of the Royal Society of Canada.

Program Notes

Piano Sonata, Opus 1

ALBAN BERG

Born February 9, 1885, Vienna
Died December 24, 1935, Vienna

In the fall of 1904, Alban Berg—nineteen years old—appeared on the doorstep of Arnold Schoenberg in Vienna with a portfolio of youthful compositions. He was answering Schoenberg's newspaper advertisement for composition students, and that fall the older composer accepted Berg and another young man named Anton Webern as private students. Berg would remain a student of Schoenberg for the next six years, and the music he composed under

Schoenberg's guidance during the first decade of the century shows a steady growth in assurance and sophistication. Yet these first efforts—the *Seven Early Songs*, the *Piano Sonata*, and the *String Quartet*—are in some measure all transitional works: they show signs of Berg's future direction (particularly in their motivic concentration), yet all three works remain firmly anchored in the late-romantic idiom of the turn of the century.

Berg's *Piano Sonata* is very much a transitional work. He began it in the summer of 1907, after three years of study with Schoenberg, and completed it the following summer. The sonata is only one movement long, though Berg's original plan had been to compose a piano sonata in traditional three-movement form. Having completed what was to be the first movement of that sonata, Berg found that he could make no headway on the second and third movements, and Schoenberg suggested that the young composer should regard the work as complete in its one-movement form. Berg felt satisfied enough with this music to consider it his Opus 1, and it was published by Universal Edition in 1910; the first public performance took place in Vienna on April 24, 1911.

Listeners may be struck by just how traditional this movement is, for it conforms in many ways to the form of the classical piano sonata. While it is written with a great deal of harmonic freedom, it has a home key and even a key signature (B minor), and Berg honors classical form to the extent of offering a repeat of the exposition. The remarkable thing about this music is Berg's ability to generate an entire structure out of tiny motivic fragments, most of which are presented in the opening measures. These are expanded into a full sonata-form structure, recapitulated, and brought to a quiet—and emotionally-satisfying—close in unequivocal B minor. Berg notates this music with scrupulous care, with tempo fluctuations and dynamic gradations registered quite precisely. This is wide-ranging music in many senses: the writing spans almost the entire width of the keyboard, and its dynamic compass stretches from triple forte to triple piano.

Piano Sonata in B minor, S.178

FRANZ LISZT

Born October 22, 1811, Raiding, Hungary
Died July 31, 1886, Bayreuth

Liszt wrote his *Sonata in B minor* in 1852–3 and dedicated it to Robert Schumann. The first public performance took place four years later in Berlin in 1857, when it was played by Liszt's son-in-law Hans von Bülow. The *Sonata in B minor* is in all senses of the word a revolutionary work, for Liszt sets aside previous notions

of sonata form and looks ahead to a new vision of what such a form might be. Schumann himself, then in serious mental decline, reportedly never heard the piece but could not have been especially comfortable with the dedication of a piece of music that flew so directly in the face of his own sense of what a sonata should be. Another figure in nineteenth-century music, however, reacted rapturously: Wagner wrote to Liszt to say, "The Sonata is beautiful beyond any conception; great, pleasing, profound and noble—it is sublime, just as you are yourself."

The most immediately distinctive feature of the sonata is that it is in one movement instead of the traditional three. Beyond this, it is built not on long and distinct melodic themes but on short phrases. These phrases undergo a gradual but extensive development—a process Liszt called "the transformation of themes"—and are often made to perform quite varied functions as they undergo these transformations. Despite the one-movement structure, Liszt achieves something of the effect of the traditional three-movement form by giving the sonata a general fast-slow-fast shape. The entire sonata is built on just four brief theme-phrases: the slowly-descending scale heard at the very beginning; the leaping theme in octaves at the *Allegro*; a powerful theme over repeated eighth-notes marked *Grandioso*; and a lyric fourth phrase marked *cantando espressivo*, itself an expanded version of the martial repeated notes of the opening.

The *Sonata in B minor* is extremely dramatic music, so dramatic that many guessed that it must have a program, as so much of Liszt's music does. But Liszt insisted that this is not descriptive or programmatic music. He wanted his sonata accepted as a piece of "pure music," to be heard and understood for itself.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger

Theme and Variations (Cathy's Variations)

Variations on a theme of Paganini

Étude No. 8 *Erlkönig* (2007)

Étude No. 11 *Minuetto* (2009)

Étude No. 12 *Prelude and Fugue* (1986)

MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

Born September 5, 1961, Montreal

The *Theme and Variations* is purely the work of a man in love, and it was inspired by

my fiancée Cathy Fuller, my true soulmate, who fascinates me more with each passing day. As a matter of fact, the theme is meant to be a portrait of her, something that I'd never had the idea of attempting before. I will always remember the day I first played this piece for her as one of the happiest in my life.

Save perhaps for the slightly naughty inclusion of a meaningful French folksong somewhere in the texture during the coda, there are no motivic allusions or musical codes à la Robert and Clara. The music is as pure and loving as I knew how to make it, though in the instance of variation 3, the composer-pianist in me couldn't resist welding the theme to an extended passage from the last movement of Beethoven's Sonata in E major Opus 109, one of Cathy's favorite pieces, by the one composer she could never do without.

