

MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

PIANO

THE MONTREAL GAZETTE

Hamelin rewards audience

BY ARTHUR KAPTAINIS, GAZETTE MUSIC CRITIC MARCH 18, 2009

There was a big turnout on Monday for Marc-André Hamelin in the Théâtre Maisonneuve. Possibly those Montrealers who could afford only one of the four Pro Musica concerts dedicated to the homegrown piano virtuoso attached the highest priority to this solo appearance.

They were rewarded by playing that reached exalted heights near the end, starting with Hamelin's own etudes. His programmatic treatment of the Erlikönig legend (Etude No. 8) was splendidly warm and surging, truly a symphonic poem for the keyboard.

Nor were 10 fingers necessarily required. His Etude No. 7 for left hand alone (after Tchaikovsky's Berceuse Op. 16 No. 1) matched its neighbour in beauty and arguably surpassed it in poetry.

Then came the third of Leopold Godowsky's Symphonic Metamorphoses on themes by Johann Strauss (Wine, Women and Song). Hamelin controlled the one-two-three beat with subtle authority while creating a prism of ecstatic sound.

Funny how these virtuoso vehicles sounded the most musically engaging. Earlier, Chopin's Barcarolle and Ballade No. 3 in A Flat Major had gone smoothly but earnestly. Alexis Weissenberg's Sonata In A State of Jazz was prodigiously chromatic, but somehow circumscribed by its own complicated rhetoric. All the same, it was a technical tour de force, played from memory.

Hamelin started the recital with brightly lit performances of two Haydn Sonatas. He took both repeats in the first movement E Flat Major Hob. 41, lending balance to what might have seemed a peremptory coda.

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