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Emanuele Arciuli
Italian Academy
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The piano that graced the small stage of the Italian Academy was a lovely little thoroughbred: a baby Steinway, its wood grain gleaming within the frame of the proscenium's red curtains.

But this good thing came in a package too small for the plans of **Emanuele Arciuli, the Italian pianist who gave an excellent recital of contemporary music on this instrument on Wednesday night.** Smaller than a concert grand, the piano lacked the upper keys Mr. Arciuli needed to perform pieces like Stockhausen's "Klavierstück IX." So he had to revise his program.

But changes didn't diminish the pleasure in what he did do. He opened with "Quattro Illustrazione" by Giacinto Scelsi, four linked vignettes of thick, dark chords examined, layered, picked apart and pounded together, all with an air of spontaneous curiosity.

This was immediately contrasted with another visually oriented work of a completely different color, Morton Feldman's "Piano Piece (to Philip Guston)," which had a translucent clarity and laid out its ideas with an evenness that was comparable to the all-over paintings of the Abstract Expressionists.

Next came a landscape, John Cage's "In a Landscape," its simple patterns spun out with clarity and feeling, then a kind of snapshot, **John Adams's recent "American Berserk," which Mr. Arciuli played with an elegant legato that supported the music's excitement while belying its frenetic undertones.**

Another theme of the evening was the juxtaposition of Italian and American voices. Ivan Fedele's bright flourishes in "Cadenze" and Claudio Rastelli's somewhat dogmatic dodecaphony in "Bagatelle" were overshadowed by two of Frederic Rzewski's "Four North American Ballads." **The fourth ballad, "Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues," is a virtuosic depiction of a mill's machinery, thundering, then breaking off into blues flourishes: compelling music, certainly as showcased in this impressive performance.**

by ANNE MIDGETTE