



Georgian Music Review – Pianist Charles Richard-Hamelin Performs Chopin – Sunday November 29th, 2017 - 2:30 p.m.

Pianist Richard-Hamelin Enthralls Audience

Submitted by Julia Jacklein

When a musical performance moves us deeply, it can be difficult to characterize that performance in a manner that does even partial justice to the music and the musician. Sunday afternoon's *Georgian Music* concert, featuring pianist Charles Richard-Hamelin, was such a performance. Richard-Hamelin, originally from Lanaudière, Québec, has recently risen to prominence as the second-place winner in the 2015 International

Chopin Piano Competition, and on Sunday he demonstrated his rare expressive gift and technical mastery in an all-Chopin program.

As anyone who is familiar with the music of Chopin knows, one of its chief challenges is its frequent change of mood and texture: its movement from deep melancholy to exuberance, and the well-timed transitions this involves. Richard-Hamelin showed his understanding of this multi-layered music in the skillful blending of melody and harmony and through musical pacing which was nothing less than exquisite.

The program began with the beautiful and haunting Nocturne No. 20 in C Sharp Minor, which was performed with great sensitivity, followed by a set of three impromptus and the famous Fantasie-Impromptu in C Sharp Minor. The first of this grouping was the spirited and whimsical Impromptu No. 1 in A Flat Major.

The following impromptus showed a wonderful combination of Chopinesque dance rhythms and almost expressionistic harmonies, which the pianist's fingers brought to vivid life.

The highly rhythmic Polonaise in A Flat Major Op. 53, though frequently heard in concert, was infused with novelty; indeed, it seemed surprising that the audience did not stand up to move to the music, so engaging were its rhythms. And yet, throughout his performance, Richard-Hamelin himself moved with great economy: his every gesture served a musical purpose.

Following the intermission, the audience was further enchanted by Richard-Hamelin's performance of the Chopin Ballades Nos. 1-4. These are among the pillars of the standard piano repertoire. The first, in G minor, begins with an introspective passage before taking on a tragic quality. The second one, in F major, features simple, folk song-like melodies which abruptly morph into a conflict-ridden section with tumbling broken chords. The third one is a mixture of lighthearted dance rhythms and more sinister moments, while the Ballade No. 4, in F Minor, is perhaps the most difficult piece of the group. It combines staggering musical and technical challenges to create a masterpiece filled with poignant emotion.

Given the depth of the music and the intensity of his focus, it was hardly surprising that the pianist showed signs of fatigue at the end of the concert. The audience showed its great appreciation through enthusiastic standing ovations, both before and after the encore.