

SAN FRANCISCO PERFORMANCES

presents

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.

ARTIST PROFILE

Tonight's concert marks Marc-André Hamelin's third appearance for San Francisco Performances. He previously appeared in recital on December 2, 2003 and April 29, 2005.



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-Saens *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-Saens *Piano Concerto No. 4* with the Grand Teton Music Festival and Yan Pascal Tortelier.

Under exclusive contract with Hyperion records, Mr. Hamelin's latest release is a disc of Schumann's *Carnaval*, *Fantasiestücke* and *Papillons*. His highly acclaimed recording of Rubinstein's *Piano Concerto No. 4* and Scharwenka's *Piano Concerto No. 1* was issued earlier in the season. During the 2004/05 season his recordings of the complete Albeniz *Iberia* and Ives's "*Concord*" *Sonata* brought him a nomination for Gramophone Magazine's 2005 Artist of the Year.

Among his dozens of recordings include concertos by Alkan, Bernstein, Bolcom, Korngold, Joseph Marx, Medtner, Rodion Schedrin, Scriabin, Shostakovich, and solo discs of Alkan, Caotoire, Nikolai Kapustin, Liszt, Reger, Roslavets, Rzewski, Schumann, Villa Lobos, and "The Composer-Pianists: From Alkan to Hamelin." His double album of the complete Chopin-Godowsky Etudes won the 2000 Gramophone Instrumental Award. With a double nomination for the epic Busoni Concerto with the CBSO under Mark Elder and the Chopin-Godowsky, Mr. Hamelin was the only classical artist to play live at the 2001 Grammy Awards. He received another Grammy nomination in 2002 for his recording featuring the works of Alkan.

In 2005 Mr. Hamelin was honored to be made an Officer of the Order of Canada and a Chevalier de l'Ordre national du Québec.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Piano Sonata in A Major, D.664

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Born January 31, 1797, Vienna

Died November 19, 1828, Vienna

A certain amount of confusion has surrounded the date of composition of this brief piano sonata. Some scholars have placed it in the years 1817 or 1825, but recent evidence suggests that Schubert actually wrote it during the summer of 1819, which he spent on vacation in the Speyr region of Austria. This was a relaxed time for the young composer: he found the surrounding countryside "inconceivably lovely," and that summer he also wrote one of the most relaxed and best-loved of his works, the "*Trout*" *Quartet*. The summer appears to have had other charms as well—Schubert dedicated this sonata to the daughter of one of his hosts, the eighteen-year-old Josefine von Koller, of whom he said: "She is very pretty, plays the piano well, and is going to sing some of my songs."

What most distinguishes this music is its ex-

traordinary gentleness. Lyric ideas are stated and developed tenderly, and while the music can at moments proceed with a great deal of vigor, the *Sonata in A Major* is for the most part without stress or unsettling tension. Much of the writing is set very high in the piano's register, giving the sonata a ringing, bell-like sonority—the main theme of its final movement, in fact, has been compared to a music-box tune.

Schubert often favored a four-movement structure for his mature piano sonatas, but the *Sonata in A Major* is in only three. The *Allegro moderato* opens with a long, constantly-singing idea. This theme has been criticized as being too much song and not enough true sonata theme, one capable of development, though that may be the source of its charm for many listeners. The development brings pounding triplet octaves, but Schubert keeps the mood gentle, and the movement concludes on quiet fragments of its opening idea.

The *Andante* is built on a simple chordal melody, but here the phrases fall into the unusual length of seven measures. The development section, once again employing triplet rhythms, moves from D major to D minor before the quiet close.

The amiable concluding *Allegro* is based on runs and dotted rhythms, though Schubert leads us into another world with the dancing second subject. Much of the writing is again set high in the instrument's range, and this movement dances home to the sound of ringing bells.

Sonatina Concertante, Opus 28

PANTCHO VLADIGEROV

Born March 13, 1899, Zurich

Died September 8, 1978, Sofia

Though he became Bulgaria's leading composer of the twentieth century, Pantcho Vladigerov was born in Switzerland, where his mother had gone for good medical care when she learned that she was going to have twins: Pantcho's twin brother Luben was actually born the day before he was. The boys began their musical studies in Bulgaria but were sent to Berlin in 1911 to complete their training. There Pantcho studied piano and composition, winning several awards in the process. He found life in the heady artistic climate of Berlin quite congenial and remained there for two decades, serving for some time as composer-in-residence and music director of the Max Reinhardt Theater. But the imminent rise of the Nazis made Berlin less attractive, and in 1932 Vladigerov returned to Bulgaria. He served as Professor of Piano, Chamber Music, and Composition at the Academy of Music in Sofia across the rest of

his long and productive life. Among his students was the pianist Alexis Weissenberg.

Vladigerov 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, Vladigerov's music seems reminiscent of Bartók: both composers make use of the folk-song idiom of Eastern Europe, particularly its shifting meters. But Vladigerov puts a much greater emphasis on melody, and at moments his music sings with an almost sensuous opulence.

The *Sonatina Concertante* is Vladigerov'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: Schlußszene 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

originally written for instruments or voice.

But Liszt also turned to the music of other composers as the starting point for his own creativity and as an opportunity to demonstrate his keyboard virtuosity. Such works go under a variety of names, including *paraphrase*, *remembrance*, or *fantasy*, and for them Liszt would often turn to popular operas: he would begin with some of the best-known tunes from operas, and from them he would create virtuoso works for the keyboard. The themes may have been written by other composers, but the treatment was entirely Liszt's—these are essentially original compositions by Liszt, and they became 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 Lombardi*) 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 relationship. During his years as music director in Weimar, 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 excerpts from Wagner's operas were usually quite respectful—they were almost always straightforward and literal. Liszt made his transcription of *Isolde's 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 fulfillment 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 approach to the sonority of the piano.

Verdi's *Ernani*, first performed in 1844, became his first international success. It tells a complex tale of *Elvira* and the three men who love her. Those three—King Don Carlo, the aristocrat-turned-outlaw *Ernani*, and Don Ruy Gomez de Silva—find themselves locked in a deadly struggle that ultimately turns into a tale of harrowing vengeance. This is a violent opera, full of

quite dramatic music. Liszt drafted a first version 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 occupation, the opera tells of the Druid priestess *Norma* and her fatal love for the Roman soldier *Pollione*. Liszt wrote his *Reminiscences de Norma* in 1841, and in this case he built up his paraphrase on themes specifically associated with *Norma* herself. The *Reminiscences* become, then, a sort of portrait of that heroine, though here they are done up with a furious virtuosity. Liszt subtitled this work “Grand fantaisie pour piano,” and grand it certainly 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 arpeggiated chords. Liszt then proceeds to take the *Norma* themes, six in all, through an extended and brilliant treatment.

Program Notes by Eric Bromberger © 2006