

MY SYMPHONY

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ALEXANDER SCHIMPF

TALKS TO MY SYMPHONY

Over the past few years Alexander Schimpf has risen to prominence by impressively winning the 2008 German Music Competition, a distinction no pianist had earned for 14 years; then First Prize at the 2009 International Beethoven Competition in Vienna; and finally emerging as the first German pianist to ever win First Prize at the 2011 Cleveland International Piano Competition. His final round performance at Severance Hall was given a standing ovation and was also honored with the Audience Favorite Prize. Since then, Schimpf's career has gained momentum with regular appearances at music centers around the world. In 2011 alone, he gave debut recitals at the Vienna Konzerthaus, Berlin's Konzerthaus and at Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall in New York.



My Symphony had the opportunity to talk with Alexander Schimpf, who will be performing Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 at the Akron Symphony Orchestra's Classics Series concert titled *Romeo and Juliet* on Saturday, January 19, 2013.

MS: You're such a gifted pianist, so I'm curious to know when you started playing. Was it your first instrument? When did you know you wanted to play piano professionally?

AS: I started playing the piano regularly when I was five years old. It was my first instrument. But my decision to study music and piano professionally came rather late in life, comparatively speaking, when I was about 16 or 17 years old.

MS: Who has been most influential to you in your musical career?

AS: I could mention many people. One is my last piano professor in Germany, Bernd Glemser, who influenced me a lot during the most important years of my studies. He is actually a very busy international performer himself, so I was able to take a lot of advantage from his experiences. Another person was the French pianist, Cécile Ousset, with whom I have been studying privately a few times a year. It was important for me to have such different sources out of which I could get ideas, inspiration, and professional advice at the highest level. My teachers came from extremely different pianistic traditions, which of course sometimes gave me a hard time. But in general, I consider this a very good thing. The one and only truth in musical interpretation doesn't exist; and in the end, with my different influences, it was easier to find my musical decisions, whatever I wanted to do on stage myself.

MS: Since winning the 2011 Cleveland International Piano Competition, your career has really taken off. Is there anything you're particularly excited about in the coming year?

AS: I am looking forward to every single trip to the United States. Here I always have had exciting experiences, and this will be a completely new chapter in my life performing and spending so much time on this side of the Atlantic. I am especially curious to visit Boston and Las Vegas - places which I have heard so much about. But things have also been developing well in Germany and other European countries, so there is much that I am excited about.

MS: You had the opportunity to work with Maestro Christopher Wilkins during the final round of the Cleveland International Piano Competition. What can you say about that experience and your expectations for playing with the Akron Symphony Orchestra?

AS: I felt that we had very good cooperation right away in the first meeting, which was just like a conversation about the piece we were going to perform (Beethoven's 4th Piano Concerto). Then the next day, we had very little time to work together with the Cleveland Orchestra, so it was necessary to have a good understanding, and I think this worked out very well also during the performance. You can imagine that this was a very special concert for me that I shared with him; so I am very excited to work with Maestro Wilkins again in Akron. In the Chopin concerto which we will play, the general focus is much more on the soloist ... but you need a very good accompanying conductor for that music, sometimes it is like an opera with a solo singer. I am sure that it will be very nice again!

MS: Are there any special projects you're working on right now that you can share with us?

AS: Right now I am working on one of my absolute favorite pieces of music, the 2nd Piano Concerto by Johannes Brahms, which is also one of the longest and most demanding works of that genre. I will perform it in February for the very first time, actually in my hometown Würzburg, which is something I particularly look forward to! There will be another performance in the U.S. later this year, and I hope for more in the future.

MS: Do you see yourself performing for the rest of your life? What else would you like to accomplish during your career?

AS: I actually enjoy teaching, but I haven't done very much of it so far. This will surely be something I will do in the future, but I don't plan to stop performing. Of course, I wish to do that as long as possible, and I hope for the chance to explore more countries around the world this way.

MS: Who are your favorite musicians and/or composers? Who do you look up to in the world of music?

AS: One pianist who I admire a lot is the Russian Grigory Sokolov. I understand that he hardly ever performs outside of Europe or Russia. His concerts have been the most impressive live performances I have heard so far. As for composers, there are many whose music I like and admire a lot, but if it comes to my real favorites, I think they are Ludwig van Beethoven and Franz Schubert. This might change one day, but I have felt a special emotional connection to their music for many years.

More details about Alexander Schimpf and this Classics Series concert are at www.akronsymphony.org.