

# MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

## PIANO

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Classical

## Marc-André Hamelin

★★★★★ Pittville Pump Room, Cheltenham

Rian Evans

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[The Guardian](#)

The French-Canadian pianist Marc-André Hamelin has earned acclaim as a virtuoso in the 19th-century mould, a reputation justified by a performance of epic proportions at the Cheltenham festival.

The first record that Hamelin bought as a 13-year-old prodigy was apparently Charles Ives' Concord Sonata, and the sheer dynamic force of his delivery of it at Cheltenham suggested he wanted the audience to share that early exhilaration and awe. The lucidity and instinctiveness of Hamelin's interpretation aptly reflected Ives' grand intentions in the four massive movements, in which Ives honours the so-called transcendentalist philosopher-writers from Concord, Massachusetts: Emerson, Hawthorne, the Alcotts and Thoreau. The vast scale and momentum was brilliantly sustained throughout, but perhaps most compellingly when Ives' great explosions of sound collapsed into more poetic reveries, only to reignite furiously.

Hamelin matched the Ives with an equally mind-boggling performance of Alkan's Concerto for Solo Piano, Op 39. Few pianists are capable of such feats of stamina, yet the fiendish difficulties were despatched with minimum fuss, and the music came into sharp focus, with its sweeping lyricism, originality and dissonances that would have delighted Ives.

Between these two marathons, Hamelin played Schumann's Fantasy in C major, Op 17. While his approach seemed too big and blustery, it could hardly detract from an overall tour de force.

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