

# In With a Gentle Bach, Out With a Bold Stravinsky



Katie Orlinsky for The New York Times

Alexei Volodin's program at the Metropolitan Museum on Thursday included Bach, Rachmaninoff, Ravel and Stravinsky.

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The repertoire a pianist chooses to begin a program can reveal much about his musical personality. Alexei Volodin opened his recital at the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) on Thursday with an introverted and subtly shaded rendition of Bach's Partita No. 6 in E minor.

This young Russian pianist has been touring the country with the [London Symphony Orchestra](#) and the conductor [Valery Gergiev](#), with whom he will perform at Avery Fisher Hall on Sunday. Instead of immediately offering bold statements during Thursday's concert (part of the museum's PianoForte series), he gave a quietly soulful and elegant interpretation of the Partita's opening Toccata that seemed to invite the audience to lean in and listen closely.

He played the Corrente with sparkling energy and brought a wistful nostalgia to the Sarabande. Mr. Volodin clearly articulated the multiple voices hidden in the thicket of counterpoint in the concluding Gigue, whose grandeur he aptly conveyed.

The opening theme of Rachmaninoff's Variations on a Theme of Corelli (Op. 42) was also cleanly voiced. The 20 short variations are based on a popular Baroque melody called "La Folia," which Corelli used in his Violin Sonata (Op. 5, No. 12). (Many other composers also incorporated the tune into their works.)

Composed in 1931, the Variations, with chromatic, biting harmonies, reflect Rachmaninoff's mature style, which is less romantic and more emotionally reserved than his earlier pieces.

Mr. Volodin played with rhythmically incisive momentum and illuminated the varying character of the movements. The program also included an evocative performance of Ravel's "Miroirs," with a particularly striking rendition of the Spanish-hued "Alborada del Gracioso."

Mr. Volodin affirmed his firebrand credentials with a virtuosic performance of Stravinsky's Three Movements From "Petrouchka," which ended the concert. In less capable hands this

passionate work can sound bangy, but Mr. Volodin nailed the chords with jackhammer precision without resorting to pounding the keyboard. The concluding “Semaine Grasse,” a musical depiction of a colorful carnival scene, was a riotous whirlwind.

Mr. Volodin looked understandably tired, but rewarded the enthusiastic crowd with four encores: a [Shostakovich](#) Prelude (Op. 34, No. 22, from the 24 Preludes), Rachmaninoff’s Prelude in G sharp minor (Op. 32, No. 12) and [Chopin](#)’s Polonaise “Héroïque” (Op. 53).

*The next concert in the PianoForte series features the Brazilian pianist Nelson Freire on April 18 at the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium, Metropolitan Museum of Art; (212) 570-3949, metmuseum.org.*