



Burkard Schliessmann

By James Inverne

People like to pigeon-hole pianists. There are, we are routinely told, the barnstormers – romantic pianists who throw the entire force of the heart and soul into their playing – and then there is the more analytical school – those who play by intellect, everything meticulously thought out and delicately weighted. By and large it's piffle, of course; few pianists would admit to excluding head or heart in their playing and great interpretations are forged through a combination of the two, and more besides. But German-born Burkard Schliessmann rejects such divisions more than most.

For a start he was taught both by the great Shura Cherkassky and by Poldi Mildner. They each taught him different approaches – the one romantic, the other classical – and this has led him to find the through-lines between areas often (wrongly) seen as mutually exclusive.

"I try to have both styles, and one influences the other," says Schliessmann. "This is not such an unusual thought. Rubinstein thought that Beethoven was a very romantic composer, for instance. Okay, we have to discuss where and where not he can be seen as romantic, but still in the heart of the classical school such as this we can find an absolutely romantic approach. Bach also can be very romantic."

Coming from the other side of that coin, he suggests, one can also find the classical romantics. He cites Schumann, Brahms, Schubert and even Chopin. "Schumann learned the structure of Bach and said that no music could be created without this example. Chopin loved Bach and whenever he played his own works – which was very seldom, as he didn't like the atmosphere on the podium, he would for the two weeks beforehand study and play only Bach. Chopin's music is of course romantic and needs that element of poetry, but at the same time it requires a very strict style. It's interesting that Chopin didn't like Schumann's music because he felt it was too romantic! Even though Schumann's Kreisleriana was a homage to Chopin, Chopin said it was 'no music!'"

Schliessmann himself records a wide repertoire, from Liszt to Bach (recently a new recording of the Goldberg Variations). And his way of enjoying music goes far deeper than for many. "Enjoyment is the attainment of a special level in music-making," he explains. "It's important to play with intuition and to tie emotions and insights to musical structures. But it's very important to me to study around the music. Art, philosophy, science, the context of a composer's time – only then can you understand what he's trying to say in his own time and then relate it to our time. So one goes



Schliessmann's playing is representative of the best of the modern school.

through a very intellectual and even spiritual process; and once that has been absorbed there is a place for intuition again." It is a process that excites him immensely and, in a burst of enthusiasm that is testament to the emotional side of this thinking musician, he adds, "Even thinking about this explosion of material I get goosebumps!" Certainly, his talents have been recognised by a wide range of individuals and institutions. Among these are his numerous tv-productions with the ARD, ZDF, WDR, ARTE and others, which had been broadcasted throughout the world.

Schliessmann owns two treasured Steinways. They were carefully selected after years of searching. One, he says, is a "very orchestral" instrument and is used for large scale works. The other "is very sensitive and sensible, great for chamber music." The search for the ideal instruments was, he says, entirely worth it: "My pianos are alive to me and a mirror of me. It was vital to get it right."

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