

HURRAH FOR HUSUM

The Schloss vor Husum Rarities of Piano Music Festival has become an annual haven for pianophiles, as *Bryce Morrison* discovers

QUOTING ONE'S OWN WORDS can be self-indulgent, but for the Schloss vor Husum Rarities of Piano Music Festival, I am going to make a necessary exception. As I wrote elsewhere, 'What would we do without Husum?' Started 25 years ago and inspired and guided by Peter Froundjian, it has evolved and erased all early misgivings to become a unique musical paradise for those wishing to explore beyond the safe and obvious, reminding us that the piano repertoire is immense, too much of it unknown and unplayed. Of course, there is much that deserves obscurity, though even music as banal as, say, Kabalevsky's Fourth Piano Concerto deserves a hearing, if only for amusement value. But it is when you think of the sneering dismissal of composers such as Fauré, Chabrier, Alkan, Balakirev and Szymanowski that the blood starts to boil and something needs to be done.

Having been a college teacher for a large part of my life, I have been dismayed at the ignorance of students, particularly those in the leading schools of music. To hear a so-called postgraduate student at a so-called 'centre of excellence' ask of the Chopin Mazurkas, 'They're dances, aren't they?' takes one into a dark place. I recall a head of the strings department at the Royal College of Music exclaiming in rage at a pupil whose only knowledge of Mozart came from a box of Mozart Kuchen. I myself heard the infamous

The festival is based at the picturesque Husum Castle



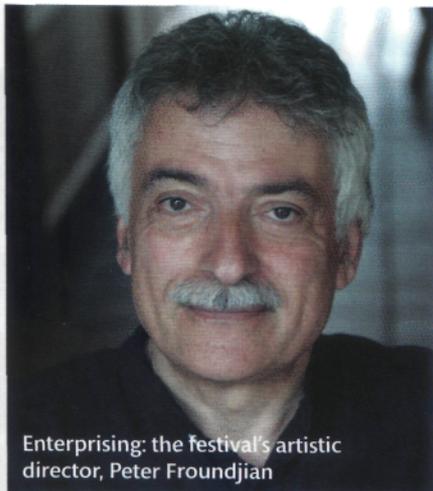
Fanny Waterman telling a luckless student not to play enterprising repertoire (in this case Schumann's B minor Allegro and Liszt's Third Mephisto Waltz) 'because it's not good music'.

GREAT ARTISTS – WHETHER composers or performers, creators or re-creators – are not always helpful in making a case for particular byways of the piano repertoire. For Messiaen, Saint-Saëns was 'très inutile,' while for Nadia Boulanger, Rachmaninov was 'très vulgaire.' Hugo Wolf claimed

Brahms 'cannot exult', while for Alfred Brendel, Grieg 'is for chamber maids'. How grateful one is for Sviatoslav Richter, who complemented his Bach, Beethoven and Brahms with late Liszt, Hindemith and Szymanowski. Glenn Gould's insistence on the other hand, that interest in rare Romantic music was no more than a passing fad has been triumphantly erased by the popularity of Hyperion's magnificent Romantic Piano Concerto series. Prejudice too, against transcriptions (notably those by Liszt and Busoni) now seems little more than a lost cause. And similarly, the influence of 'Schnabelites' (disciples of a great pianist who turned his ideas into a rigid ideology) has mercifully waned. Schnabel's belief that great music is always better than it can be played or his teasing irony ('I am the only pianist who plays a

second half of a programme as boring as the first') have now been tempered with a greater sense of range and possibility.

DISCUSSION AT THE 2014 festival ranged far and wide, with debates about the various merits of past pianists such as Arrau, Gieseking and Horowitz continuing far into the night (no chatter about Lang Lang at Husum!). In other words, Husum is the real thing, a festival with a meaningful rather than superficial difference. Above all, it gives pianists a chance to explore



Enterprising: the festival's artistic director, Peter Froudjian

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(Hamish Milne in Reubke, Jonathan Plowright in Bach-Rummel). Let off the lead, so to speak, most pianists long to dabble in lesser-celebrated repertoire.

The chief record companies have hardly helped the cause of neglected music. I can recall asking Cecile Ousset why she had not placed her masterly performance of the Dutilleux Sonata on disc, and the answer – ‘it’s not commercial’ – was all too predictable. Appealing to the lowest common denominator, the record companies have become ‘hoist with their own petard’ and it is little wonder that disillusionment and falling sales have quickly set in.

All these considerations are at the heart of Husum, of its foundation and philosophy, of its delight in opening rather than closing doors. For the guest or visitor, everything is made as inviting

The 2014 instalment featured Joseph Moog performing Scharwenka's Second Sonata



Intimate: the main concert hall



and hospitable as possible. My own talk on the brilliant Australian pianist Eileen Joyce was complemented by a superb glass-case exhibition of my own collection of photographs and letters. Everything is done to make the occasion vivid and worthwhile. All young artists should visit Husum and, of course, listen to the accompanying annual CDs on Danacord, which include selections of each year's outstanding performances. I can guarantee that they will have their vision enriched and enlarged. They will surely leave free to think again, to consider and hopefully have many prejudices removed. ♪

The next instalment of the Schloss vor Husum Rarities of Piano Music Festival takes place on 21-29 August and features Florian Uhlig, Jonathan Plowright and Xiayin Wang, among others

HUSUM SAMPLER

We have four free tracks to download from the CD of the 2013 Schloss vor Husum Festival, courtesy of Danacord Records: www.rhinegold.co.uk/ipdownload. Digital readers click here for instant access.

- ▶ **Track 1:** Grieg – Dance from Jølster, Op 17 No 5. Håvard Gimse (pf)
- ▶ **Track 2:** Christian Sinding – Impromptu, Op 31 No 4. Håvard Gimse (pf)
- ▶ **Track 3:** Aleksander Michalowski – Mazurka in C sharp minor, Op 17. Ludmil Angelov (pf)
- ▶ **Track 4:** Korngold – Fairy Tale Pictures, Op 3 No 7, The Fairy Tale's Epilogue. Artur Pizarro (pf)