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**presents.**

24|25 SEASON

## **MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN, piano**

TUES, OCT 15, 7:30 pm

Hodgson Concert Hall

Supported by

**THE KING FAMILY FOUNDATION IN MEMORY OF THE LATE JANE KING  
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## PROGRAM

### **LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN** (1770-1827)

Sonata No. 29 in B-flat Major, Op. 106 “Hammerklavier” [45:00]

- I. Allegro
- II. Scherzo: Assai vivace
- III. Adagio sostenuto
- IV. Introduzione: Largo – Fuga: Allegro risoluto

## INTERMISSION

### **FERRUCCIO BUSONI** (1866-1924)

Sonatina Seconda [8:00]

### **MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN** (b. 1961)

*Déploration sur la mort de Frédéric Chopin*

World premiere, commissioned by the American Liszt Society

### **FRANZ LISZT** (1811-1886)

*Réminiscences de Norma di Bellini*, S. 394 [17:00]

*Marc-André Hamelin records exclusively for Hyperion Records, Ltd.*

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Program is subject to change.

## PROGRAM NOTES

by Laurie Shulman ©2024

### **Sonata No. 29 in B-flat Major, Op. 106 “Hammerklavier” Ludwig van Beethoven** (1770-1827)

Let us address the obvious up front: this sonata is a colossus of the piano literature. Its very name is sufficient to strike awe (and possibly terror) into the hearts of pianists. *Hammerklavier* is the German term for *fortepiano*; Beethoven adopted the German terminology in part as a reaction against Napoleon. Italian was a Napoleonic language, and using German language tempo and interpretive markings was a way for Beethoven to assert national pride and identity as the Napoleonic era ended with the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

His *Hammerklavier* Sonata dominated Beethoven's days from the earliest sketches in December 1817 through much of 1818. On 27 December 1817, the London firm of Broadwood & Sons sent Beethoven a new, six-octave grand piano. The instrument, autographed by important London musicians such as Johann Baptist Cramer and Ferdinand Ries, arrived in Vienna in late spring. With greater expressive capability for altering tone color and volume, this larger, more powerful piano surely affected the last two movements of the new sonata.

Originally, Beethoven intended to present the *Hammerklavier* as a gift for Archduke Rudolph's name day, 17 April; however, only two movements were complete by that date. Beethoven finished the sonata that summer in the picturesque village of Mödling, south of Vienna. When he sent it to his

publishers late in 1818, it bore a dedication to the Archduke.

By this time he was almost totally deaf, and work on the sonata coincides with the first conversation books, in which his friends and associates wrote their replies to his questions and comments. (Tantalizingly, we only have his colleagues' comments; Beethoven spoke aloud to them.)

In one of music's great understatements, Beethoven famously described the *Hammerklavier* as “a sonata that will give pianists something to do.” Biographer William Kinderman calls it “a pivotal work of the late style.” Another prominent Beethoven scholar, Lewis Lockwood, observes:

In its technical demands, its scale, and its breadth of expressive content, it is a turning point in Beethoven's third maturity and in the history of the piano sonata.

The *Hammerklavier* was the largest sonata anyone had yet composed, and would remain Beethoven's lengthiest. Only his final three piano sonatas would follow: the trilogy of Opus 109 in E major, 110 in A-flat Major, and Opus 111 in C minor; all are more modest in scale, reflecting Beethoven's tendency toward formal compression in his late works.

### **About the music**

Beethoven's sketch for the opening gesture is marked “Vivat Rudolphus.” That fanfare and answering theme are a clear salute to his most important patron; they also constitute a classic masculine/feminine dichotomy. Pauses between statements heighten the contrast between the two ideas, before Beethoven reveals the narrative architecture of this grand sonata structure.

Frequent key changes characterize the opening Allegro. After the opening in B-flat major, Beethoven soon moves down a minor third to G major for the balance of the exposition. His development section modulates to E-flat major, a major third lower. In rapid succession, he passes through C minor [a descent of a minor third], then launches a fugato in E-flat based on the sonata's opening motive.

Following the working-out of the fugato, another startling modulation occurs, to the remote key of B major. Those who know music will recognize that, enharmonically, this is yet another drop of a major third. The chains of descending thirds recur throughout the *Hammerklavier*. Beethoven's recurrent tonal patterns serve as a broader unifier in the overall composition.

