

MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN

pianist

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Classical CDs of the week: Marc-André Hamelin, Bart Schneemann and more
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Ives: Piano Sonata No 2 ('Concord'); Barber: Piano Sonata

Marc-André Hamelin (piano), Jaime Martin (flute), Hyperion CDA67469, £12.99

It has been a good year for Charles Ives's Concord Sonata. This is the third new recording to be released in 2004 of a work that, alongside the Fourth Symphony, could be said to encapsulate Ives's radicalism.

Its four movements portray key members of the Transcendentalist movement, that remarkable collection of writers and philosophers centred on the town of Concord, Massachusetts, in the mid-19th century: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Bronson and Louisa May Alcott and Henry David Thoreau.

All the Ivesian characteristics are here: poetry, hymnody, a cacophony of ideas. It is music that in the final movement exceeds the capabilities of the piano and calls for a flute for a short passage. Marc-André Hamelin, a pianist of phenomenal virtuosity and insight, never misses a trick.

Pierre-Laurent Aimard's Warner account, reviewed here a few months ago, was perceptive enough, but Hamelin characterises the four movements with even greater imagination and encompasses the 42-minute span and unconventional trajectory with complete control.

He is no less formidable an interpreter of Samuel Barber's Piano Sonata, a very different work indeed, full of Romantic gesture and flamboyant writing that comes closer to the quirkiness of Prokofiev than to the supposed "American style".

Matthew Rye