

With Schubert at the Piano

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Q. Do you find structure as much of a problem in Schubert as legend would have it?

KUERTI. But you can see why certain listeners have problems with Schubert's structures. Where, for instance, is the recapitulation in the opening movement of the 'big' A minor Sonata? A frail, solitary little wisp of the main theme emerges and is answered canonically, two octaves lower. It's the right spot and the right theme for the recapitulation, but the wrong key. Then Schubert brushes through the right key and moves straight on to yet a third tonality, so it hardly feels like home. Several glorious modulations later, we find ourselves working through the same rabble-raising syncopations heard near the beginning, and recognize a dramatic return to the tonic. This now really does feel as though we are back home – though this time it's the wrong theme!

Q. Another Schubertian controversy. Once chosen, how flexible can the tempos be, within the body of the movement as a whole?

KUERTI. But a lot of Schubert's tempo indications are implicit rather than explicit. It's quite clear to me that when he writes 'diminuendo' he also means 'poco ritardando', as he so often follows diminuendo with *a tempo*. (See for example the second movement of the *Trout Quintet*.) He never writes *a tempo* after decrescendo, so there is an important distinction to be made here.

Schubert on disc – reviews by Daniel Stearns

Anton Kuerti (Analekta) is a musician whose mind never stops working. Just occasionally, you'd rather it did. 'Cut the spotlights', you may feel now and again, 'you don't need them. Trust yourself (and trust the composer) more. You can afford to.' But the more you think about the reasoning behind some of his more idiosyncratic departures from the straight and narrow, especially in the realm of rubato, the more you find yourself coming face to face with aspects of the music itself which you never perceived before. And then you want to call out, by way of a postscript: 'Hey, thanks!' Critics have occasionally charged Kuerti with over-interpretation, but there's no question in my mind that he is an authentically great pianist, with much to tell us. But he is not a calculatingly ingratiating player. He never courts his listeners. He gives us the truth as he sees it, even when it may be a string of unanswered questions. In one sense, indeed, he fulfills the ultimate responsibility of every interpretative musician, leaving the listener with the music, not the performer, uppermost in the mind.