He reverses the traditional order of the inner movements, placing the Scherzo second. (He had done this in the *Archduke* Trio and would do so again in the Ninth Symphony.) Its motives, clearly derived from the first movement's opening, cascade down in a series of falling thirds. Beethoven's intentional distortions of the fanfare are playful. They help to relieve the tension and drama of the Allegro. The structure is a very flexible A-B-A', modified by changes of key (to B-flat minor in the central section), of meter (switching between 3/4 to 2/4), and tempo (two passages marked *Presto*). Beethoven's sense of humor is much in evidence.

The *Adagio sostenuto* in F-sharp Minor (a third below the home key of B-flat) is the longest slow movement Beethoven ever composed: more than 19 minutes. He returns to sonata form for this glorious meditation, but it reveals itself more like variations because of Beethoven's endless imagination with

respect to voicing, texture, and decoration. His dynamic range, exploring many shades of piano and pianissimo, reflects the possibilities of the new Broadwood piano. This is private music, worlds away from the bravura of the opening or the facetious bluster of the scherzo.

The Largo that opens the finale is a slow introduction but, in its comparative brevity, a striking contrast to the expansiveness of the *Adagio sostenuto* that has just ended. Once again, Beethoven moves through a series of modulations in descending thirds. The ongoing trajectory of increased tension is all leading to the grand fugue that is the culmination of the *Hammerklavier's* entire journey.

This is a fugue of great complexity, beginning with its lengthy subject. Beethoven marks it *Fuga a tre voci, con alcune licenze* [fugue in three voices, but with some license, i.e. departure from the strict rules of counterpoint]. He merges contrapuntal art with the poetry of great music, for example in the chorale-like passage in D Major that provides respite midway through the fugue. As in the previous movements, the proportions are oversized. Everything about the *Hammerklavier* is grand and imposing, intended to make an unforgettable impression. In the hands of a brilliant, determined, and fearless pianist, this take-no-prisoners finale does exactly that.

### A Strange Publication History

The Viennese house of Artaria issued the *Hammerklavier* Sonata early in 1818 with a dedication to Archduke Rudolph. When Beethoven sent it to Ferdinand Ries in London for publication, he suggested three possibilities: (1) publish the Fugue on

its own; (2) issue the first movement, Adagio, and Scherzo (in lieu of a finale); or (3) publish the first movement and the Scherzo as a complete work.

Such repackaging is very unlike Beethoven, who was meticulous about maintaining the integrity of his compositions. In March 1819, he did authorize the first and second movements and the fugue to be published separately. Biographer Lewis Lockwood has suggested that he was strapped for cash because of expenses associated with his nephew Karl's schooling. If so, the alternative publication history was a pragmatic and commercial gesture that Beethoven hoped would generate more income.

### Sonatina Seconda Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924)

Busoni is not a composer whose name is exactly on the tip of everyone's tongue. Yet he was an extraordinarily imaginative thinker, and one of the most fascinating figures in early 20th-century music. The son of an Italian clarinet virtuoso and an Austrian pianist, Busoni spent most of his youth in Austria, and was ultimately more Germanic than Italianate in his music and philosophy, although he remained fond of Italian culture. He showed enormous talent early and began to perform and compose when he was just a boy. He took his first composition lessons at age 13. Between 1881 and 1894, Busoni studied at the Accademia Filarmonica in Bologna for three years, then lived in Vienna, Leipzig, Helsinki, Moscow, Boston, and New York. By the time he established a permanent home in Berlin in 1894, he was an internationally famous pianist.

As a composer, Busoni's evolution was somewhat rockier. He was heavily influenced by Bach, Schumann and Mendelssohn as a young man then, at the turn of the century, underwent an abrupt change of heart and became keenly interested in such innovators as Arnold Schoenberg and Béla Bartók. Ultimately his greatest obsession proved to be Bach. Starting in 1892, he began transcribing and arranging many of Bach's organ compositions for piano. He continued to do so until 1919, incorporating many of the transcriptions into his touring repertoire.

*Sonatina seconda* is the opposite end of the spectrum in terms of Busoni's writing.

All six Busoni Sonatinas are late, ranging from 1910 to 1921. He composed the *Sonatina seconda* (1912/13) at the height of his radical, experimental period: shortly after Schoenberg arrived in Berlin and Busoni heard his *Pierrot Lunaire*. Schoenberg and Busoni were the kingpins of Berlin's musical *avant-garde*. Evidently Busoni felt the need to produce something equally arresting as Schoenberg's revolutionary *Sprechstimme* score.

Another factor affecting the *Sonatina's* bold, experimental stance was the Futurist movement, a forcible rejection of artistic tradition and embracing of mechanized processes and the energy of the machine age. Futurism originated in Italy in 1909 and was ascendant in Europe. Finally, Busoni was keenly interested in the occult and believed in extra-sensory perception. He seems at pains to take us places we have never been.

