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# Top-flight performance pleases Hollins audience

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I had never heard pianist Michael Habermann before his performance Monday in Hollins College's Talmadge Hall, but it seems to me he is an artist of the first rank, and his recital an important cultural event in this area.

Coming a few weeks after Roy Johnson's brilliant interpretation of all the Chopin etudes, last night's program climaxed an autumn unusually rich in fine piano concerts.

Habermann opened with Busoni's "Fantasia Contrappuntistica," one of the few works whose difficulty — complexity, really — stands in the way of more frequent performances. Habermann's playing was spellbinding, rich in detail, superbly articulated and balanced, thrillingly dramatic. The work itself is a masterpiece, piling climax upon climax, seemingly discursive but never out of control, and Habermann conquered its successively greater challenges with skill.

It would be wrong to say it looked easy. It didn't look easy. It looked like an awesome task that Habermann felt was worth the trouble to accomplish beautifully. I agreed. This opening number brought me to my feet.

The Casella Sonatina which followed is a work of color and charm, and Habermann's performance of it seemed ideal in almost every respect. Its shifts of style were carefully modulated, its numerous rhetorical gestures in his hands somehow never seemed shallow.

The second half of the recital was devoted to the works of Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji, a reclusive English/Indian composer of legendary eccentricity. Habermann is, I believe, the only pianist permitted to perform Sorabji's works, and even he cannot record them.

Four Sorabji selections were offered, each played with obvious conviction by Habermann. I was most impressed with "Pastiche," a savage parody of the Habanera from "Carmen," in which the composer seems truly angry, outraged at the triteness of Bizet's tune, contemptuous of its popularity, determined to annihilate it, then giving up in despair. Hardly a loving tribute.

Also included was the premiere of Sorabji's "Fantasiattina" on the name of poet Christopher Grieve. This I found abrupt and unsatisfying, like a Debussy prelude in overdrive, despite what I feel sure was an excellent rendition by Habermann.