

Stephen Bryant

FRESH FROM A TOUR OF THE FAR EAST, AND WITH THE Proms fast approaching, Stephen Bryant is a busy man. The leader of the BBC Symphony Orchestra (BBCSO), Bryant has come a long way from the young pupil who refused to use vibrato: 'I didn't like the way it distorted the clear tone of the violin but my teacher, Mr Piper, told me that in order to take my Grade 6 exam I would have to do it. So, reluctantly, I did.' Despite having risen to the top of his profession, however, Bryant says: 'I never stop and think, "I've made it." I don't think I've ever looked

'Being a musician is all about the present – present practice and present performance'

at things from that sort of angle. I'm always looking ahead to my next concert or project.' Bryant's desire for, or as he calls it, 'obsession with' clarity of sound came from hours spent listening to recordings of Heifetz, aged eleven, and it has stayed with him ever since. Indeed, clarity of sound is one of the reasons that he prizes the Pressenda he now plays: 'The sound was the most important thing for me. My Pressenda has a clear, sweet sound with lots of natural overtones and good carrying power. The combination of the sound, its responsiveness and the feel of it under my hand makes it unique.'



It was the third violin he tried out at J.&A. Beare and he is now so comfortable with the instrument that he struggles to articulate what it's like to play: 'It's so familiar and so much an extension of me that I find

it impossible to describe.' Nor does he expend much energy thinking about the people who have played the violin before and those who will play it after him: 'Being a musician is all about the present – present practice and present performance. I don't like the thought of anyone else playing it. It's such a close relationship, a musician and their violin.'

Unsurprisingly, Bryant chooses the Royal Albert Hall as his favourite concert venue: 'The building has real dramatic impact and the concerts are always exciting because of the atmosphere engendered by the knowledgeable and enthusiastic Proms audiences. The orchestra is doing eleven Proms this year, all of them broadcast and many also televised.' But Bryant's musical pursuits range far beyond the Proms: his forthcoming projects include a Radio 3 broadcast of the Khachaturian Violin Concerto with Martyn Brabbins and the BBCSO, and a chamber music concert including Webern's Rondo for string quartet, Mendelssohn's Piano Trio in D minor and Schumann's Piano Quintet, broadcast from Seoul, South Korea.

Bryant also gets inspiration from a more unlikely quarter: 'Bruce Lee, the martial arts expert, has been an idol of mine for many years because, although he works in a different field, he developed himself through self-discipline, focus and drive to be the best he could possibly be.' Bryant even confides that he has a light punch bag in his music studio: 'I have to remember to take my boxing gloves off for the violin!'

Lizzie Davis

