

Renaissance man

Unlike many musicians, pianist Burkard Schliessmann is devoted to a number of interests away from his instrument. He tells *PAY* how these impact his playing in a positive way



Burkard Schliessmann is one of the most highly-regarded pianists of the modern era. As well as critical recognition – including two Critics' Choice Awards from the *American Record Guide*, two Recording of the Year Prizes from MusicWeb International and the prestigious Melvin Jones Fellowship Award – he's also developed a considerable personal following over the years. So what is it about his playing that keeps bringing people back?

"I'm pupil from Shura Cherkassky, Poldi Mildner, Bruno Leonardo Gelber and Herbert Seidel," answers the pianist. "That means I represent the great romantic musical interpreters. Technical mastery is of course important, but my interpretations remain essentially intuitive. I don't think or worry about the realisation of my interpretation."

"For me, intuition means embracing everything at the highest level – both the emotional and the intellectual," explains the pianist. "It is a kind of instinct that ensures you always do the right thing."

Schliessmann is known for his performances of Bach, Liszt and Schumann. Bach in particular is a personal passion, a composer who he has a deep-seated love for. "In my youth I played Bach more than any other composer – by age 21 I could play his complete organ works from memory."

"Growing up with Bach helps you develop a special sound," he continues. "What is demanded is a particular form of internalisation, both inner and outer lyricism. It is this that makes the *Goldberg Variations*, for example, so unique – and so demanding."

The German pianist has also regularly performs pieces by Chopin, releasing a triple CD of these recordings back in 2015.

"My chopin album has been met by outstanding recognition," he says, proudly. "Even though there are many Chopin interpretations out there, I hope I brought a new understanding and insight to the pieces."

Critics certainly thought so, with the album receiving a Global Music Award. Now the highlights from that album are being issued on vinyl, a format that Schliessmann is a fan of.

"Vinyl lovers will really enjoy this album, especially because it's mastered at 24-bit quality," he says. "I wanted to deliver something 'old fashioned' that the listener can enjoy in a modern layout. The warm

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When not playing piano Schliessmann is also a keen scuba diver and photographer, and has a deep interest in philosophy. How do these other pursuits impact his playing? "I'm inspired by all of these," he answers. "They give me new power for my interpretations – for me, the whole world is art."

"Scuba diving is very influential, particularly the colours of the underwater world. I try to put all of these colours into my playing – you could call it synaesthesia. I also find animals like sharks and mantas inspirational too, and my interactions with them have given a 'kick' to my playing."

"As for photography, that is all about catching the feeling and impression of a moment. The similarities with piano playing are clear."

Schliessmann dedicates considerable time to these interests, qualifying as a professional diver and launching his own photography website. But this doesn't mean he spends less time with his music, or that he doesn't have any ambitions left in the field.

"For many years my secret wish has been to record the *Art of Fugue* by Bach on organ," he says, when asked about potential future projects. "I would do this on one of my favourite instruments" the organ of Laurenskerk in Alkmaar, Netherlands. It is one of the most important organs in the world, and this insreucment would bring out all the colours and structures of the *Art of Fugue* in an ideal way."

Right now, though, the pianist has two main goals. The first is to find a new manager; having tried his hand at self management, he discovered it simply takes up too much time.

"I'd be grateful if I could find effective representation, as it would give me the chance to concentrate solely on my art. Right now I spend too much time organising my own schedule, which is inefficient. Ideally I'd see the partnership as a collaboration, rather than simply a customer-client relationship."

Second, he has to get himself sharp for some upcoming projects: "I have some recitals in the US, and I'm also rehearsing for a new project at Teldex Studios in Berlin in September. I'll be recording major works from Robert Schumann: *Kreisleriana Opus 16*, *Fantasie Opus 17* and *Fantasiestücke Opus 12*."

He will also appear on Classica TV, a station he's worked with a number of times. "Classica TV broadcasts on HD and in more than 18 countries all over the world, and I think it's a great way of bringing art into people's living rooms," he says. "It's a great tool, but of course it cannot match the experience attending a recital in a concert hall: the mood, the tension, the catharsis."

schliessmann.com

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