

whole thing. There is amazing control in his playing. It's wonderful we have these documents but they shouldn't be restricting for pianists. I heard the recording by Moiseiwitsch which is probably the complete opposite of what Rachmaninov does, although Rachmaninov said Moiseiwitsch played his concertos better than himself!

**SH** Well, Moiseiwitsch, Medtner, all those pianists we have playing in the '20s and '30s are more contrapuntal in their thought and colouring. There's too much playing now that is very expressive but in the same kind of way all the time – there's ebb and flow, ebb and flow, always *rubato*, always tasteful – but with Rachmaninov you get these amazing opposites where he plays absolutely metronomically and when he reaches the second subject or a lyrical moment it will be wildly more free than anyone would do today. To me that's part of the style. I think you need that hot and cold contrast for the style to be correct.

**YS** There also has to be a style that suits your musical personality. For some people the recordings could be a hindrance. The only way to produce original thought is if you are convinced 100 per cent and comfortable with what you are doing. It's worse to artificially fit a particular style if it's not yours.

**JN** For some pianists, Rachmaninov is not their style at all. And they are often the same pianists who don't care for Chopin. Why?

**SH** A matter of taste.

**YS** There is so much repertoire to choose from. We have to play whatever suits us best!

**SH** It might be historical. There was that generation – Kempff, Brendel, Serkin – who reacted against the excessive romanticism of the previous period when nobody was playing Schubert sonatas. Rachmaninov didn't even know that Schubert had written sonatas! And on discovering those extraordinary masterpieces, there was a certain resentment, of "why did you neglect all this music?". And you go out and bat for the Austro-Germanic tradition and probably exaggerate your side of the fence as it were.

*Further discussion followed on the why, how and who of the "no Rachmaninov" brigade. SH revealed that Alfred Cortot had often played the Third Concerto but, sadly, never recorded it. He had examined Cortot's copy of the score with Rachmaninov's handwritten adjustments and cuts.*

**JN** Have you a favourite moment from the five?

**SH** If I have to narrow it down it would be after the central climax section in the slow movement of the Fourth to the end of the movement.

**JN** So at moments like that you think it's pretty wonderful being a concert pianist.

**SH** Well, no, you don't because you know you've got the terror of the last movement to come! It

must be something funny in Rachmaninov's brain but at the beginning of every last movement in these concertos there are horrendous hurdles to overcome, after which you can relax till the end of the work. I mean the opening of the Third's finale...

**JN** ...and the Second has got that awkward figuration...

**YS** ...and the Fourth has got these changing accents which are easy to mess up! But I think my favourite passage is in the middle of the first movement of the First. It slows and the orchestra comes back with the theme. It's like clouds followed by sunshine – it happens so quickly – then the piano taps along in the left hand and you feel like you're just flying away. The texture in the piano part is wonderful. But then the whole First Concerto is wonderful. I'm not just saying this because I'm playing it, but it is my favourite piano concerto. My father used to play it so I remember it from early on. It's modelled on Grieg's but you have in addition the Russian expansiveness. You can't mistake it for anyone else than Rachmaninov. It's very comfortable to play, everything lies

wonderfully under the hands. You can only write music like this when you are young. It is so passionate. There are no other motives behind it!

**Other pianists appearing in the Rachmaninov series include Olga Kern (Rhapsody: August 8), Boris Berezovsky (No 4: August 23) and Nikolai Lugansky (No 3: August 30)**

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**Our June issue explored opera direction.**

**MyronC:** To update and re-interpret opera is absolutely fundamental to its survival. Admittedly, most reconstructions do fail to impress, but there have been updated productions that have added to the dramatic interpretations. If nothing else, opera production that incites debate can only be a good thing in terms of exposure. Maintaining an interpretative status quo will lead to stagnation.

**CMILLWARD1** I often wonder what composers, and playwrights, would think about modern productions of their works. Like great works of art, be they sculpture, canvas, buildings, musical drama is best left alone, and left in its time period as regards costume. Can't people these days accept anything without sex and violence?

**MTaylor1** People have always been disinclined to accept anything without sex and violence. Can you think of an opera without at least one or the other?



**Rachmaninov: passion, wonderful textures and pianistic terrors**