



presents

The Shenson Piano Series
Made possible by Fred M. Levin and Nancy Livingston, The Shenson Foundation

Marc-André Hamelin, piano

Tuesday, December 15, 2009, 8pm

Herbst Theatre

PROGRAM

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN	Andante and Variations in F minor, Hob. XVII:6
WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART	Piano Sonata in A minor, K. 310 <i>Allegro maestoso</i> <i>Andante cantabile con espressione</i> <i>Presto</i>
FRANZ LISZT	Venezia e Napoli, S. 162 <i>Gondoliera</i> <i>Canzone</i> <i>Tarantella</i>

INTERMISSION

GABRIEL FAURÉ	Nocturne No. 6 in D-flat Major, Opus 63
CHARLES-VALENTIN ALKAN	Symphonie for Solo Piano, Opus 39, Nos. 4-7 <i>Allegro moderato</i> <i>Marche funèbre: Andantino</i> <i>Menuet</i> <i>Finale: Presto</i>

Marc-André Hamelin is represented by Colbert Artists Management, 111 West 57th Street, New York, New York; 212.757.0782; www.colbertartists.com.

Hamburg Steinway Model D and piano technical services, Pro Piano San Francisco.

ARTIST PROFILE

This is Marc-André Hamelin's sixth appearance with San Francisco Performances. Along with his San Francisco debut in December 2003, previous recitals were in April 2005 and 2006, October 2007 and April 2008.

Marc-André Hamelin



Photo: Fran Kaufman

Marc-André Hamelin's startlingly original blend of musicianship and virtuosity has earned him legendary status as a true avatar of the piano. Long known for his matchless exploration of unfamiliar pianistic terrain, Hamelin is now recognized worldwide for the originality and technical brilliance of his performances of the classic repertoire.

In summer of 2009 Hamelin opened the Aspen Music Festival's season, appeared at the Ravinia, Salzburg, Aldeburgh, Domaine Forget and Santa Fe Chamber Music festivals, and joined the New York Philharmonic for Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and *I've Got Rhythm* variations.

Highlights of 2009-10 include dates with the symphony orchestras of Boston, Montreal, San Francisco, Minnesota and Indianapolis, and recitals for the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, San Francisco Performances, the Van Cliburn Foundation, La Jolla Music Society, Maine Center for the Arts, the 92nd Street Y in New York City, Club Musical de Quebec and elsewhere.

In Europe, Hamelin returns to Wigmore Hall, and plays additional recitals in Amsterdam, Stuttgart, Glasgow, Berlin and throughout Italy and Spain. Concerto dates include the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Orquesta Sinfonica de Valencia, and the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra, with whom he performs and records the Strauss *Burlesque* and Max Re-

ger Piano Concerto for Hyperion. He also tours Australia in recital and orchestral performances.

Recent notable appearances include a series of dates at New York City's Lincoln Center—in recital and with orchestra for Mostly Mozart, in recital for the “Great Performers” series, in chamber concerts with Midori, and playing Haydn and Mozart concerti with Sir Neville Marriner and the Academy of St. Martin the Fields. In recent seasons, Hamelin has made recital appearances for Chicago Symphony Presents, Celebrity Series of Boston, WPAS in Washington, D.C., San Francisco Performances, Wigmore Hall's London Pianoforte Series, the Schubert Club in St. Paul and the Irving S. Gilmore International Keyboard Festival. Orchestral dates have included the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Montreal Symphony, the National Arts Center Orchestra, the New Jersey Symphony, the North Carolina Symphony, the Pacific Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Saint Louis Symphony, the San Francisco Symphony and the Seattle Symphony. He appears regularly in recital and with orchestras throughout Europe, in Australia and in the Far East.

In March 2009 the Pro Musica Society of Montreal marked its 60th anniversary season celebrating “The Art of Marc-André Hamelin” with a week of concerts, featuring Hamelin in chamber music, a solo recital and Beethoven and Haydn concerti. Additionally, throughout 2008–09, Hamelin toured with the Takács String Quartet, performing the Schumann Piano Quintet in North America and in Europe, and recording the work for Hyperion Records. In fall 2008 he embarked on a tour of Asia and Australia for concerts with the orchestras of Singapore, Malaysia and Melbourne, finishing with a pair of recitals in Hong Kong.

Under exclusive contract with Hyperion Records, Hamelin has received eight Grammy nominations including a 2009 nomination for *Marc-André Hamelin in a state of jazz* released in May 2008. His latest release (August 2009), is *Haydn: Piano Sonatas, Vol. 2*. He has recorded over 35 CDs for Hyperion, a collection that includes concertos and works for solo piano by composers such as Alkan, Busoni, Godowsky and Medtner, as well as brilliantly received performances of Brahms, Haydn, Liszt and Schumann.

