

Pianist Marc-André Hamelin Uncovers Forgotten Composers And Returns Them To Prominence

May 02, 2017 By [Keith Powers](#) 



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Marc-André Hamelin works in the crevices. He looks for composers under rocks. He unearths, polishes and returns forgotten talent to prominence.

The Canadian-born pianist has an inclination to dig deep into overlooked piano works — finding repertory that has gone unplayed for one reason or another.



The Canadian-born pianist is now based in Waltham.
(Courtesy Sim Canetty Clarke)

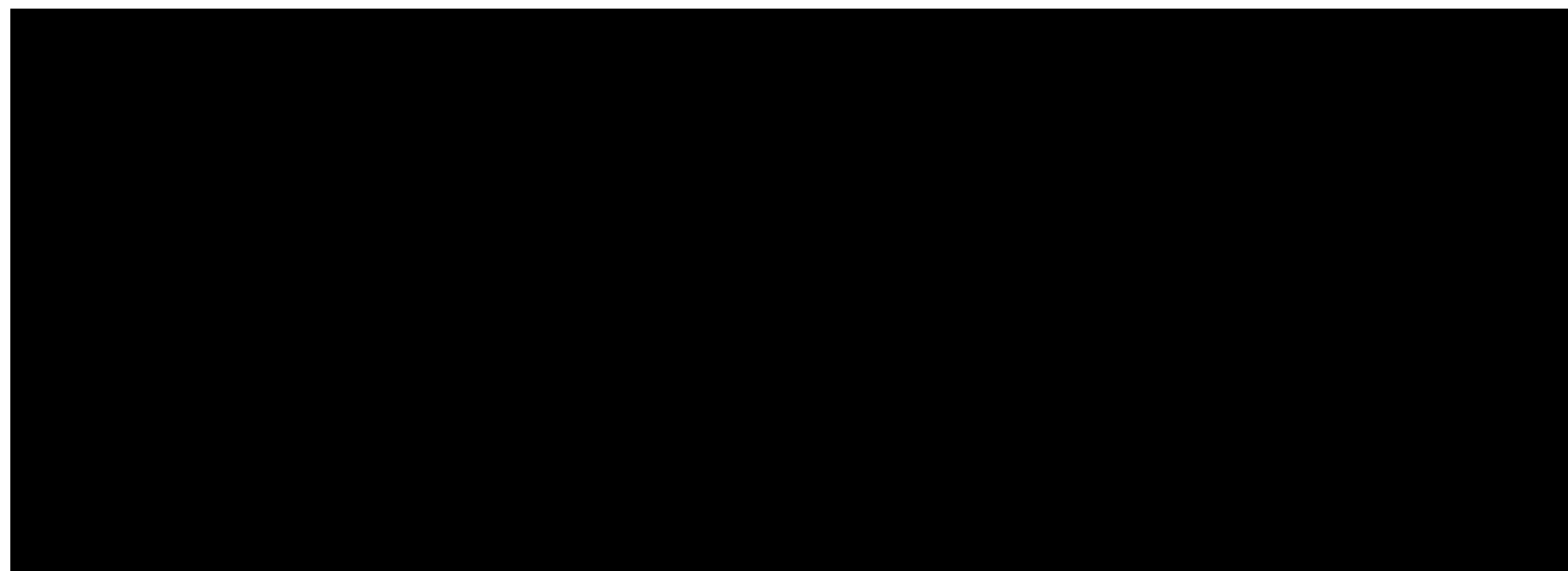
It's not the only thing he does, obviously, and his [Celebrity Series recital at Jordan Hall Friday evening](#) will show just that. Hamelin reintroduces works by Russian pianist Samuil Feinberg (1890-1962) on the program, mixed in with Haydn, Chopin and Beethoven.

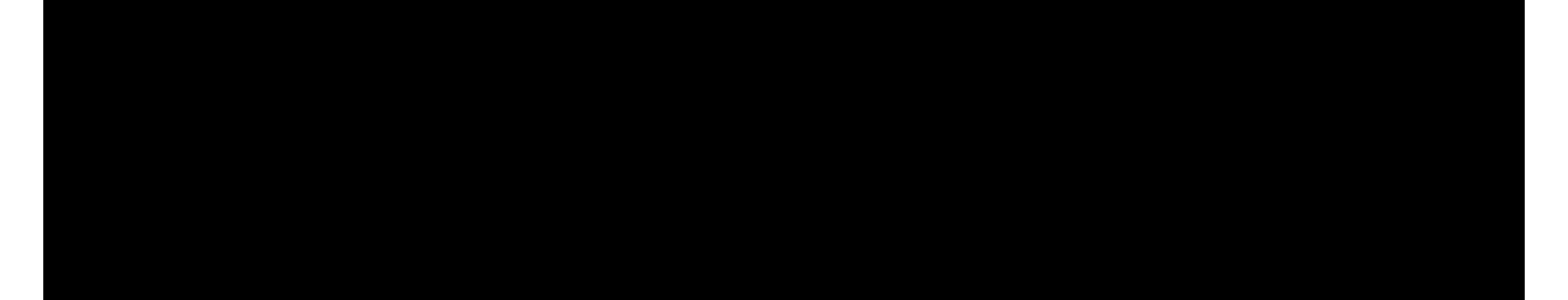
"I tend to offer balanced programs," Hamelin says. "I like to introduce the unfamiliar, but include it with things that people know. Too much unfamiliar music can be bewildering."

