



Getting closer to the great composers

The fortepiano has experienced a resurgence in recent years – and the instruments of Paul McNulty are playing their part.

Glyndebourne, the Opéra de Paris, Mark Minkowski, Teodor Currentzis, Ronald Brautigam, Kris Bezuidenhout, the Labeque sisters, András Schiff... it's fair to say that Paul McNulty's fortepianos are the choice of prestigious institutions and great artists throughout the world. Replicas of classical and romantic era instruments, when you play a McNulty fortepiano you're getting as close as possible to the what the great composers would have known. They're not quite time machines, but they're pretty close.

Described in Gramophone Magazine as “the doyen of historical instrument makers”, Paul McNulty has built more than 300 instruments modelled on the pianos loved by Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin and Liszt.

PAY spoke with renowned pianist and director of McNulty Fortepianos, Viviana Sofronitsky, to find out more.



PAY: There has been a fortepiano revival in recent times. Why are these instruments becoming so popular?

Viviana Sofronitsky: It goes back to Wanda Landowska, who revived great Baroque repertoire by playing it on new harpsichords. Because this music did not sound as convincing on the modern piano it had been neglected, and Landowska’s performances in the early 20th century brought it back to the concert stage.

It has taken time for the same idea to be applied to the fortepiano, because reconstructing high-quality fortepianos is much more difficult than harpsichords.

But now, with concert quality fortepianos available, more and more artists are performing and recording on fortepianos.

With more different types of fortepianos being built, the repertoire possibilities are also expanding. While 20 years ago only Mozart-era instruments were being built, it is now possible to perform Liszt's and Brahms's works on new fortepianos that have a sound and feel those composers would have been familiar with.

There are even new competitions, such as the "Chopin Competition on Period Instruments" organized by the prestigious Warsaw Chopin Institute, that are helping to grow fortepianos even further.

PAY: What sound qualities do McNulty fortepianos have?

VS: What's really important to remember is that piano making in the 18th and 19th centuries was not standardised and hence the fortepiano is many different instruments, not one. This colourful, intense and dynamic world was full of individual workshops and schools of building, each connected with composers during particular periods. Our Stein (1788) – the piano admired by the young Mozart – sounds totally different to our Streicher (1868), which was Brahms's last piano.

What I will say is that there is always a distinct and fascinating link between their sound and the compositions that were written on them. When you hear it, it transforms your perception of the music.



PAY: What makes McNulty pianos so special?

VS: Paul's pianos not only have an outstanding attention to detail in the authenticity of the sound, but they are wonderfully playable. The audience will appreciate the beautiful sound and the historically-informed performance concept, but for musicians the sensitivity and responsiveness of the instrument is also critically important.

They are also very reliable, consistent instruments. Paul has always used provable data to fix a design in distinct, scientific parameters. Each instrument maker has their own formula, and this is part of his.

PAY: What about the history of the fortepiano, for those that don't know?

VS: The first fortepiano was invented in 1700. It became popular in Germany from the mid-eighteenth century, overtaking the harpsichord. JS Bach played and composed for the fortepiano in his last years; his son Carl Philipp Emanuel wrote many works for it.

Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven all wrote their most important music on the classical fortepiano in Vienna. Vienna was not only the heart of Viennese Classical music, but of piano making at the time, exporting instruments worldwide.

As the Romantic era took hold, fortepianos became larger and with a different sound quality. Schubert, Mendelssohn, Chopin, Liszt and Brahms all had different instruments, with different palettes to suit their music perfectly. The piano as we know it today did not come into being until the end of the nineteenth century. So...all piano music written before 1870 was composed for fortepiano!



PAY: When did Paul McNulty start making fortepianos?

VS: Paul started in 1985. He studied music and piano technology, with an emphasis on history. His first historical instruments were ordered by Trevor Pinnock, Paul Badura Skoda and Nikolaus Harnoncourt. Paul tells me he finds it very satisfying to create carefully-replicated cultural artefacts, “The feeling one gets from hearing a particular sound in the hands of a great composer becomes a personal connection, often spiritual and profound.”

PAY: How practical is it to give concerts on a McNulty fortepiano – is it possible to transport it?

VS: Yes it is. We offer full concert service, from our extensive piano bank covering instruments suitable for all musical epochs, from CPE Bach to Brahms! Our service includes transport and tuning, so organizers arrive in the hall to find a performance-ready instrument. Overseas shipping is also no problem.

For fortepiano owners, the transport and basic maintenance is remarkably straightforward. We provide comprehensive instructional videos about transport and simple adjustments. In addition, piano technicians throughout the world are becoming increasingly expert in fortepiano service.

For more information on Paul McNulty Fortepianos head to www.fortepiano.eu, email info@fortepiano.eu or call [tel:+420 737 927 567](tel:+420737927567).

Click Here To Order your 21/22 Performing Arts Yearbook



Copyright © 2022 Muso Communications Ltd, All rights reserved.

You are receiving this email because you signed up via our website or currently a member of artsdb.net

Our mailing address is:

Muso Communications Ltd

The Media Centre

[7 Northumberland Street](#)

[Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD1 1RL](#)

[United Kingdom](#)