Marc-André Hamelin was recently presented with a lifetime achievement prize by the German Record Critic's Award (Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik) and was made an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2003 and a Chevalier de l'Ordre du Québec in 2004; he is also a member of the Royal Society of Canada. He makes his home in Boston.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Andante and Variations in F minor, Hob. XVII:6

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN
Born March 31, 1732, Rohrau
Died May 31, 1809, Vienna

This extraordinary music is one of Haydn's final compositions for piano. He wrote it in Vienna in 1793 between his two visits to London, and evidence suggests that Haydn himself was unsure just what form this music would take. The manuscript is headed “Sonata,” and it is possible Haydn intended it as the first movement of a sonata, giving up that plan when it became clear to the composer that this music should stand alone. He revised the score carefully, and its final form is unusual: it is a set of double variations—the first theme in F minor, the second in F major—which is then completed by a powerful coda 83 measures long.

The somber theme, marked *Andante*, is heard immediately and passes between both hands, extending through two strains. Haydn then switches to F major for the second theme, but this florid melody, full of swirls and arabesques, shows subtle harmonic relations to the subdued opening subject, so that there is already a unifying bond between these two themes before the variations begin. Haydn then offers two variations on these two themes. The variations on the F minor theme remain restrained, chromatic and expressive, while the variations on the F major theme are more florid, full of trills and flowing triplets. Haydn begins the coda with a literal reprise of the opening theme, and suddenly this music takes off: over rising harmonic tension, the coda grows more powerful, more expressive, and more dynamic as it drives to a *fortissimo* climax. And then—in an equally original stroke—Haydn has the music fall back, shatter and fade into silence on bits of the original theme.

Haydn dedicated the *Andante and Variations* to Babette (or Barbara) von Ployer, who had been one of Mozart's students. Scholars, though, have been nearly unanimous in sensing another woman as the real inspiration behind this music. In 1789, Haydn had become good friends with Marianne von Genzinger, the wife of a Viennese physician, and their friendship took the form of a lengthy series of letters in which the older composer was able to pour out—after his own long and unhappy marriage—a depth of feeling and observation; these letters in fact remain one

of the clearest records of Haydn's character and thinking in these years. In January 1793, Marianne von Genzinger died suddenly at age 38, and many music historians regard the *Andante and Variations*, written shortly after her death, as Haydn's response to that devastating event. This somber and expressive music—composed and very carefully revised in the months after Marianne's death—has seemed to many to be Haydn's homage to a friend he held very dear.

Piano Sonata in A minor, K. 310

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART
Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg
Died December 5, 1791, Vienna

In September 1777, the 21-year-old Mozart set out on an ambitious trip that would eventually turn into a disaster. His mission was clear: accompanied by his mother, he was to seek a position worthy of his talents in two of the musical capitals of Europe, Mannheim and Paris, while father Leopold remained behind in Salzburg. Suspicions of Mozart's immaturity were instantly confirmed. From Mannheim, he proposed abandoning the trip to take a 16-year-old soprano on a tour of Italy (Leopold's response to this was nearly apoplectic), and everywhere he went Mozart was considered too young for the role of Kapellmeister. The real disaster came in Paris when Mozart's mother died suddenly during the summer of 1778. When Mozart returned to Salzburg in January 1779, both he and his father knew that the trip had been in every way a failure.

Mozart did write music during those 16 months, and scholars have heard evidence of Parisian tastes on the symphony he wrote in that city (*No. 31*, nicknamed the “*Paris*”). But two works written on this tour escape easy categorization and appear to have sprung directly from Mozart's own deepening sensibilities: in Paris he wrote his first violin sonata in a minor key and his first keyboard sonata in a minor key. These two works—the *Violin Sonata in E minor, K. 304* and the *Piano Sonata in A minor* heard on this program—are extraordinary, showing a depth, tension and expressivity new in the young composer's music. Alfred Einstein has called the violin sonata “one of the miracles among Mozart's works” and refers to the piano work as “a tragic sonata.” A generation or so ago, some were quick to search for events in Mozart's life that might explain this new depth, and it was easy to make an obvious conjecture: that he wrote both works in response to his

mother's death. But the evidence seems clear that both sonatas had been completed before Maria Anna Mozart died on July 3, 1778.

We feel a level of tension from the first instant of this sonata, where the A-minor tonality is violated by a D-sharp grace note, but this dissonance only serves to establish the mood of what will follow. Mozart's marking *Allegro maestoso* for this movement is curious, for there is nothing heroic or regal here. Instead, there is something darker, something powerful and insistent, and the music keeps pressing ahead—even the quietly rippling second subject maintains this mood. Tensions remain high in the development; tonality blurs here, and the movement's fundamental pulse drives to the close without relaxation.

