

# MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

## PIANO

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**TIMES**ONLINE

From The Sunday Times  
January 18, 2009

### Chopin: Sonatas Nos 2 and 3, Berceuse, Barcarole - Marc-André Hamelin

Hugh Canning

The French-Canadian virtuoso's by now extensive discography has enriched the catalogue with so many byways of the piano repertoire — Alkan, Godowsky; most recently, jazz-inspired compositions by Weissenberg, Gulda and Antheil — that he has earned his chance to record the highways. Chopin's second and third piano sonatas lie at the heart of the Romantic piano literature, and Hamelin, a poet among virtuosos, brings sensibility and a brilliant technique in equal measure to this oft-recorded music. Each of the sonatas is preceded by late pieces, the uniquely designated Berceuse, Op 57, and the Barcarolle, Op 60, while at the heart of this cannily programmed recital is the Op 27 pair of Nocturnes — the second, *lento sostenuto*, in D flat, is one of his most beloved essays in the genre. Hamelin impresses above all with his dramatic conception of the two great sonatas. The pivotal movement of the B flat minor, No 2, is the celebrated Funeral March, in which Hamelin suggests a grandiose cortege approaching, then receding into the distance, with magisterial touch and cumulative power. The brief *presto* seems a natural release after such overwhelming grief. He is no less compelling in the grand *allegro maestoso* of the B minor sonata (No 3), making light of the technical challenges while never falling into empty virtuoso display. The *molto vivace scherzo* glitters, and Hamelin's cantabile playing of the slow movement's melodic contours is the pianistic equivalent of *bel canto* singing. This is the Chopin of a true Romantic, spellbinding at its (considerable) best and superbly recorded.

Hyperion CDA67706

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