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Weekend Herald, Auckland

06 Apr 2013, by William Dart

Arts, page 13 - 187.07 cm²

Metro - circulation 204,549 (-----S-)

ID 188534160

BRIEF NZSO(W)

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The ultimate romantic

by William Dart

Daniel Muller-Schott, on tour with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, smiles when I suggest he has achieved veteran status at the age of 37. The German cellist was only 15 when he won the International Tchaikovsky Competition in 1992 and, for his recording debut eight years later, dared to take on Bach's six solo *Suites*.

"It was a natural choice," he points out. "My mother is a harpsichordist and I started studying the *Suites* when I was 6. But it's only a start. These pieces are friends for life. You always go back to study them in more depth and some day I'll definitely record them again."

Arts Channel viewers may remember Muller-Schott in a concert of Mozart Trios, playing alongside violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter and pianist Andre Previn. "That was a wonderful project," he exclaims, while admitting that Mozart and his contemporaries did not always write their most enterprising music for his instrument. "Unfortunately, there aren't so many concertos. That's so frustrating in the case of Mozart and Beethoven. I think they were considering writing one but somehow the time wasn't ready."

Muller-Schott credits his teachers, from Heinrich Schiff to Steven Isserlis.

"Schiff was very analytical, encouraging us to look closely into the

Performance

Who: German cellist Daniel Muller-Schott with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra

Where and when: Founder's Theatre, Hamilton, Thursday at 7.30pm; Auckland Town Hall, Friday at 7pm

Masterclass: Academy of Performing Arts, Waikato University, Wednesday at 5pm

On disc: Muller-Schott plays Prokofiev and Britten (Orfeo, through Ode Records)

score," he explains. "But there was also a very extrovert, explosive element that always came through in his playing."

Isserlis turned him on to the joys of romantic music, Schumann in particular. Next week, playing Dvorak with the NZSO, he will be offering Hamilton and Auckland audiences the ultimate romantic cello concerto. "For me it's one of the most personal concertos, too. Dvorak was in New York at the time, longing for his home in Bohemia and missing his friends."

This is a score with the perfect balance of soloist and orchestra and Muller-Schott also highlights the chamber music-like delicacy of its second movement. "There's a lot of melancholy here. It's as if Dvorak has to say farewell and look back to a world that has already passed. It's so moving."

During a performance of this work, Muller-Schott may think back to his most celebrated teacher, Mstislav Rostropovich, who urged him to cultivate a fuller, more projected tone. "You certainly need a bigger sound to com-

pete with the strings and even the woodwind, which at times can be problematic. I'm so grateful for his advice. He showed me how to squeeze out the sound and also how to shape it into expressive, singing phrase – especially useful in modern concert halls."

Muller-Schott sees his latest CD, a coupling of Prokofiev's *Sinfonia Concertante* and Britten's *Symphony for Cello and Orchestra*, as a tribute to Rostropovich, since both works were written for the Russian.

"I studied the Prokofiev with him," Muller-Schott says, smiling at the demands of its 18-minute second movement. "It's like a marathon. You never stop playing."

Britten's 1963 work needs to be heard more, he says.

Muller-Schott is looking forward to Wednesday's masterclass with student cellists at Waikato University. "Young players need to hear other people and then develop their own interpretations. Even as a teacher you can learn something in this situation. You often question yourself as to why something has to be played in a certain way. I find that very inspiring."

He talks of how today's young musicians need to be versatile, whether playing contemporary or Baroque. I mishear "rock" for "Baroque", which occasions an unexpected confession.

"I once played the Shostakovich First Concerto at the Roskilde Rock Festival in Denmark," Muller-Schott admits. "There were a few thousand heavy metal fans in front of us and it was all amplified. Never have you heard a bigger sound."



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