

ENTERTAINMENT



PRESS PHOTO/JON M. BROUWER

In an all-Chopin program (save for some Gershwin and Stravinsky in the encore), Alan Gampel performs Tuesday evening in a solo presentation in St. Cecilia Music Society's Royce Auditorium. He is in town all week, performing Friday and Saturday with the Grand Rapids Symphony.

Gampel delivers inspired evening of Chopin

A crowd of 300 witnessed world-class artistry in action Tuesday night. Alan Gampel put on an inspired performance of a variety of Chopin compositions.

Challenging and bursting with a panoply of emotion, the program mounted by Gampel enthralled the audience, and rightly so. This musician has it all. He is a showman with form and substance, technique and uncommon sensitivity. And don't forget versatility — his two impressive encores were by Gershwin and Stravinsky, with the latter an amazing transcription by Gampel from "The Firebird."

The closing sonata included dozens of highlights. This sweeping, four-movement piece began with an allegro, but, of course, the romantic kind.

Gampel matched tones like a genius, nursed along sumptuous suspended phrases without melodrama and all the while played with direct and focused energy. The crispy, crunchy scherzo featured blindingly quick runs, while the largo was velvety and melodious. Extra pedal melded sounds and created a sort of extra-atmospheric effect that

was unusual, unexpected and seemed to verge on experimental even for the new millennium.

Gampel unleashed a torrent of force in the final presto. What with incredible runs in the right hand, memorable lyricism in the left, modulations and crashing chords, this movement had all the right stuff, a kaleidoscope of memorable, moving color and sound.

The seldom-performed, showy Fantasy also was exciting. Delightful Slavic folk dances and patriotic nuances gave the framework. The rest alternated between singing tones, stormy thunder and building drama. The soloist

navigated these contrasting elements cleanly and with precision in this piece that he transcribed from one for piano and orchestra.

Gampel served up brief oral, biographical introductions to each piece on the program. These were concise and interesting. Polish-born Chopin apparently loved a.) Paris, b.) trying new forms of music, c.) the writer George Sand and d.) earlier, Maria (who broke off their engagement because, sadly, Chopin wasn't the healthiest fellow). Gampel explained how the ebb and flow of these special interests in Chopin's life shaped his



ANNE TUUK

MUSICREVIEW

ALAN GAMPEL, pianist, performed Tuesday in St. Cecilia Music Society's Royce Auditorium in an all-Chopin program. **The selections:** Mazurka in A Minor; Fantasy on Polish Airs; Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat Minor; Ballade No. 3 in A-flat Major; Nocturne in C Minor; Sonata No. 3 in B Minor.

compositions in unique ways.

The familiar scherzo, a different piece indeed from the Beethoven version, was a free-standing treasure of a number. Gampel added theatrics but played with clarity. There was huge intensity that evolved into sweetness and light and jaunty jumps around the keyboard that belied their high degree of difficulty.

Gampel showed himself an engaging interpreter in the Ballade, too, to end the program's first half. Darkish, moody phrases were balanced with warm splashes of lighter measures. Sumptuous harmonies that moved along but didn't seem rushed were interspersed. The piece evoked both poetry and the visual art of painting from the 19th century.

Royce Auditorium showcased a musician's musician Tuesday. Doubtless the audience will long cherish the memory.