

# MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

## PIANIST

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### Dukas: Piano Sonata in E flat minor; Decaux: 'Clairs de Lune'

Marc-André Hamelin, pianist.  
Hyperion CDA67511; CD.

EVER since the success of the 1940 Disney film "Fantasia," based partly on "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," the French composer Paul Dukas has been inextricably linked with Mickey Mouse and a bewitched dancing broom. It's an odd association for Dukas, a man so self-critical that he destroyed many of his works.

A new release from Hyperion offers one worthy composition that Dukas spared. His epic Piano Sonata in E flat minor has been ignored, but here the superb French-Canadian pianist Marc-André Hamelin champions it persuasively.

The technical difficulty of the sonata, composed from 1898 to 1900, has been cited as a reason for its recent neglect. Yet this seems implausible, given the formidable techniques of contemporary pianists able to master difficult repertory staples like Beethoven's "Hammerklavier" Sonata, to which Dukas's work has been compared.

Dukas, not a talented pianist himself, defiantly used Beethoven's classical sonata form while contemporaries like Debussy were shunning the genre for so-called Impressionistic music. It is a challenge to maintain the momentum and preserve



the structure of this vast, wandering sonata, which subtly echoes Schubert, Saint-Saëns and Franck. Mr. Hamelin, who has recorded many works off the beaten track, succeeds.

He balances the initial seething turbulence with quiet introspection. A bewitchingly lovely second movement precedes technical fireworks and reflective, harmonically colorful phrases in the third, before Mr. Hamelin propels the majestic finale to a virtuosic conclusion.

The curio "Clairs de Lune" was written by the obscure French composer Abel Decaux from 1960 to 1967 and is his only known work. The four short, dreamy pieces hover in a compositional time warp, strangely precocious of future works by Schoenberg and Debussy. "Clairs de Lune" is naturally dwarfed by the more substantial sonata, but Mr. Hamelin's evocative playing renders it worthwhile.

VIVIEN SCHWEITZER

Colbert Artists Management Inc.

111 West 57th Street, New York, New York 10019  
212-779-9192 • Fax 212-851-5279 • West Coast 650-794-0388  
E-mail: NYC@colbertartists.com