Mozart's marking for the second movement is also noteworthy. He seldom marked a movement *cantabile* (he felt that *all* music should sing), and so when he does, we should note that carefully. But he goes even farther here, specifying that this music should be *Andante cantabile con espressione*. The structure of this movement is easily described: Mozart moves to a major key here, F major, and the music is in ternary form, with calm outer sections framing an agitated central episode. So technical a description, however, misses the essence of the music, and in his psycho-biography of Mozart author Maynard Solomon argues that in this movement Mozart invents what would become an archetype of the romantic imagination: the music begins in Edenic innocence, but the middle section plunges that primal world into a darkness that threatens to overpower it. Mozart recovers as he returns to the opening section, but now even this has been changed by the experience. Solomon argues that in this movement Mozart creates the pattern of "the Romantic mood-piece" that Schubert, Chopin, Brahms, and many others would employ over the following century.

The concluding *Presto* returns to the tonality, and manner, of the opening movement. Though quiet, the music partakes of that same restless spirit, much of it energized around the rhythmic unit of a dotted eighth. A brief A-major episode at the center of the movement brings a brush of sunlight across the dusky landscape of this music, but Mozart quickly returns to A minor and drives the music implacably to its close.

Venezia e Napoli, S. 162

FRANZ LISZT

Born October 22, 1811, Raiding, Hungary
Died July 31, 1886, Bayreuth

Liszt's *Venezia e Napoli* ("Venice and Naples")

has a complex history. About 1840, Liszt wrote a collection of four pieces for solo piano that he called *Venezia e Napoli*; this was set up for publication in Vienna in 1840 but apparently never went to press. During the next decade, he went on to write some of his finest piano pieces, and these were gathered as the *Années de Pèlerinage* ("Years of Pilgrimage"): collections of short pieces designed to evoke a particular country or atmosphere. Book I of *Années de Pèlerinage* was devoted to Swiss scenes, Book II to Italian works of art; the third book, written much later, was devoted to Italian settings. But when Liszt was preparing Book II for publication, he went back and completely revised *Venezia e Napoli*, reducing the number of movements to three and publishing this as a supplement to Book II of *Années de Pèlerinage* in 1861.

The three pieces in *Venezia e Napoli* make good sense as a part of Book II of *Années de Pèlerinage*, for all three make use of themes originally written by Italian composers. *Gondoliera* is based on a theme by Peruchini (Liszt subtitles this piece "La Biondina in Gondoleta ["The Blond in the Little Gondola"], Canzone del Cavaliere Peruchini"). *Canzone* is on a theme from Rossini's opera *Otello*, and the concluding *Tarantella* on a theme of Guillaume Louis Cottrau. The three pieces are evocative music, redolent of their Italian origins and at some points fiercely virtuosic. The quiet *Gondoliera* is in the manner of the barcarolle, the gently rocking songs sung by Venetian gondoliers. *Canzone* (marked *Lento doloroso*) is dark and plangent, while the brilliant *Tarantella* begins quietly, but soon turns into a sparkling dance that alternates heavy chords and shimmering passage-work before the dazzling rush to its knock-out close.

Nocturne No. 6 in D-flat Major, Opus 63

GABRIEL FAURÉ

Born May 13, 1845, Pamiers
Died November 4, 1924, Paris

A nocturne is a musical form with a dangerously imprecise meaning. That title refers to atmosphere rather than form: a nocturne is said to have some of the character of the night, and we expect such music to be lyric, quiet, reflective, dark. But it was Chopin who made the nocturne a great form, and some of his nocturnes explode with an energy and fire that remind us that night can mean quite different things to different people.

Some of this variety is evident in the nocturnes of Gabriel Fauré. He was attracted to the possibilities of the form throughout his life, and his 13 nocturnes for solo piano span

his creative career: he wrote his first in 1875, when he was 30, and his last in 1921 at the age of 76. The critic Alan Rich has noted that we suffer from a clichéd image of Fauré as "a gentle, gray man who wrote gentle, gray music sometimes streaked with lavender," when in fact there can be a sharp range of mood and expression beneath the velvet surface of his music, and this is particularly true of the *Nocturne in D-flat Major*. It comes from Fauré's maturity, and—sophisticated in its techniques and wide-ranging in its expression—it is generally regarded as the finest of his nocturnes.

