

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH

FRANÇOIS-FRÉDÉRIC GUY

Talking with Yvonne Georgiadou



How does it feel to appear in Cyprus for the first time?

Well it is an enormous pleasure to discover this dreamy island with its roman and Greek ruins. And of course playing all this wonderful music with my friends Alex, Diemut and Daishin.

You have performed all Beethoven literature for solo piano. Name the works closest to your heart.

If I may say, the Sonata I'm about to perform. I love all Beethoven music equally, whether it is a small bagatelle as "für Elise" or a masterpiece like concerto 5, Hammerklavier (I have played this one 92 times and recorded three times!!!) or Opus 111. Each sonata has its own story, organic form, modernity... For me, the Beethoven sonatas remain the "alpha and omega" of the entire music history.

The Op.111 Sonata, which you will perform in Cyprus, is a personal favourite too even though it is not so often performed in concert...

Opus 111 is amongst the most poignant of all 32 sonatas. Especially the second movement, the arietta where Beethoven drives us directly to heaven with a completely stunning writing, including extreme register, full pages trills, syncopation rhythm ... Without forgetting the powerful first movement with its introduction that refers directly to the Pathétique sonata but 28 years later... A time he already revolutionised the whole music history.

What would you ask him (Beethoven) if it were ever possible to get him to answer?

How it is possible you know so deeply the human soul that you became its most famous "Porte-Parole"? And he would answer: "The Lord of heaven... I am desperately human and I speak to humanity".

We know your favourite but we don't know your least favourite composer...

Max Reger

Is there a particular work you avoid performing?

The Goldberg Variations by JS Bach.

Why?

I feel so small even to face this "cathedral" that I don't even dare opening the first page, although I would die for it.

What about the work/s you revisit when you want to stay in performing shape?

Always the Beethoven sonatas which I perform at least once a year. But Brahms and Prokofiev concertos help me keep my fingers "awake"... I would not mind going back to Rachmaninoff either who I admire more as a pianist than as a composer, although I used to perform his major concertos and etudes.

Contemporary music: You've performed a lot of works by contemporary composers. What is the future of music? Isn't it getting too elaborated and difficult to understand?

Ah very big question... For me there is no contemporary. Only good or bad composers... How is it possible to distinguish the good from the bad? Looking back at the history of music, I am always amazed to see that the greatest music of the past was always "avant-Garde". Monteverdi operas, Bach or Scarlatti keyboard music, Mozart piano concertos and opera, Haydn string quartets, all the Romantic music from Beethoven to Liszt, Wagner, Mahler, Schoenberg, Debussy, the Russian school, Messiaen, the 1925 generation (Boulez, Stockhausen, Berio)... All the others have disappeared. There were only two exceptions: Richard Strauss and Rachmaninoff who succeeded in creating masterworks without following the evolution. But I never believed a true composer should compose as it was 100 years ago.

Who were the most influential figures in your music development and career?

Karl-Ulrich Schnabel (son of the great Arthur Schnabel who first recorded the 32 Beethoven sonatas) and Leon Fleisher who was my mentor. I was also influenced by Maurizio Pollini, in combining the classical repertoire with contemporary works. The young conductor Philippe Jordan is for me a permanent source of inspiration when I share the stage with him, as well as when I listen to his incomparable performances of Wagner operas. Otherwise, Bernstein conducting the Mahler symphonies or Celibidache conducting the Bruckner symphonies.

How many hours do you practise a day when you are preparing for a big concert?

Between 6 and 8 hours a day except on the day of the rehearsal and the concert.

And what do you do to relax when not performing?

Staying at home quietly with my wife, and discovering amazing places for holidays once or twice a year... Like the Seychelles for example.

A message to piano students / aspiring pianists

Work but not only at the keyboard. Develop your symphonic, operatic and chamber culture. It will prevent you from sounding all in black and white!!

A message to those authorities that control funding for the arts

Investment in art development is the key to civilisation don't forget this.

A message to people, especially youngsters, who feel intimidated of attending concerts of classical music.

Don't be afraid. It is as simple and often less expensive as pop music!!!! But the reward is 1000 times bigger and it will last for all your life.