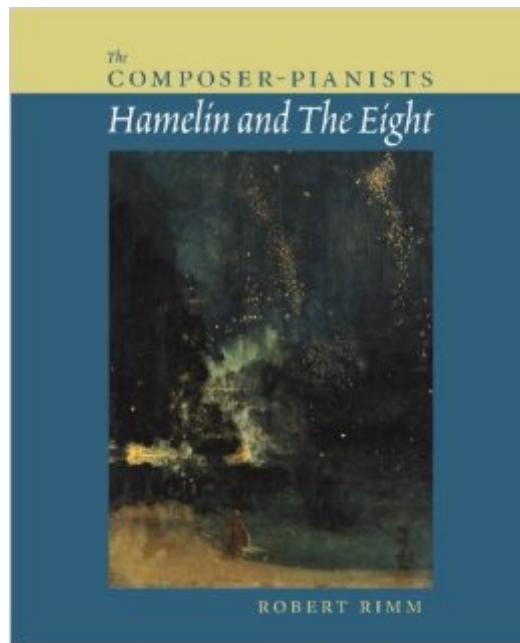


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The Composer-Pianists: Hamelin And The Eight



Synopsis

In *The Composer-Pianists: Hamelin and The Eight*, Robert Rimm writes about eight legendary, enigmatic, and interrelated composer-pianists of the instrument's golden age and goes on to consider their present-day advocate and astounding interpreter Marc-Andre Hamelin, whose dynamic playing and engaging personality immediately impressed Rimm upon their first encounter. Rimm portrays The Eight (Alkan, Busoni, Feinberg, Godowsky, Medtner, Rachmaninov, Scriabin, and Sorabji) as the piano's aural sensualists and explores the relationships among their music, their music-making, their ideas, and their lives. HARDCOVER.

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Customer Reviews

Marc-Andre Hamelin is universally acknowledged to be 'primus inter pares' among pianists living today, and Robert Rimm has written a first-rate book which explains why this is so, placing Hamelin into the context and rich legacy of the composer-pianists. The core of Rimm's evaluation consists of four chapters which compare, contrast and illuminate the lives, careers and aesthetics of The Eight: Alkan and Sorabji; Busoni and Godowsky; Feinberg and Scriabin; Medtner and Rachmaninov. The major "find" here is Samuel Feinberg, about whom much less is known by many of us than any of the other Eight. Rimm leaves us wishing to hear much more of this composer's music and of his recorded performances. In these chapters, Rimm manages to deconstruct several myths and misunderstandings about each of these provocative musicians, while calibrating, aligning and amplifying the essence of each. His observation of the correspondences, contrasts, parallels and

congruent aesthetics of each of the eight is insightful, and leads to his core thesis: That pianistic virtuosity, as shared and practiced by them (and upon which their public fame largely exists, to the dismay of each), exists to serve the music, through their consummate musicianship, and is not an end to itself. Indeed, their virtuosity must be seen as the necessary precursor to their art; none was satisfied to stop at the "merely virtuosic", but instead recognized that virtuosity was the mandatory platform for the creation and recreation of great music. These four core chapters lead to a fifth: "From Alkan to Hamelin", which examines Marc's career to date and his place in this distinguished lineage of composers and performers. [NB: I feel comfortable using Mr.

At first, I wondered why Chopin and Liszt weren't included in a book called "The Composer-Pianists," but these eight form a closely interrelated league all their own. By extensively quoting their letters, diaries and writings as they relate both to themselves and to each other (including intriguing material from Russia apparently never before translated), Rimm illuminates their thoughts, motivations, desires and methods. Although Hamelin is not widely known as a composer, he is recognized around the world as among their foremost interpreters. Who else has in his/her repertoire all the Medtner and Scriabin sonatas, the Chopin-Godowsky etudes, the Godowsky Passacaglia, the Alkan Concerto and solo-piano Symphony, the Busoni Concerto, et al., and at such an Olympian level of technical achievement and musical eloquence? I've heard several of Hamelin's compositions both in recital and on recordings, and he demonstrates polyphonic and pianistic sorcery (with transcriptions as well) that clearly echo The Eight. As Rimm posits, though, it remains to be seen whether Hamelin will occupy a lasting place compositionally. He also offers a perspective toward the future with names like Kocsis, Pletnev, Hough and others. (Incidentally, Stephen Hough has written a fine foreword to this book.) Rimm's chapter on transcriptions, a large part of The Eight's performances and compositions, should be required reading for anyone interested in the transcriber's art, and the chapter on musical criticism is both sharply observed and funny. Whether one hears music in terms of eroticism is fairly subjective (and I don't), Rimm cites numerous examples from most of these composers, especially Scriabin, that indicate direct expression of eroticism and sensuality through their music.

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