*Sonatina seconda* consists of two principal movements separated by a

*fermata* and a mysterious four measure segment marked *Lento occulto*. Essentially it is a set of free, constant variations using three- and four-note cells embedded within melodies. It begins quietly and simply with an ascending line that has no identifiable tonal grounding. Fireworks soon explode, taking the music from elusive to dangerous. The printed music has no meter and frequently breaks to three staves. Some editions have no bar lines; those that do have bar lines have inserted them for visual grounding. Biographer Antony Beaumont refers to its “stream-of-consciousness structure.”

Busoni was aware how harmonically daring the *Sonatina seconda* was, describing it as *senza tonalità* [without tonality]. With its shifting textures, rhythmic flexibility, and abstruse harmonic progressions, this work is as intellectually rigorous for the listener as it is technically demanding for the pianist.

And a postscript: Operaphiles who know Busoni’s *Doktor Faust* (1916-24) may recognize some of *Sonatina seconda*. Ten years after composing the piano piece, he acknowledged that he had conceived it as a study for the opera.

### ***Déploration sur la mort de Frédéric Chopin (2024)***

**Marc-André Hamelin** (b. 1961)

Mr. Hamelin’s new piece was commissioned by the Liszt Society of America. In French, the verb *déplorer* means to lament. A *déploration* is a poem of mourning or a musical work based on that poem. At press time, the piece was not yet complete. Mr. Hamelin will introduce his *Déploration sur la mort de Frédéric Chopin* from the stage.

### ***Réminiscences de Norma di Bellini, S. 394***

**Franz Liszt** (1811-1886)

John Bell Young has written: “If opera was the nineteenth-century equivalent of contemporary cinema, the concert paraphrase was the television miniseries.” His analogy is apt.

In an era long before sound recordings or radio—let alone moving pictures—music became more widely known through domestic performance. This necessitated reducing works for large performing forces, such as symphonies or opera excerpts, so that such works could be enjoyed in the home. Consequently, many composers arranged their own and others’ works for smaller ensembles. Piano trio, one piano four hands, and solo piano were among the most frequent choices. Opera was a particularly popular source for these arrangements. Through concert paraphrases of familiar choruses and arias from operas, the music reached a broader audience.

Franz Liszt was among the most successful and prolific composers of such works. He drew not only on popular operas of the day, but also *Lieder*. In fact, his transcriptions of Franz Schubert’s *Lieder* played a major role in enhancing Schubert’s posthumous reputation. Liszt’s opera paraphrases, some of which he called Fantasy, drew on an astounding number of his contemporaries’ works, including Auber, Bellini, Berlioz, Delibes, Donizetti, Halévy, Mercadante, Meyerbeer, Mozart, Rossini, Spohr, Spontini, Verdi, and Wagner. Clearly there was a market for such pieces. The difference in Liszt’s versions is that he rarely simplified. Instead, he used the themes he borrowed as vehicles to display his dazzling piano technique.

Sometimes this involved composing original material for bridge passages between well-known tunes; elsewhere he interpolated a cadenza. Critics are agreed that his operatic paraphrases comprise some of his finest piano writing. Concert paraphrases from operas were central to Liszt’s solo performing repertoire during the 1830s and 1840s.

He wrote the *Réminiscences de Norma* in 1841, when he was at the height of his fame as a concert pianist. The piece exists in two versions. Liszt initially wrote it for solo piano, then expanded it for two pianos, which gives an idea of the breadth of its content and almost superhuman technical demands.

The *Norma* Fantasy—as it is also called—is considered among Liszt’s finest operatic paraphrases for several reasons. It is an effective concert piece that delivers the entire content of the

opera in a succinct form. Liszt added grandeur to Bellini’s themes. The musical ideas he borrowed and reconceived encapsulate Norma’s internal conflict: her emotions of love, jealousy, and vengefulness, vs. her intellectual concepts of duty and commitment in her capacity as a high priestess. Liszt’s piano writing, though undeniably flashy, emphasizes *cantabile* melodies embedded in his multi-voiced textures. He uses broken chords, two-handed arpeggios, extended trills, crossed hands, and cascades of double octaves in eye-popping ways. Even listeners having no prior acquaintance with Bellini’s opera will be swept up in the passion and drama of this splendid work.

The *Réminiscences de Norma* was published in 1844 with a dedication to Marie Pleyel, the wife of the pianist and piano manufacturer Camille Pleyel.

