

The Russian pianist visits the Borgato workshop to play the prototype of his concert-grand

Askenazij tries out the "Double" in Lonigo

Lonigo. What is Vladimir Askenazij doing in Bagnolo di Lonigo? He is visiting one of the renowned villas of Palladio. This famous Russian (naturalized Islandic) pianist also admired the youthful work of the stone-cutter Pietro della Gondola, however he then spent most of his time in the company of another padovan, and his most original creation. We are talking about Luigi Borgato, padovan master artisan (Padova is also where Bartolomeo Cristofori – the "father" of the piano - was born) who has his workshop in the grounds of the villa in Bagnolo. It is here that Luigi, together with his wife Paola Bianchi, builds concert-grand pianos with care and competence.

His pianos are totally hand-crafted one by one, displaying innovative technical and sonorous characteristics. For example they have four strings struck per note in the upper register and the mechanics, with Renner components, are Borgato originals. A challenge to the keyboard giants of this world, which in reality is not aimed at the quantity produced rather than at quality.

The grand piano model, which has been compared to a sparkling Ferrari, is a concert-grand weighing 650 kilos, 166cm wide and 282cm in length, endowed with five pedals (the artisan has created a "Beethoven pedal" with division of the dampers), made in rose-wood with a black high-gloss finish. Askenazij played this instrument, however the real reason that brought him to Bagnolo was to see the "Double Borgato", the first double concert-grand piano with pedalboard.

Luigi presented this instrument to the public in September 2000 at the "Piano Meeting, 300 years since its birth" where it first came to the attention of the organist and pianist Giorgio Carnini. Thus began a mutual collaboration, Carnini remaining the most enthusiastic supporter and testimonial to this craftsman's ingenious invention. The famous Russian pianist and conductor Askenazij came into possession of one of Borgato's brochures, immediately awakening his curiosity. Taking advantage of a tour of northern Italy and through the introduction of a mutual friend, the maestro was finally able to view and play this new instrument.

"He has been wanting to visit since June", specifies Borgato "but due to a series of setbacks he was only able to arrive now. It was an overwhelming and immense joy for me: Askenazij represents a part of music of the 20th century, he is a total musician, whose greatness equals his simplicity and humility".

- What was his reaction? And what did he play?

"He was enthusiastic and enjoyed himself tremendously. He played a little of everything for an hour and a half, but mostly Schumann (opus no.s 56, 58 and 60 were composed specifically for piano with pedalboard), Franck and Beethoven. Naturally enough he wanted to visit the workshop and hear all about the various phases of development of this instrument. Askenazij also said "I shall always remember today's visit and will tell all my friends about it".

Born in Gorkij in 1937, both pianist and conductor, he maintains an intense concert career and appears regularly in the most prestigious concert halls and theatres. He has played all over the world and his discography is enormous (he has recorded the complete works of many composers), his conducting career being equally important. He liked the "Double" so much that he may consider recording something from its repertoire."

- What is this special piano like?

"My instrument is made up of two grand pianos placed one on top of the other. A second piano is added underneath the traditional concert-grand, activated by a pedal board with 37 pedals (similar to the pedalboard of an organ) with a range of 3 bass octaves. A "resonance" pedal attached to the lower piano activates the mechanics of the dampers on both pianos simultaneously." The "Double" has some well-known ancestors: Mozart commissioned a piano with pedalboard from the maker Walter, and the nearest relation is the 1800's "Pedalflügel". Composers such as Schumann, Mendelssohn and Liszt wrote specifically for this instrument.

- Is it true that after captivating Askenazij your "Double Borgato" has also been successful in the world of the cinema?

"The new film, temporarily entitled "The Angel and the Hunter", will run for the next edition of the Berlin Film Festival. It is produced by Franco Nero, Ennio Morricone composed the music and its director is Giancarlo Planta. They asked specifically for the "Double" knowing that there was a real pianist who would be playing it (Giorgio Carnini).

According to Borgato's predictions the new film is quite particular, it has little dialogue, a lot of music and shows careful treatment of the photography. In short, an excellent mix to highlight such a unique protagonist that, from Lonigo, is taking its first steps in the world thanks to the intuition of this audacious venetian master craftsman.