Marc-André Hamelin, piano

Saturday, April 29, 2006, 8:00 p.m.
Herbst Theatre

Franz Schubert
Piano Sonata in A Major, K.664
Allegro moderato
Andante
Allegro

Pantcho Vladigerov
Sonatina Concertante, Opus 28
Con moto
Andantino
Animato giocoso

INTERMISSION

Richard Wagner–Franz Liszt
Isoldens Liebestod: Schlußszene aus Tristan und Isolde

Giuseppe Verdi–Franz Liszt
Ernani: Paraphrase de concert

Vincenzo Bellini–Franz Liszt
Reminiscences de Norma

Marc-André Hamelin is represented by Colbert Artists Management, New York.

Hamburg Steinway Model D provided by Pro Piano San Francisco.

Montréal native Marc-André Hamelin is internationally renowned for his musical virtuosity and refined pianism.

Recitals in the 2005/06 season will include appearances in Tokyo, Seville, Bilbao, Paris, Warsaw, Montreal, Houston, Richmond, Cleveland, Charlottesville, and the third in his three-year series of annual concerts with San Francisco Performances. His orchestral engagements will include the Saint-Saëns Piano Concerto No. 2 for the opening week of the New Jersey Symphony led by Neeme Järvi, Brahms No. 2 with the Dallas Symphony and Andrew Litton (to be recorded for Hyperion), Schedrin No. 2 with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic led by Ingo Metzmacher, the Busoni Piano Concerto with the Winnipeg Symphony and James Paul, Shostakovich No. 2 and the Strauss Burlesque at the National Arts Center Orchestra in Ottawa with Thomas Dausgaard, and Beethoven No. 4 with the Edmonton Symphony led by William Eddins.

Mr. Hamelin began the summer of 2005 with his New York Philharmonic debut with the Liszt Totentanz, and continued with recitals at Ravinia, Ruhr, Domaine Forget, Pentworth, Bayreuth, a return to the International Keyboard Festival at Mannes; and the Saint-Saëns Piano Concerto No. 4 with the Grand Teton Music Festival and Yan Pascal Tortelier.
and Scharwenka’s Paraphrase de concert opens with a long, constantly was issued earlier in the season. The piano sonata. Some scholars have placed it in rounded the date of composition of this brief was the pianist Alexis Weissenberg.

Valdigerov composed in a number of genres: symphonies, concertos, an opera, a ballet, much instrumental and chamber music, as well as songs and folk-song arrangements. At first acquaintance, Valdigerov’s music seems reminiscent of Bartók: both composers make use of the folk-song idiom of Eastern Europe, particularly its shifting meters. But Valdigerov puts a much greater emphasis on melody, and at moments his music sings with an almost sensuous opulence.

The Sonatina Concertante is Valdigerov’s only extended work for piano (he wrote a number of short works for piano, but no sonatas). Composed in 1934, two years after his return to Bulgaria, the Sonatina is in three movements in a fast-slow-fast sequence. This is music of energy and color, and its Andantino is particularly attractive. This central movement begins with a brush of color, then immediately unfolds its long melodies, which have an exotic Eastern flavor. Meter shifts constantly through this movement, which offers a pungent harmonic language and is sometimes set high in the piano’s range before the music trails off to its quiet close.

Isoldens Liebestod: Schlußzene aus Tristan und Isolde (transcribed by Franz Liszt)

Richard Wagner
Born May 22, 1813, Leipzig
Died February 13, 1883, Venice

Ernani: Paraphrase de concert (transcribed by Liszt)

Giuseppe Verdi
Born October 9/10, 1813, Roncole
Died January 27, 1901, Milan

Reminiscences de Norma (transcribed by Liszt)

