



I'd compare the field of obscure piano music to a deluxe chocolate assortment

**T**he question I am asked perhaps more often than any other has to do with where "on earth!" I find the unusual repertoire I perform and record. Well, I've always been an extremely avid score collector, to the point where I'm presently in great danger of running out of space. So if I relied solely on this rather behemoth and intimidating wall-of-a-hundred-piles-or-so that stares me in the face every time I practice, I would find enough joy and fulfilment for several lifetimes, even if I just filtered out everything that's questionable, out of fashion or just plain bad (I wasn't always as discriminating as I am now). I suppose there are many reasons behind the collecting bug, a subject about which I'm quite sure whole psychological treatises have been written, but I assure you that my impulses for acquiring anything are purely of an artistic nature! Even though I'm as sensitive as anyone else to the beauty of a book-as-object, and I've been known to have quasi-Pavlovian reactions at the sight of a particularly ornate and colorful frontispiece in a Belaieff edition, music comes first!

**One does have to go through an** awful lot of this music to find the truly special pearls, the ones which will become the objects of lasting musical love affairs. Without wishing to go all Forrest Gump on you, I'd perhaps best compare the field of obscure piano music to a deluxe chocolate assortment, but one imbued with magical properties

## DIARY

### Marc-André HAMELIN

**An avid collector of rarities, the pianist explains his passion for discovering uncharted musical territory**

in which, after finishing the first layer, one finds not only another one but an infinity of additional delights and an inexhaustible quantity of further flavours to sample and pick new favourites from. This makes the exploration of the piano literature one of the most fascinating pursuits I can imagine. Fortunately for the music-loving public, who often are not trained musicians and have to rely purely on recordings, there are many enterprising pianists who have delved into these uncharted regions of the repertoire.

**Another question that often** comes my way is "what is the next composer we'll be discovering through you?" And I confess that more often than not I come up empty, since there are so many I could turn my attention to at any one time. One experience I had very recently showed me that a discovery can be all the more exciting when it takes you completely by surprise.

**I have the good fortune to share** my existence with an extraordinary woman named Cathy Fuller who, in her capacity as producer and host for the public radio station WGBH in Boston, continually presents her listeners with fascinating and very creative choices from all walks of classical music. So I was listening to her programme last week when she aired a couple of keyboard sonatas by CPE Bach, as performed by Mikhail Pletnev. The playing alone would have compelled me to listen, but I was going from one amazement to the next, marvelling at the absolutely revolutionary nature of the music, and practically hitting myself over the head for not having been attentive to CPE Bach's music before. Of course I'd heard a few things over the years, and a piece I once wrote for player-piano based on his *Solfeggietto* recently came out on CD, but my awareness of his art was very low indeed. Even before the music ended, my appetite had been well-

whetted, and I was more than ready to find out more about his output.

**And then came the magical** moment, one which I still find hard to explain: at the end of the sonata in E major, the composer has the colossal gall to quit in the very middle of a phrase, on an inconclusive harmony! I was literally thunderstruck. I had to go straight to the printed music – a reliable Urtext edition – first to assure myself that I hadn't dreamed anything, then to marvel at how such a thing could even be possible, in that period of history or any other...is it a sudden ending, or a sudden stop, or an interruption, or a suggestion that the end of the phrase exists but we're being whisked away from it? And how should it be conveyed in performance?

**The whole thing reminded me of** how Charles Bokowski ends one of his short stories, often abruptly, saying the barest minimum but implying a lot. When I tried out the movement at the piano, despite the pleasure of producing the music myself, the mystery remained complete. And so I hope it remains!

**If these kinds of little surprises** came too often, they just wouldn't be so special. I absolutely believe that many other such tiny miracles exist, and may they be the source of exciting discoveries for all musicians and music-lovers. ☺

**Hamelin's next volume of** *Haydn sonatas on Hyperion* will be reviewed next month