

Hailed by The New York Times as a pianist of “a fiery sensibility and warm touch”, Anna Shelest has thrilled the audiences throughout the world. Her recent engagements included debuts at Alice Tully Hall in New York City, Stern Auditorium at Carnegie Hall in New York City, and The Kennedy Center in Washington DC.

Born in Kharkiv, Ukraine Ms. Shelest began her piano studies at the age of six when she attended the Kharkiv Special Music School for Gifted Children. At the age of eleven she performed at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris as the youngest prize winner of the Milosz Magin International Piano Competition.

An “effective collaborator” (The New York Times), Shelest made her orchestral debut at the age of twelve with the Kharkiv Symphony Orchestra, playing Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 1. Since then she has been a soloist with some of the world’s most renown orchestras such as Montreal Symphony Orchestra, St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, under Maestro Paavo Järvi, and Netherlands Symphony Orchestra.

Ms. Shelest has performed on some of the world’s greatest stages such as Carnegie Hall in New York City, The Kennedy Center in Washington DC, Great Hall of Moscow Conservatory and Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. In June 2011 she was the first one to present a recital at the newly rebuilt 7 World Trade Center in New York City.

Her other recordings include: Rachmaninoff Etudes-tableaux op. 39 and Moments Musicaux op. 16; a collaboration with Cristian Ganicenco, principal trombonist of Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, on the CD “Beyond Oblivion” featuring music for trombone and piano; and Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition as well as works by Tchaikovsky and Glinka.

Having received her Masters Degree at The Juilliard School, Ms. Shelest currently resides in New York City with her husband and son.

To learn more, please visit www.AnnaShelest.com



Selections from the interview with David Dubal.

Dubal is an American pianist, teacher, broadcaster, author of numerous books, including *Evenings with Horowitz*, *The Art of the Piano*, *The Essential Canon of Classical Music*, *Conversations with Menuhin*, as well as the host of an Emmy Award winning documentary, *The Golden Age of the Piano*.

Some pianists, such as Sviatoslav Richter, did not believe in transcriptions and practically excluded them from their repertoire. What is your view on this?

Richter has said that the piano as an instrument did not interest him, just its great repertoire, and he had one of the largest repertoires of any pianist. Perhaps the reason he did not care for transcriptions is that he performed so many original works.

However, the real aspect of transcription is that every pianist in one way or another desires to put in their own hands something they love, which is a song by Schubert or a Paganini caprice – this can be accomplished because of the piano. Liszt loved the Beethoven Symphonies, so he decided to transcribe them for the piano. Actually, in Liszt’s arrangements one may hear more details than in the orchestral setting.

Do you consider transcriptions equal or lesser pieces to original compositions?

Transcriptions have such a variety of difficulty and differentiation of colors and nuance, which can bring the originals into a new light.

In many ways, every Liszt transcription of a Schubert song almost equals the original, even without the words. Liszt’s understanding of other composers’ styles is astounding as to how he gets under each composer’s skin!

In Liszt’s own *Sonetto 104 del Petrarca*, he writes a fine song, but it cannot compare to his own transcription. Liszt has totally transformed his song into an exquisite love lyric, a nocturne that is pianistically gorgeous. When playing the work, one’s hands fall in love with it!

Grethen am Spinnrade of Schubert is certainly a masterful song, yet I think that the totality of this dramatic work is actually better realized by Liszt in a strange way. Liszt Transcriptions of Schubert are far above merely a painter copying a masterpiece – for Liszt it is a separate form of creativity, a special genre.

Wagner-Liszt *Isolde’s Liebestod* cumulates the opera with an extraordinary impact, yet Liszt makes his effect so well on the piano that one even forgets that four hours have already passed in the opera. Wagner would never have become as original a composer without Liszt’s music. In a letter to Liszt, Wagner says: “Look Papa, I have stolen this from you!”

The eminent literary critic George Steiner calls Liszt the “greatest critic in the history of music”, meaning that he takes a piece and criticizes it from his own point of view. His transcriptions are a tremendous enacted syllabus of the whole literature of music that he loved and wanted to play himself.

Bach Chaconne may be called the perfect piece for violin. Do you agree? What did Busoni achieve with his transcription?

Yes, I feel that this is the greatest piece for solo violin. It was natural for a great experimental “Lisztian” mind like Busoni to want to play it on the piano. He does not improve on the work because that is an impossibility, but he does build it within the framework of how the 19th century thought of Bach. Busoni merged his own personality into the composer to such a degree that it becomes a different creation on the piano. I call it the Cologne Cathedral of “Bachian” arrangements. Busoni himself premiered it in 1892 at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston.

Looking at Schumann First Sonata, what can you say about Schumann’s role in expanding the piano vocabulary?

Schumann is a towering genius whose pianistic output is as important as that of Chopin, Liszt and Brahms. Schumann’s Sonata in F sharp minor is dedicated to Clara Wieck who in 1840 would become his wife. She was its first public interpreter. Schumann published the piece not with his actual name, but with the names of two aspects of his complex personality, the fierce Florestan and introspective Eusebius. Of course, in later editions Schumann’s name appears on the title page. The Sonata is one of the most extraordinary half-hours in all of the piano literature. To play it is not enough and one must love it passionately to recreate it; the pianist must be a poet as well. Op. 11 has received less attention than the G minor Sonata op. 22, yet it is a greater work. The F sharp minor Sonata is difficult and fascinating because of its irregularity of form. There are some that say Schumann is not pianistic in a sense that Liszt or Chopin is, but Schumann has his own unique piano style. Even on the page he looks far different than other Romantic composers. He knows exactly how he wants the piano to sound, and what we call awkwardness is actually his unique “Shumannish” form of expression. The wonder of this score is the fact that Schumann triumphs in the sonata form, making it Romantic instead on conventionally Classical, as he does in the G minor Sonata. In this great work, he continually invents new aspects of himself as a composer. Schumann sees the world as a gigantic autobiography, and everything he feels he puts into his music – naturally, not in a literal sense. It is music that will never play itself – you have to put your heart and soul into him. Schumann interpretively remains the most thorny and enigmatic keyboard composer of the Romantic age.

The French philosopher Roland Barthes felt that “only someone that plays Schumann himself can truly understand him”. When you listen to the F Sharp minor Sonata, you are not only hearing music of immense beauty but also of fantastic strangeness, and strangeness always accompanies great art.

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