

Julian Steckel, Cello Profile

Written music is potential energy that a performer must unleash. Audiences can tell if a musician really feels that energy, or if their expression is second-hand. When Julian plays, he is sharing something fragile and alive. “As an interpreter, I’ve started trusting my inner life more and letting the audience in,” he says. “It’s a kind of vulnerability that makes you stronger.” His first child was born at the end of 2018. Since then, his conviction has grown, his sense for metaphor expanded.

He knows that making music for an audience occasionally involves tipping the scales too far one way or another. But he is aware of his responsibility toward what is often called the “intentions of the composer.” He dives deep into scores, investigating the organic connections that give a work its unity. “If you know one room in an apartment, but not that the apartment has seven other rooms, you won’t even understand the room you’re in,” he says. When Julian plays, the music is in safe hands. You listen for his discoveries; what the music, through him, is trying to tell you.

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Every life is a series of experiences, encounters, memories, places. Sometimes it’s possible to understand the contours of a musician’s ability through a list of these moments. Julian’s solo career was launched after he won the prestigious ARD Musikwettbewerb in 2010. Since then, he has soloed with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Orchestre de Paris, the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra and the St. Petersburg Philharmonic. He’s worked with the conductors Christoph Eschenbach, Sir Roger Norrington, Valery Gergiev, Jakub Hrůša, Mario Venzago, Fabien Gabel, John Storgårds, Lahav Shani, Antony Hermus, Christian Zacharias and Michael Sanderling. His chamber music partners include Janine Jansen, Christian Tetzlaff, Karen Gomyo, Antje Weithaas, Renaud Capuçon, Veronika Eberle, Vilde Frang, Antoine Tamestit, Lars Vogt, Elisabeth Leonskaja, Paul Rivinius, Denis Kozhukhin, the Modigliani, Armida and Ébène quartets.

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For Julian, these experiences and encounters are the result of organic growth, not external pressure. It’s a development that tends to happen when a musician of his ability goes through life with an open mind.

His playing is effortless, unhindered by technical boundaries. He derives energy from appearing not to try. It’s a quality that many look for and few find. He sees his talent and his musical upbringing as a gift. His mentors are responsible for the rest.

“My very first teacher considered lightness and simplicity to be at the core of cello playing,” Julian says. “Listen to yourself, plan what you’re doing, get it right the first time. I owe everything to these insights.” He studied with Ulrich Voss, Gustav Rivinius, Boris Pergamenschikow, Heinrich Schiff and Antje Weithaas. Now he is a teacher too, at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater in Munich.

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In the current season Julian will make his debut with the Munich Chamber Orchestra (Clemens Schuldt), as well as the MDR Symphony Orchestra Leipzig under Dennis Russell Davies. Re-invitations will lead him to the National Theater Orchestra Mannheim, the Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra, the Orchestre Symphonique de Québec (Otto Tausk), as well as the Kristiansand Symfonieorkester and the Auckland Symphony Orchestra with Giordano Bellincampi.

Along with this, chamber music remains a source of inspiration and a hotbed for communication for him: his projects include several complete cycles of the Beethoven sonatas for violoncello and piano with Paul Rivinius, an Australia tour with the Skride Quartet as well as a trio tour with Karen Gomyo and Olli Mustonen.

Julian's relationship with music spans analytical intelligence and extreme commitment. His interpretations are grounded and accessible. He's played his way to freedom.

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