

# Eduard Kutrowatz – At Home in Music

by Renate Publig

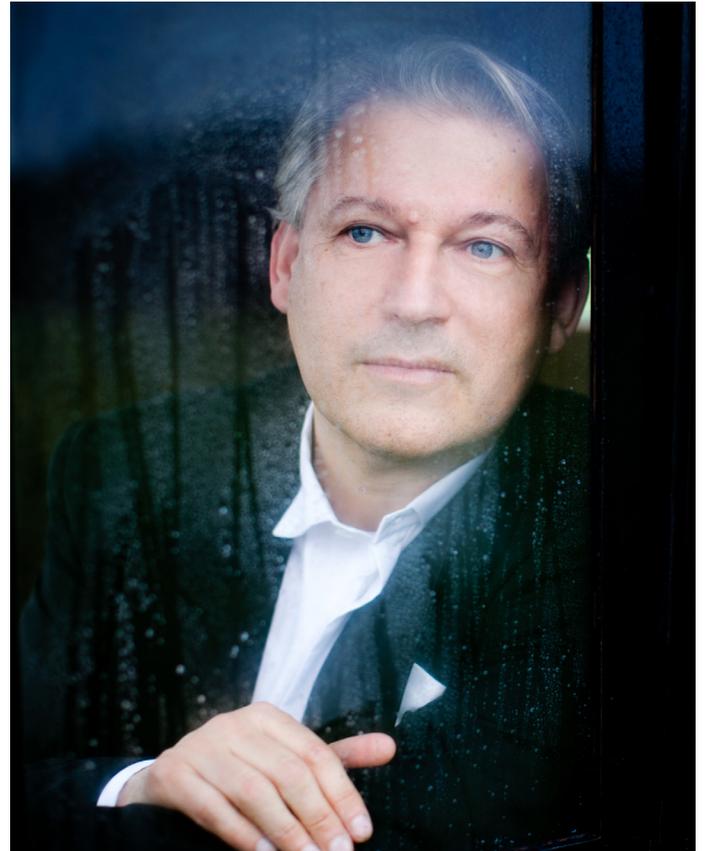
**'Begegnungen', encounters, is the name of Eduard Kutrowatz' new CD, and the title is its programme: in the interview, he talks about the significance of musical encounters, of word and music and of the importance to keep some free space in one's calendar.**

Eduard Kutrowatz, pianist, composer and – together with his brother, Johannes – artistic director of the Liszt Festival in Raiding, was born in Burgenland. His schedule leads him around the world and he is professor at the Vienna Music University. If asked where he feels most at home, he answers: 'In music!' He expands on this: 'I think a lot about language and writing; I'm even working on a play. But language alone always seemed like a cage to me, while music means freedom: Music is able to explode the shackles of conceptual thought and to elevate onto an emotional level.'

But it is still remarkable that apart from solo or piano duet recitals given with his brother, Johannes, Kutrowatz very often appears as a piano accompanist in lieder recitals or in joint programmes with music and literary readings. 'My intention is to tell stories. Originally, I wanted to become a singer; this was prevented by a little cut in a tonsillectomy in my youth. As a hopeful optimist, I try to see everything as a chance and am very happy with the piano. I rejoice in working with first-rate singers.' And the list is impressive: singers like KS Ildikó Raimondi, Elisabeth Kulman and Herbert Lippert, to name but a few, appreciate the empathic collaboration with Kutrowatz.

Most concert programmes do not only tell stories, but rather give food for philosophic thought, like, e. g., the Proust evening with Peter Matic in the Musikverein: 'All life is philosophy, is asking and questioning. The question mark may remain, as the greatest treasure of knowledge is not to be able or not to be required to know everything! It is often enough to view the microcosm as a macrocosm. The more I travel the more I enjoy my time in Burgenland, as it, too, contains the whole world – just as does a poem, or the 9,000 minutes of Peter Matic's Proust audiobook. With one foot I live in Japan, where I discovered my love for haikus. These three-line poems hold philosophic statements containing entire stories. In this extremely strict form a perfect statement is made, perfect in the mastery of the design. There, a difference becomes clear: In the west one strives for perfection, in Asia for mastery. The "master" used to have a different importance; it was not enough to be "just perfect". It was only the experience and wisdom behind perfection that made the difference.'