So Hamelin's presentations of Feinberg — he's playing the first and second sonatas — and the likes of Alkan, Medtner, Catoire and other largely unknown composers, always get blended in with more standard repertory. In this recital, Hamelin adds Beethoven's "Appassionata," and Chopin's "Funeral March" sonata — works that nearly every lover of the keyboard will recognize.

"My programs take different shapes," he says. "It starts with one work that I want to play. With Feinberg, I've had the scores since the '80s or '90s, but I didn't really start looking them over until the last three or four years. I think this music needs more exposure, and I am hopeful that whatever exposure I give it will help."

Feinberg, almost completely unknown now, had his own career as a concert pianist. Here's a vintage recording of him playing a Scriabin sonata:





Hamelin feels that his performances of pieces by Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951), whom he has been playing for more than a decade, have made a difference in just this way.

"All you have to do is look at YouTube," he says. "All these other pianists are taking him up. Dover eventually re-published the scores — that was a watershed. Lots of young people have asked me to sign their copies. I feel like that is part of my mission."

That mission has taken Hamelin to pianistic heights. He performs everywhere — with the top orchestras, in solo recitals in the most intimate halls, in collaboration with esteemed colleagues. This Celebrity Series performance is hardly his first — he was even given carte blanche to curate a series of three performances in Boston in 2013-'14, which resulted in a duo recital with Emanuel Ax, a stunning trio performance with violinist Anthony Marwood and clarinetist Martin Fröst, and a solo recital.

Hamelin lives in Waltham with his wife, well-known WGBH radio host Cathy Fuller, but his travel itinerary is breathtaking. For this interview he's home, on a short respite between two tours with pianist Leif Ove Andsnes, playing a two-piano arrangement of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" both in Europe and then in the states.

The season also sees Hamelin performing with orchestras in Montreal, Atlanta, Minnesota and in Germany, and in festivals all over Canada and in the United States. He's also a juror this spring in the Van Cliburn piano competition, and

has been asked to compose a work that will help determine a winner.

He's an avid composer and often includes his works on programs. A recording of his own "Études" was nominated for a Grammy. He holds seven more nominations for his performances of other composers' work.

Here's a brief clip of his performance at the 2007 Grammy Awards presentation:

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No matter who the composer is, Hamelin's austere, music-first approach stands apart in an era of showy performances. Calling him cerebral is a given — just a few minutes of conversation reveals that. But it's a trait that carries over to performance as well.

“My role is really as a channeler,” he says. “I go onstage to share these composers. I know that people go to see artists that they like, but the focus should never be on you.”

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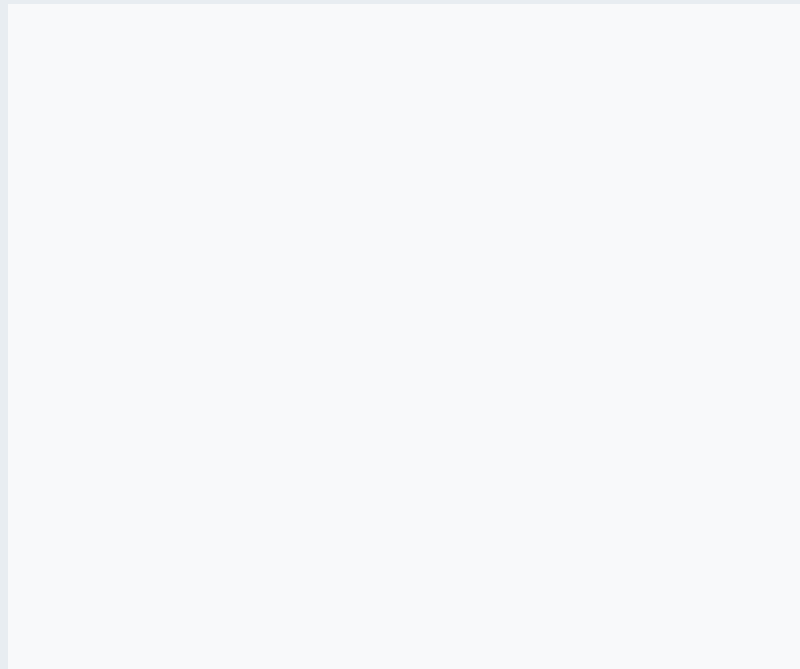
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