The nature of my *Paganini Variations* is such that writing anything about them would inevitably spoil the fun and give many things away. I will only say, quite confidently, that if one looks at the many works that have used Paganini's twenty-fourth Caprice over the years, this one definitely, for better or worse, breaks the mold! I had great pleasure in writing this piece, especially since—within a span of only about ten minutes—it

constantly tries to push the envelope as far as what may be esthetically acceptable!

It should be said straight away that *Erlkönig*, Étude No. 8, has nothing to do musically with the Schubert song of the same name. However, they do have a common source, one of the most masterful poems in the entire German literature. My piece is basically a faithful setting of this poem—adhering to it as closely as any vocal setting—the only difference being that I repeated the first four lines for musical reasons.

As novel as the idea might seem, this is not the first time that Goethe's poem has been given a non-vocal setting. So far as I know that distinction belongs to Alexis Hollaender who, sometime during the first decade of the twentieth century, fashioned a short work for left hand alone that also adheres to the text. It was Hollaender's piece that started me thinking about using the poem for an étude, but the seed may have been planted many years earlier. While still at school, I came across a quotation of Johann Friedrich Reichardt's vocal setting in Donald Jay Grout's *A History of Western Music*; I remember then being struck by how different an approach Reichardt had adopted from the Schubert we are all familiar with. (Other settings from the same

period include those by Loewe, Spohr and Zelter, all available on Schubert's Friends and Contemporaries.)

The performer is of course expected to know Goethe's poem; familiarity with it is absolutely essential to a successful performance, especially in order to give a different tone to all the characters in the story. I have attempted to paint a picture in sound of the poem's many facets. For example, at the end of the child's second Erlking hallucination, he can be felt trying to say 'mein Vater, mein Vater' before he fully wakes up and actually says it, and this is reflected in the different dynamics given to each hand.

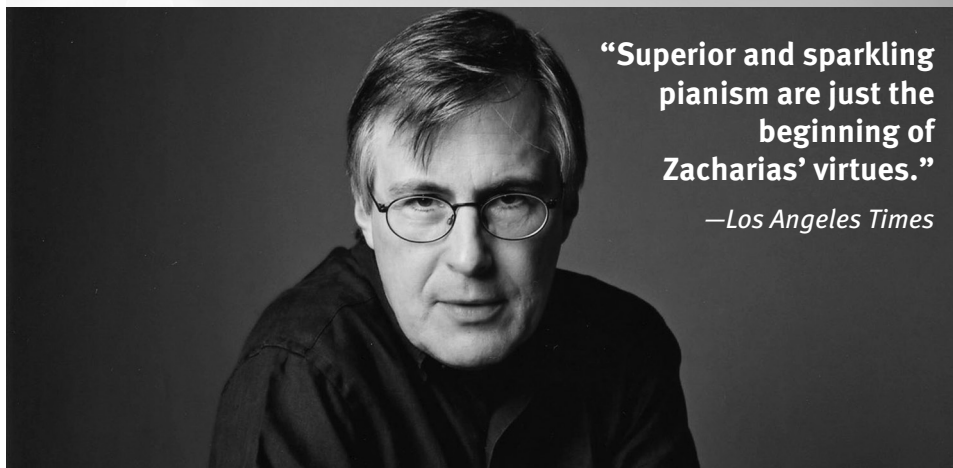
The *Minuetto* was the last one of these études to be written, and the main theme comes from a sketch dating from about ten years earlier; according to this sketch, I had originally intended this minuet as being part of a sonata. I think it provides a welcome contrast within an otherwise 'busy' collection, and because of the (intentional) similarity between its final cadence and the beginning of the *Prelude and Fugue*, the two pieces go particularly well programmed together. On the personal side, it was interesting for me to link the two pieces this way, uniting, as it were, the earliest-written étude in this opus with the most recent one.

The *Prelude and Fugue*, the final étude in the collection, was actually my first sizeable compositional effort. At the time of writing, I did not have a complete set of études in mind; moreover, the fugue was written first, and it was only natural that I should later preface it, in accordance with a long-established precedent. Retrospectively, it seems to me that the fugue in particular has a lot in common with the tarantella-like movement of Busoni's Piano Concerto, which I was learning at the time. The work was never meant to become such a monstrous agglomeration of cruel virtuosic devices; I simply wanted to explore some of the possibilities of the rather silly fugue subject. Once started, the piece started going pretty much on its own, in directions I hadn't anticipated.

I experienced a rather uneasy moment when, some time after completing the piece, I came across Sergei Taneyev's *Prelude and Fugue in G sharp minor, Opus 29*. I was alarmed to see that there were some startling similarities between the two fugues: same metre, same key (enharmonically), same pianistic terrains, and a very similar fugue subject. Please be assured that if this were other than mere coincidence, I would be honest enough to admit it!

—Program notes by Marc-André Hamelin

Christian Zacharias, piano



“Superior and sparkling pianism are just the beginning of Zacharias’ virtues.”

—Los Angeles Times

Friday, December 9, 8pm | Herbst Theatre

PROGRAM:

C.P.E. BACH: Sonata in A minor; Rondo in C minor

BRAHMS: *Klavierstücke*, Op. 119

BEETHOVEN: Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 110

SCHUBERT: Sonata in D Major, D. 850

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