

Artist Management

**Pianist Anton Kuerti
at the Toronto Summer Music Festival**

"Kuerti's multiplicity of touch and acuity of musical perception gave us this rare music in all its aspects – a unique and memorable achievement. "

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Anton Kuerti's Schumann interpretation a recital apart

To open this year's Toronto Summer Music Festival on Tuesday, the phenomenal Anton Kuerti dazed a packed Koerner Hall with an evening of Robert Schumann's piano music at its most feverishly inventive.

In the first half, we heard three of the boldest of the *Eight Novelettes, Op. 21*, and the deeply original *Fantasia in C, Op. 17*, followed without a pause by the mind-blowing *Toccata in C, Op. 7*. In the second half, the seldom-encountered *Grand Sonata in F-sharp Minor, Op. 11*.

This music in its richness took me back to my late 20s when I had the honour of studying harmony with the revered teacher Nadia Boulanger in Paris. As a recurrent exercise, Mlle Boulanger would have me devise a sonic bridge, a harmonic progression in the empty bars between two chords. I'll never forget my first experience of this innocent-seeming task. I submitted my progression. She studied it silently for a moment with her failing eyesight which nevertheless saw everything, and said: "Yes, it's correct. But I don't find it beautiful. Hear how Josquin des Prez filled the same progression ..." and she played it. "And here is Monteverdi's solution ..." and she played that, and moved on up through Purcell, Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Debussy and Stravinsky – that same simple musical distance covered each time with striking individuality and beauty. Each time we repeated the test, she would use different examples, often from the music of different composers. But Schumann was nearly always among the composers – a mark of Boulanger's respect for the originality and scope of his harmony.

Kuerti's program and his handling of it were steeped in his awareness of Schumann's harmonic range and mastery and that awareness alone would have set his recital apart from the vast majority. In addition, he brought to it powerful gifts of memory and all the other piano skills.

The psychological duality of Schumann – his conscious awareness of himself as the bold, heroic Florestan on the one hand, and the introverted, sensitive Eusebius on the other – was also much in evidence in Kuerti's program. After the stirring kaleidoscopic volubility and careening pianistic turmoil of the Florestanish first two movements of the *Fantasia*, the quiet rapture of the Eusebian third movement was like a balm. All three movements were encompassed in Kuerti's understanding. The swiftly ensuing *Toccata* was all Florestan: unchained and absolutely hair-raising.



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The *Sonata*, with its original, fanciful attribution to Schumann's contrasting personae Florestan and Eusebius, and their dedication of the piece to the 15-year-old piano prodigy Clara Wieck (who was later to become Schumann's wife) took us further still into the composer's restless harmonic imaginings, elaborating them with daring fractured modulations, trenchant textures and obsessively variable rhythms. Again, the Eusebian second movement was a blessed island of calm. Again, Kuerti's multiplicity of touch and acuity of musical perception gave us this rare music in all its aspects – a unique and memorable achievement.

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/arts/music/anton-kuertis-schumann-interpretation-a-recital-apart/article1647504/?cmpid=rss1>