Vincenzo Bellini
Born November 3, 1801, Catania
Died September 23, 1835, Puteaux

Liszt made a number of straightforward piano versions of works by other composers, such as Beethoven symphonies, Weber overtures, and other orchestral works, chamber music, and songs. His motives here were entirely generous: he liked this music and knew that performances of the original versions would be infrequent, so he set out to bring the music to a wider audience by playing it in piano versions. Such arrangements are generally known as transcriptions: straightforward and (fairly) literal piano versions of works
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Wagner, Verdi, and Bellini. Liszt and Wagner
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bardi)
his first Verdi paraphrase in 1848 (on
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on seven Wagner operas plus the
original compositions by Liszt, and they be
came vastly popular. Liszt made paraphrases of
operas by Mozart, Donizetti, Auber, Gounod,
Meyerbeer, Rossini, and many others, but the
two opera composers he turned to most often
were Wagner and Verdi. He wrote paraphrases
on seven Wagner operas plus the Ring, and his
interest in Verdi spanned his career: he made
his first Verdi paraphrase in 1848 (on I Lombardì) and his last (on Simon Boccanegra) in
1882, only four years before his death. Liszt and
Verdi may seem very different composers, but
Verdi knew and admired Liszt’s paraphrases of
his operas and complimented him on them.

This recital offers piano transcriptions and
paraphrases by Liszt of music from operas by
Wagner, Verdi, and Bellini. Liszt and Wagner
shared a long and—at times—difficult relation
ship. During his years as music director in Wei
mar, Liszt championed Wagner’s music and led
a number of his operas, including the premiere
of Lohengrin. But in 1865 Liszt’s daughter Cosi
ma abandoned her husband Hans von Bülow,
ran off with Wagner, and eventually married
him. Liszt was furious with both Cosima and
Wagner and remained estranged from them
until a reconciliation was worked out in 1872.

If Liszt could disapprove of Wagner’s actions,
he nevertheless admired his music, and he made
piano transcriptions of music from eleven of
Wagner’s operas. Liszt’s transcriptions of ex
cerpts from Wagner’s operas were usually quite
respectful—they were almost always straightforward and literal. Liszt made his transcription of
Isoldens Liebestod in 1867, only two years after
the premiere of Tristan und Isolde (and during
his period of estrangement from Wagner and
Cosima). Isolde’s final scene is of course best
known as the Liebestod (or “love-death”). At
the end of the opera, as Tristan lies dead before
her, Isolde sings her farewell to both Tristan and
to life. This music has become familiar as one
of the most famous orchestral excerpts from
Wagner’s operas: as Isolde finds ecstatic fulfill
ment in death, Wagner surrounds her with a
shimmering, glowing orchestral sound. Liszt’s
transcription of this scene is remarkable for its
fidelity to Wagner’s music and for his subtle ap
proach to the sonority of the piano.

Verdi’s Ernani, first performed in 1844, be
came his first international success. It tells a
complex tale of Elvira and the three men who
love her. Those three—King Don Carlo, the aris
tocrat-turned-outlaw Ernani, and Don Ruy Go
mez de Silva—find themselves locked in a deadly
struggle that ultimately turns into a tale of har
rowing vengeance. This is a violent opera, full of
quite dramatic music. Liszt drafted a first ver
sion of his paraphrase on themes from Ernani in
1847, only three years after the premiere, but did
not publish his (much-revised) final version until
1859. In contrast to his fairly literal transcription
of Wagner’s Liebestod, the Ernani paraphrase is
quite free, and Verdi’s music becomes a vehicle for
Liszt’s own spectacular keyboard abilities. From
the bold opening fanfares, the music moves on
to a virtuoso treatment of Verdi’s themes, here
often richly embellished and hammered out in
great chords. The grand close is remarkable for
its sonorous keyboard writing.

Norma was first produced in 1831, when
Bellini was only 30. Set in ancient Gaul
during the revolt against the Roman occup
ation, the opera tells of the Druid priestess
Norma and her fatal love for the Roman sol
dier Pollione. Liszt wrote his Reminiscences
de Norma in 1841, and in this case he built up
his paraphrase on themes specifically associat
ed with Norma herself. The Reminiscences be
come, then, a sort of portrait of that heroine,
though here they are done up with a furious
virtuosity. Liszt subtitiled this work “Grand
fantaisie pour piano,” and grand it certain
ly is, stretching out to over a quarter-hour in length. The work begins with a powerful
statement—marked Tempo giusto, marcato,
and fortissimo—that imitates the sound of a
full orchestra, complete with drum rhythms
and broadly arpeggated chords. Liszt then
proceeds to take the Norma themes, six in all,
through an extended and brilliant treatment.

Program Notes by Eric Bromberger © 2006