## **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

### **MARC-ANDRÉ HAMELIN**

Pianist Marc-André Hamelin, a “performer of near-superhuman technical prowess” (*The New York Times*), is known worldwide for his unrivaled blend of consummate musicianship. He continues to amass praise for his brilliant technique in the great works of the repertoire, and for his intrepid exploration of the rarities of the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries. He regularly performs around the globe with the leading orchestras and conductors of our time, and gives recitals at major concert venues and festivals worldwide.

Mr. Hamelin’s 2024-2025 season begins with recitals in Asia at the Beijing Concert Hall, Xi’an Concert Hall, Seoul Arts Center, and in duo recitals with Charles Richard-Hamelin in Tokyo, Yokohama and Fukuoka with later solo recitals in Gulangyu, Chengdu and the Shanghai Symphony Hall. European highlights include recitals in Warsaw, Ascona, Copenhagen, Toulouse, Cremona, Florence, Budapest, Detmold, Nijmegen, Herrenhausen, Ruhr, Hamburg’s Elbphilharmonie and London’s Wigmore Hall. Orchestral appearances include the RTVE Madrid, Bruckner Orchester Linz, and Prague Radio Symphony. He will return to São Paulo State Symphony Orchestra for a recital and concerti touring with the orchestra later to the Bogotá International Classical Music Festival.

In North America he returns to Carnegie Hall for Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 5 with the Orchestra of St. Luke's with Bernard Labadie. Further orchestral appearances include the Cleveland Orchestra, Montreal Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, National Arts Center Orchestra in Ottawa and the orchestra of Quebec, Toledo, Amarillo and a complete Beethoven Concerti Cycle with the Edmonton Symphony. Recital highlights include San Francisco Performances, Music Toronto, Boston's Isabel Stewart Gardner Museum, the Music Room at Caramoor and University of Georgia Presents. He also tours with the Dover Quartet in a program that features his own Piano Quintet.

Summer 2024 included recitals at the Schubertiade, Deutschlandsberg, Banff Center, Vivace Festival, a duo recital with Charles Richard-Hamelin at Ottawa Chamberfest, and Liszt Piano Concertos 1 and 2 with Yannick Nezet-Seguin and the Orchestre Metropolitain at Festival de Lanaudiere and Domaine Forget.

An exclusive recording artist for Hyperion Records, Hamelin has released 89 albums to date, with notable recordings of a broad range of solo, orchestral, and chamber repertoire. In October, Hamelin releases his recording of Beethoven's imposing Piano Sonata in B flat major, 'Hammerklavier,' Op. 106, coupled with the earlier Piano Sonata in C major, Op. 2, No. 3. In 2025, he releases *MixTape*, featuring 20th-century music.

Featuring nine original pieces, Hamelin's 2024 album *New Piano Works* is a survey of some of his own recent works, exhibiting his formidable skill as a composer-pianist whose music imaginatively and virtuosically taps into his musical forebears. "His previous offerings of his own music were rich, but his latest self-portrait album is on another level," wrote *The New York Times*, one of many outlets that wrote glowing reviews. It was Hamelin's first album of all original compositions since *Études* (2010). In 2023, Hyperion released Hamelin's recording of Fauré's *Nocturnes & Barcarolles*, with the four-hand *Dolly* suite, played with his wife, Cathy Fuller. A double album of C.P.E. Bach's *Sonatas & Rondos* was released in 2022, and another of William Bolcom's complete rags. Both received wide critical acclaim and chart success.

Hamelin has composed music throughout his career, most of which is published by Edition Peters, including his *Études* and *Toccata on L'homme armé*, the latter commissioned by the Van Cliburn Foundation. Hamelin performed the *Toccata* along with music by C.P.E. Bach and Bolcom in an NPR *Tiny Desk* concert in 2023. His latest compositions include a piano quintet, which he premiered in 2022 with the Dover Quartet, and the solo piano works *Hexensabbat* and *Mazurka*, the latter commissioned by the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., where the composer presented the first performance in spring 2024.

Hamelin makes his home in the Boston area with his wife, Cathy Fuller, a producer and host at Classical WCRB. Born in Montreal, he is the recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the German Record Critics' Association, and over 20 of its quarterly awards. He has also received seven Juno Awards, 12 Grammy nominations, and the 2018 Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in Piano Performance from Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music. In December 2020, he was awarded the Paul de Hueck and Norman Walford Career Achievement Award for Keyboard Artistry from the Ontario Arts Foundation. Hamelin is an Officer of the Order of Canada, a Chevalier de l'Ordre national du Québec, and a member of the Royal Society of Canada.

# SPOTLIGHT ON THE ARTS



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