

# MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

## PIANO

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THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN NEWS

REVIEW

## Pianist Hamelin puts on dazzling program

By **Marc Shulgold**, Wednesday, May 14, 2008

For fans of the piano, there's nothing like an evening of good old finger-busting, eye-popping virtuosity. Hands flying across the keys, impossible sounds emanating from the Steinway.

On Wednesday in Gates Concert Hall, Marc-Andre Hamelin conjured memories of the golden age of pianists, putting an exclamation point on the final program in the Friends of Chamber Music's Piano Series in Gates Concert Hall.

Here was a dazzling program that would have made Rubinstein and Horowitz smile.

An unexpected hit of the night was the *Sonata in a State of Jazz* by the Bulgarian pianist Alexis Weissenberg. In four movements exploring such popular dance styles as the tango, samba and Charleston, the *Sonata* emerges as an intellectual, heavily modernist examination of jazz idioms - closer to Scriabin than Satchmo. Dense and hideously difficult, but likeable in its quirky way.

Two other pianist-composers appeared on Hamelin's unhackneyed program: a wildly exuberant *Symphonic Metamorphosis on Johann Strauss' Wine Women and Song* by the legendary Leopold Godowsky, and a pair of *Etudes* by Hamelin - a take on Goethe's poem *The Erlking*, which strictly followed the meter and mood of the text, and a lovely left-hand-alone setting of a Tchaikovsky *Lullaby*.

As an amusing encore, Hamelin offered his own addition to Beethoven's 33 *Diabelli Variations*, turning Diabelli's simple tune into something strangely resembling *Chopsticks*.

Amid all this novelty came works by two masters: sonatas (in F and B-flat) by Haydn and the *Barcarolle* and Third *Ballade* of Chopin.

While the Haydns served as delightful warm-up ditties, the Chopin pieces exploded with sweep and romantic passion - putting to shame the other composers on the program.

Throughout the evening, Hamelin appeared unfazed by the complexities of the music, displaying flawless technique and a solid sense of phrasing and dynamics. The Canadian is a showman, but in an understated way.

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*Colbert Artists Management*

111 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019  
www.colbertartists.com ~ 212-757-0782