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## The New York Times

### Recitals That Linger, a Festival That May Not

By Anthony Tommasini, July 17, 2014

***“Mr. Goldstein played both works with brilliance and imagination.”***

On most days of the two-week International Keyboard Institute and Festival, a popular annual venture sponsored by Mannes College the New School for Music, there are two piano recitals each evening. So it was on Wednesday, the third full day of the festival. For the early-evening Prestige series, which mostly presents exceptional younger artists, the award-winning 32-year-old German pianist Alexander Schimpf played a varied program culminating with Beethoven’s mighty “Hammerklavier” Sonata. **Later that evening, the Israeli pianist Alon Goldstein, admired for the refinement and imaginativeness of his performances, played a formidable program** on the Masters series. The recitals were presented at the intimate concert hall of the Mannes College building on the Upper West Side, which seats just 275.

The institute draws student pianists who participate in workshops and master classes and, naturally, attend almost every recital. But this festival, now in its 16th season, has long attracted lots of concertgoers who love piano music and piano playing. I was not the only person who took in Wednesday night’s doubleheader.

As it happens, this could be the last festival. Mannes’s longtime building has been sold, and the college is relocating, starting in the fall of 2015, to a newly renovated space in Arnhold Hall at the New School in Greenwich Village. Next summer, the institution will be in the process of moving, so the keyboard festival will not take place, and its future is uncertain. This would be a loss to audiences in New York.

The recitals on Wednesday were fascinating. Mr. Schimpf, who won first prize in the prestigious Cleveland International Piano Competition in 2011, began his program with a vibrant, articulate account of Bach’s Toccata in E minor. He followed with the American premiere of “Augenblicke — eine Sammlung,” a 2008 work by the German composer Adrian Sieber. This rhapsodic, restless eight-minute piece veers between outbursts of hurtling, thick, dissonant chords and contrasting passages of somberly reflective, more lyrical music. In a swirling, seductive account of Debussy’s “L’Isle Joyeuse,” Mr. Schimpf conveyed exactly what kind of joy the visitors to the island of the work’s title were indulging in.

Beethoven’s late Sonata No. 29 in B flat (Op. 106), “Hammerklavier,” is the longest, most audacious and difficult of his sonatas. It is always an event to hear it performed, and there was much to admire in Mr. Schimpf’s account. He brought a light touch, bright sound and bracing energy to the monumental first movement. Still, he took a quick tempo that he had trouble controlling, which led to some rushed and jumbled passages. The same problem affected the scherzo. He was at his best, though, in the searching slow movement, played with magisterial elegance and sensitivity. And he reined in the tempo of the

Alon Goldstein

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daunting final fugue just enough to let the tangle of crazed counterpoint come through and sound, well, excitingly crazy.

Mr. Goldstein, who is enjoying an international career, began his recital with a curiously cool, even careless, at times, performance of Beethoven's "Tempest" Sonata, though **he brought rippling allure to the work's mesmerizing finale**. He seemed a different pianist, though, in the next work, **Beethoven's "Les Adieux" Sonata. Here was a beautifully balanced approach to the score, refined yet impetuous, noble yet spirited.**

After intermission, he excelled in two pieces by Liszt, the seldom-heard Paraphrase on Themes From Verdi's "Aida" and the better-known Concert Paraphrase After Verdi's "Rigoletto." Liszt's fantasies on operas are not just clever showpieces. Here is a great composer reveling in excerpts from two Verdi operas while also exploring the potential lying within the music. **Mr. Goldstein played both works with brilliance and imagination**, qualities he brought to Ravel's "Une Barque sur l'Océan" from "Miroirs."

He also played Three Études (2012) by the Israeli-born composer Avner Dorman, inventive and aptly demanding works. In the first, "Snakes and Ladders," a rush of passagework in spiraling triplets is punctuated with stabbing, staggered chords. During the performance, the pages of Mr. Goldstein's score on the piano's music stand kept turning ahead on their own: The culprit seemed to be an overhead air-conditioner duct. Mr. Goldstein had to start over. When he finished, the audience broke into applause, and he took the occasion to comment on the work's intriguing title. He said that he could detect lots of snakes in the music but no ladders. He also said that he had asked the composer whether these three pieces were études "for the piano or against the piano," referring to their difficulty.

His comments were charming and helpful. He should speak more when he next plays in New York. This being perhaps the last Mannes summer festival, that future appearance will probably not be at this valuable event.

Alon Goldstein