

Morton Feldman - For Bunita Marcus (2017)

Written by bluesever

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Canadian pianist Marc-André Hamelin is widely admired for his brilliant virtuosity and effortless showmanship, which he frequently displays in his performances of the flashier works of Franz Liszt, Alexander Scriabin, Charles-Valentin Alkan, Leopold Godowsky, and others. But Hamelin embraces a different challenge in performing Morton Feldman's *For Bunita Marcus*, a solo piano work of over 72 minutes in duration, in which the smallest gestures are played slowly, quietly, and with extreme delicacy. This austere piece, like many of Feldman's expansive late works, doesn't require conventional pianistic skills, but instead calls on such inner resources as patience, muscular control, and clearheadedness to sustain the sense of weightless abstraction in the gradual unfolding of musical ideas. Hamelin's playing throughout is subdued and somber, and the narrow range of pitches and sparse harmonies give this performance a constrained feeling that denies any expectations of prestidigitation. Yet Hamelin's even pacing and subtly graded dynamics reveal his steadiness and fortitude, as well as his great sensitivity to the smallest changes and the shapes the music takes. While this recording may appeal most to dedicated followers of Feldman, Hamelin's fans should also hear this minimalist classic, to discover another side of this amazing musician. ---Blair Sanderson, AllMusic Review

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Composed in 1985, two years before Morton Feldman's death, For Bunita Marcus has become one of the most frequently recorded of all his works, and one of the few of his pieces that shows signs of moving beyond the exclusive territory of new-music specialists and into the mainstream piano repertory. It also provides a perfect and, at around 80 minutes, a relatively concise introduction to the timeless, pared-down world of late Feldman, with its webs of repeating, minutely displaced motives, hanging harmonies and absolute avoidance of anything that could be construed as conventional musical rhetoric.

Marc-André Hamelin presents that world of microscopic nuances with immaculate care. There's none of the impatience that characterised Ivan Lilić's reading of For Bunita Marcus two years ago; everything in Hamelin's performance seems part of a natural, inevitable unfolding, and the Hyperion recording perfectly catches all its details, and clouds of decaying sonorities that colour every silence. As Hamelin shows, the empty spaces in Feldman's piano writing are as important as the pitches themselves. --- theguardian.com

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