

# Otago Daily Times

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## Capturing the longing

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**Described by *The New York Times* as "a fearless player with technique to burn," Daniel Müller-Schott is performing in Dunedin with the NZSO tomorrow. Charmian Smith talks to the young German cellist.**

Daniel Müller-Schott was on a high after the concert he'd just given in Lille, France when the *ODT* phoned.

He'd been playing Prokofiev's *Sinfonia Concertante*, a big piece of music, and he felt it had gone well.

"Somehow the message came across and you meet people and that's always very uplifting," he said.

"You focus so much on the moment in the evening when it's actually happening, when the music is there and everyone is there. I guess it all comes together after the concert and I am happy and enthusiastic."

It is not always like that. Some pieces, such as Shostakovich's second cello concerto, are dark, deep and depressing, he says.

"You can't really hide from that so usually I can't really see anyone after playing that piece, but if I play the usual cello repertoire like Schumann or Dvorak, then I feel somehow sociable."

He will play the Dvorak cello concerto in his upcoming tour with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra's "Echoes of Home" concert series, which starts in Dunedin tomorrow evening. It is the masterpiece of all cello concertos, he says, even though Dvorak originally thought the cello was not strong enough to be a solo instrument with an orchestra.

"There's a quote by him saying the top is very nasal and the lower strings are just grumbling and can't be heard, but in the end he decided to write something for cello and orchestra and thank God he did," Müller-Schott said.

He thinks it was Dvorak's friendship with Irish-born, German-raised American composer, cellist and conductor Victor Herbert and hearing Herbert's second cello concerto that influenced him.



<sup>[1]</sup> Daniel Müller-Schott. Photo supplied.

"It's one of the greatest, at so many levels. The piece has so much intimacy and chamber qualities and it's a great way of interacting musically with the orchestra players. I always enjoy very much that it's like give and take musically from the solo instrument then to the wind instruments and then to the other string instruments. It's a wonderful experience."

Dvorak wrote the work in the mid-1890s when he was director of the National Conservatory in New York and was inspired by the music of America. The concerto includes some American folk tunes and also refers to a song he had written, *Leave Me Alone to My Dreams*, a favourite of his sister-in-law and former love, Josefina Kaunitzova.

"He was longing for Bohemia and his home and for Prague, and while he was in the US, he heard Josefina was ill but he could not return. That's when he decided to include the melody of one of her favourite songs of his, *Leave Me Alone to My Dreams*, Müller-Schott said.

"It's in the second movement and also the coda of the third movement where you can follow those beautiful song melodies. It makes this piece very personal because his friend died while he composed it, so it's a very personal statement and that makes it all the more moving."

Perhaps because of this, performing this piece makes Müller-Schott feel melancholy.

"The whole piece is so complex. It has so many emotional layers in a way. It's very touching, very moving and I always feel this last phrase, to just say farewell to the world, is something that I keep in my feeling when I play this piece."

Müller-Schott (now 36) has been playing cello from the age of 5. As a child growing up in Munich, he was taken to an orchestra rehearsal by his musician mother.

"The Schumann cello concerto was being rehearsed and I loved it so much, and I loved the cello. I asked my mother if I could learn the instrument, so I started having lessons when I was 5. I just felt it would be my instrument."

As a child he played with musical friends which he thinks is important for children learning an instrument, as no child wants to practise for hours alone.

"So I was happy to play from time to time but I was not really seriously practising. I was happy for that because I think that kept my love for the instrument, and later I played in some youth competitions, and somehow it was all developing in a very natural way."

At 15 he won the youth section of the Tchaikovsky Competition and that made him start taking the instrument seriously and to decide to study it full-time. He also started getting invitations from presenters and the career of a professional musician evolved. German violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter, who was starting a foundation for young musicians at the time, took him under her wing and gave him the opportunity to study with the great Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich for a year.

"I somehow had different influences in my musical education which was very helpful, really a mind-opener in many ways, and I'm very grateful I had the opportunity for that," he said.