The newest CD, 'Begegnungen', 'encounters', has just appeared. It includes lieder by Peter Cornelius, Franz Liszt, Friedrich Cerha, but also some compositions by Kutrowatz himself; sung by



Eduard Kutrowatz © Julia Wesely

Ildikó Raimondi. And the CD's title is its programme, as it is the encounters made by every human being that define and enrich their lives: 'I have always felt the need to enter the dialogue with other singers, other instrumentalists. This dialogue that one conducts on stage with the partners, and then to transmit this exchange to the audience: this is what making music means to me.'

On the CD, we meet not only Kutrowatz the pianist, but also Kutrowatz the composer: 'Actually it is presumptuous to study the musical masterpieces and then to call oneself a composer. But the word componere fundamentally implies to put together existing elements in a new and very personal context. In composing lieder, my first care is the text, the piece's architecture. Actually, I just arrange; I sing a text and set it to music.' Of course composing alters one's views of the works by other composers: 'I increasingly view the pieces I perform, so to speak, through the composer's looking-glass; – in the great masters with even greater reverence and humility than before!'

There are two entries by Friedrich Cerha on the CD: 'As a human being and as a composer, Friedrich Cerha has stridden

through an entire century and now extends into the new century. His style has undergone a development and cannot be labelled; this is why the CD contains two cycles from totally different creative periods: *Lieder der Minne* are from the 1960s, they seamlessly connect to late romanticism, while Cerha wrote the *Cycle after poems by Tamar Radzyner* for the occasion of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Both compositions are mirrors of their times. Music of our time that needs to be performed and recorded!' Friedrich Cerha's reaction to the CD recording reflects the deep mutual recognition: 'This is how I imagine my pieces!'

If one looks back on music history, the common practice was to perform contemporary music; this changed over the course of time: 'Today we term pieces from 1920 "contemporary music" – but it is already 100 years old! This needs to be changed and viewed from today's point of view.' And so, it is by now about 100 pieces premiered by Kutrowatz; he considers it important, responsible, and necessary that musicians are not only 'museum administrators' of the great works, but also to take on the risk of giving life to graphics drawn upon paper and to fill them with emotion and life. 'In this respect, the performer is also a "co-creator"! This is my approach to new music.' This co-creatorship, this dialogue with the composers is what is so exciting in contemporary music: 'This collaboration usually works out excellently, no matter whether it is a young composer like Johanna Doderer or a legendary figure like Friedrich Cerha or, just now, Herwig Reiter. Composers appreciate a serious approach to their works, it makes it easier for them to give their "children" away.'

It is understandable that the day is sometimes too short with such an impressive calendar. How can all activities be accommodated? 'I need little sleep because I go to bed happily exhausted from my work. I feel deeply grateful – it is a privilege when one is fulfilled by what one does.' If some time is still free despite all these activities, one finds Kutrowatz in his Burgenland garden: 'To work there is balm for my soul and I'm delighted right now when I think of my vegetable and rose garden. The woods, nature is important for me; as a Pisces, my favourite sports medium is the water and I used to play table tennis on a semi-professional level. Unlike tennis, this is very well suited for a pianist as it requires a supple wrist and fast reactions.'

Let us come back once again to the subject of composing: It is often difficult to withdraw from current events due to their frequently harrowing nature. Eduard Kutrowatz, too, speaks of how Roland Hagenberg's text about the misery of the boat refugees in the Mediterranean set him an imperative to set it to music. 'As an artist, one has the opportunity to call attention to certain events. To be heard – in the truest sense of the word! – is a deeply essential part of what one denotes as art.'



'It was and still is my only ambition as a musician to hurl my spear into the infinite spaces of the future!' writes Franz Liszt, a composer intensively studied by Kutrowatz, the artistic director of the Raiding Liszt Festival. He was not only interested in his biography and compositions, but Liszt's pioneering work as a 'networker' also inspired him: 'This forward-looking element has become important to me; not only to create something in the zeitgeist, but to keep the developments in mind!' This applies

especially to the development of the entire music market: 'If there is not enough young audience one has to counteract this tendency. And one does not achieve this with superficially popular concerts, but rather by carrying the work to the future in a responsible manner. I trust in the young to recognize the good and right!'



Eduard Kutrowatz, KS Ildikó Raimondi © Andrea Schramek