

# MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

## PIANIST

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### Pianist's performance extraordinary

BY KENNETH DELONG, JUNE 10, 2010

Honens International Piano Competition. Marc-Andre Hamelin.  
Rozsa Centre, University of Calgary

Once one of Canada's semi-invisible pianists, Marc-Andre Hamelin has emerged from the shadows to become among the best-known and most-sought-after keyboard giants of our time.

Initially, his career was built around the performance of monstrously difficult works that no one else played, but with the passing years Hamelin has demonstrated that he is not just a freakishly talented note spinner, but also a master of the mainstream works.

Hamelin's sold-out concert Wednesday night, held under the auspices of the Honens International Piano Competition, combined both sides of his musical personality. The first part consisted of standard repertory works by well-known figures such as Haydn, Mozart, Liszt and Faure. It also included the Symphony for solo piano by Charles-Valentin Alkan, the reclusive contemporary of Liszt, a work only a handful of living pianists can play, and virtually none to the standard exhibited at this concert.

For this was extraordinary playing from any perspective, the command of the keyboard transcendental, and the delicacy and poetry of the playing of the highest order.

Hamelin is a pianist with a distinctive personality, not only in how he approaches the keyboard, but in how he conceives and expresses musical ideas. As a performing persona he projects a cool, even somewhat businesslike manner, but this inward restraint quickly transforms into a fantastically efficient way of delivering the notes, the product of breathtaking co-ordination and physical finesse.

Hamelin has recently started to perform the music of Haydn. On this occasion, he brought his special insight and inner concentration to the well-known Variations in F minor, making a strong opening to the program.

This was followed by Mozart's Piano Sonata in A minor. One of the composer's more impassioned works, it was given a forthright, energetic performance, the tempos of the framing movements on the quick side, but with the passage-work as clean and flowing as if the execution was a mere nothing.

But the best was yet to come. Following a poetic, highly polished account of a late Faure nocturne, Hamelin brought the concert to a close with the monumentally difficult Symphonie for solo piano by Alkan. Here Hamelin left the competition in the dust.

It was a night all who attended will remember.

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