

MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

Pianist

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Albéniz: 'Iberia,' Other Works

Marc-André Hamelin, pianist. Hyperion CDA67476/7;
two CD's.

NOT to trade in stereotypes about Canadians, but Marc-André Hamelin, for one, is much too modest. "I feel I have no qualifications to play this music," Mr. Hamelin says in the June issue of *The Gramophone*. "I'm Canadian, and I've never been to the south of Spain."

Mr. Hamelin, it turns out, has every reason to play Isaac Albéniz's grand and colorful compilation "Iberia." This imposing masterpiece, like so much of the Spanish piano repertory, has long been virtually the private preserve of the venerable Alicia de Larrocha, and Mr. Hamelin's recording is as compulsively listenable as some of her best.



Like Ms. de Larrocha, Mr. Hamelin commands an enormous range of touch and expression. He is as comfortable in the languid meanderings of "Evocación" as in the pointed dance rhythms of "Rondeña,"

and he modulates between such extremes with utter fluency. As part of this far-reaching sensibility, Mr. Hamelin is always alert to atmosphere, which is everything in this music.

He fills out the album with other late works by Albéniz, including "La Vega," "España: Souvenirs" and "Navarra" (in a completion by William Bolcom). But perhaps the most delightful moment is in "Yvonne en Visite," in which the poor young Yvonne is forced to play the piano in public and succumbs to a case of the jitters. Mr. Hamelin's ability to sound so fumblingly artless here is artistry of the highest order.

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