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An assessment of my cello by master luthier Martin Schleske

The search

As a solo cellist for the Brandenburgisches Staatsorchester, I had been looking for many years for a cello that would meet as many of my musical requirements as possible. Since prices for instruments built by the old Italian makers from the 17th and 18th centuries have reached astronomical levels, I finally gave up my search for an instrument in this price category and decided to study the available options such as a newly built instrument. Through a colleague who is intensively involved in sound optimization of musical instruments, I came into contact with the violinmaker Martin Schleske. I was impressed from the start with his first work (a tonal reproduction of an “Amati” cello). Meanwhile, I inspected all of the celli he has built, including tonal copies of “Montagnana” and “Gofriller” instruments. Unfortunately, their owners were not interested in parting with them! But about six months ago, the Martin Schleske Master Studio completed a tonal copy of the “Montagnana” owned by Steven Isserlis. I fell in love with this instrument immediately and refused to let it get away.

Description of the sound

I had my first notable experience with this unbelievable cello by Martin Schleske while accompanying the soloist in Grieg's piano concerto. A listener who was seated in the 10th row told me after the concert that she almost stopped hearing the piano. A colleague told the sound of my instrument gave her a “foot massage” through the vibrations traveling across the stage. I am describing this experience since it shows on the one hand the power of this cello. On the other hand, I know that this type of occurrence tends to be typical of high-quality instruments: Their radiance grows at increasing distances from the instrument. It took some time to get used to this phenomenon. Another interesting experience occurred while I was the soloist for the Brandenburgisches Staatsorchester. Once again, the sound of the cello had no trouble getting through. Colleagues described it as rich in harmonics and clear as glass even in the lower registers. A reviewer in the audience enjoyed the colors of the sound, praising the instrument as having a range “extending from the dark timbre of an alto voice to that of a coloratura soprano”. The range of overtones mentioned above is a key to the easy response of the instrument, which in turn makes for a relaxed approach to playing with a lot of room for inflection.

I was very surprised while preparing to rerecord a piano trio by Brahms. As a general rule, the cellist will sit in front of the open piano. This means the cellist will sometimes have to struggle in the lower ranges to avoid being covered up since the piano is so dominant. When I still had my old instrument, I traded places with the violinist to get around this problem. But when I played my cello by Martin Schleske, we were able to revert to the traditional seating without encountering any problems relating to the phenomenon I described above. Even in this configuration, I can make wonderful inflections with this instrument and rest assured that I will be always heard.

I cannot express how thankful I am for this unbelievable cello!