

# The New York Times

## A Twirling Airiness in a Recital of Schumann, Bach, and Debussy Lise de la Salle, a French pianist, opens concert series

By Steve Smith  
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When the teenage French pianist Lise de la Salle presented a recital at the Metropolitan Museum of Art six years ago, the New York Times critic Bernard Holland ended an admiring review with a blunt declaration: “Ms. de la Salle has a substantial career ahead of her.” That prediction has been borne out in subsequent years, as this focused artist — now 25 — has garnered widespread renown for her recordings and increasingly prominent engagements.

The beauty of Peoples’ Symphony Concerts, founded in 1900 to bring top-rank concerts to audiences of limited means, is that it routinely offers events with artists of Ms. de la Salle’s caliber and stature, priced at a pittance, now \$14. On Saturday night, she opened the series in its return to the comfortable, acoustically excellent auditorium of Washington Irving High School on Irving Place, after a season spent elsewhere because of auditorium renovations.

Ms. de la Salle’s recital was to start with two works by Schumann, followed with Busoni’s arrangement of Bach’s Chaconne and six Préludes by Debussy. Instead, she flipped her program, starting with the Bach-Busoni. It was a wise move. Busoni’s grandiose modern-piano realization of Bach’s solo-violin Parnassus served to establish her **prodigious power and control, but also her taste and restraint, revealed in well-calibrated dynamics and intelligent pedaling.**

From there, **Ms. de la Salle offered freshness and lucidity** in Debussy, her measured approach providing **tantalizing whiffs of fragrance instead of heavy perfume.** Her “Fille aux cheveux de lin” was **modest and sweet, free of mawkishness.**

“Les fées sont d’exquises danseuses” and “Ce qu’a vu le vent d’ouest” demonstrated her capacity for **aqueous ripples, airy zephyrs and tempestuous whorls.**

With Schumann’s splashy “Abegg” Variations (Op. 1) ably dispatched with Champagne bubble fizz to start the recital’s second half, Ms. de la Salle concluded her program with the same composer’s towering Fantasia in C (Op. 17). **She was an expert guide through a score by turns turbulent and reverent, faithfully maintaining narrative threads while deftly illuminating the passions swirling around them.**

Recalled for two encores, she complied with glowing accounts of Schumann’s “Liebeslied” and Schubert’s “Standchen” as arranged by Liszt.