When Fauré wrote this music during the summer of 1894, he was, at age 49, finally beginning to find some success as a composer. This was the period of his close relationship with Emma Bardac (he wrote the *Dolly Suite* for her daughter), and he would soon be named to the faculty of the Paris Conservatory. It is a measure of Fauré's non-romantic approach to the nocturne as a form that when asked where he had found the inspiration for the *Nocturne in D-flat Major*, he replied "in the Simplon tunnel." The music gets off to a gracious beginning (Fauré marks it both *Adagio* and *dolce*) as the gently swaying principal melody emerges from a texture of flowing triplets. The opening mood may be "nocturnal," but soon the music races ahead in C-sharp minor at the *Allegretto molto moderato*; a return of the opening material leads to an even faster section in A major that ripples across the keyboard. Such sudden, fluid shifts of harmony and tempo are basic to this music, and Fauré makes them sound effortless. The nocturne drives to a great climax that breaks off suddenly. Out of that silence, the opening melody returns, and in this gentle mood the nocturne glides to a peaceful close.

Symphonie for Solo Piano, Opus 39, Nos. 4-7

CHARLES-VALENTIN ALKAN

Born November 30, 1813, Paris
Died March 29, 1888, Paris

Over a century after his death, Charles-Valentin Alkan remains one of the most intriguing—and mysterious—figures in the history of music. Yet nothing at the beginning of his career suggested the unusual course that his life would take. From a large and musical family, Alkan entered the Paris Conservatory at age six, won prizes in piano, organ and harmony, and embarked on the career of a virtuoso pianist. He was good friends with Chopin, with whom he played joint recitals, and with Liszt, who said that Alkan had the "finest technique" he had ever encountered

in a pianist. But at age 25 he withdrew from the concert stage to devote himself to teaching and composing; thereafter he played only rarely in public. Alkan also began to display the eccentricities that became his character note: he turned into a recluse, rarely leaving his apartment and in fact renting the adjoining floors in his apartment building so that he would not be disturbed by neighbors. He became a hypochondriac and was so concerned about his health that he insisted on buying and cooking his own food. He remained single throughout his long life, but did father an illegitimate son, who became a notable pianist on his own. Though the story of Alkan's death may be apocryphal, it is so characteristic of his life that it should be remembered: the accepted account of his death is that the aged Alkan was reaching for a book on the top shelf of his bookcase when that bookcase collapsed, crushing him.

Alkan composed a great deal (his catalog lists 76 opus numbers and 16 unpublished works), and almost all of these are for solo piano. His music reflects his time, his passions and his eccentricities. He was, for example, much taken with baroque music, particularly the music of Bach. He was heavily influenced by his friends Chopin and Liszt, and some have heard the influence of Berlioz, though Berlioz disliked Alkan's music. And with all this, there was a streak of wildness in his music, an originality

so striking that Alkan has been compared to Charles Ives. He wrote music of breathtaking difficulty (and it is a measure of Alkan the pianist that he could play his own music), he wrote pictorial music (his *Le chemin de fer* is a musical portrait of a train), he wrote music that might be called demonic (one of his works is *Scherzo diabolique*), and he wrote with a charming sense of humor (another of his works is a *Funeral March on the Death of a Parrot*, scored for chorus and woodwinds).

The two books of Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, written in all the major and minor keys, have proven an overpowering example for subsequent pianist-composers, and figures as different as Chopin, Debussy, Rachmaninoff and Shostakovich have responded by writing preludes in a cycle of different keys. Alkan's response may be the most comprehensive: he wrote a set of preludes in all the major and minor keys (1847), then wrote his *Twelve Etudes, Opus 35* (1848) in all the major keys, and followed that with his colossal *Twelve Etudes, Opus 39* (1857) in all the minor keys. But the last is not simply a collection of twelve etudes, each in one of the minor keys; Alkan conceived of the twelve etudes in the form of a three-movement concerto, a four-movement symphony, a set of variations, an overture, and three individual pieces (of which one is the *Scherzo diabolique*).

This is a titanic work, and Alkan intended that sections could be performed individually.

This recital offers the *Symphonie for Solo Piano*, which comprises Nos. 4-7 of the *Twelve Etudes*. These four etudes attempt to duplicate, in the solo piano, the scope of a symphony and the sound of an orchestra, and it is not surprising that the result is music of hair-raising difficulty, particularly for its speed, technical demands, and in the sheer torrent of sound it often produces. This work—in the four movements of the classical symphony—looks backward in some ways: the *Funeral March* is an evocation of the *Eroica*, the third movement a minuet and trio. Yet some have heard anticipations of Mahler and Nielsen in its progressive tonality (this symphony begins in C minor and ends in E-flat minor), and Alkan makes surprising thematic links between the movements. The four movements may be described briefly: the opening *Allegro moderato* is in sonata form and drives to a great climax, the *Funeral March* features a consoling central episode, and the minuet is in classical three-part form. The symphony concludes with an overpowering finale. Pianist Raymond Lewenthal has described this movement as “a ride into Hell,” and in its blistering tempo, darkness and drama this movement truly does seem symphonic.

Program notes by Eric Bromberger © 2009