

Schimmel uses piano actions produced in Germany by Renner

Choosing a piano is a complicated process. 'The issue of moving on with pianos is a difficult one,' says Howells. 'The piano that suited someone as a beginner won't necessarily suit them forever. So we try to encourage people to take a longer-term view. We offer part exchange on our pianos; people can start with the entry-level piano and move all the way through to the £40,000 one, if they want. Our rental scheme works in a similar way.'

In the middle of the showroom, Reyes is absorbed in the rich palette of colour offered by Schimmel's K122, part of the Konzert range, which also includes the K125 and K132 (priced at £17,250 to £22,900). The luminous tone is the product of several decades of development, and the instruments are aimed at proficient pianists. 'This is the best upright I have ever played!' exclaims Reyes. 'I'm not just saying that because you're here – it's absolutely fantastic; you can bring out the sound as though it was a grand. He plays for a long time, demonstrating the clarity and power, then slips effortlessly into pianissimo.

'The quality of tone is very clear and not aggressive or metallic in any way, like some uprights can be. This is never strident,' says Reyes. 'The feel of the keys is so important. Sometimes pianists sweat and if the material is not right it is a nightmare. With this instrument you will never have any fear that you will slip.' According to Howells, 'Schimmel make their own piano keys and coverings – it's a significant part of their business and takes up a large part of the workshop.' (Indeed, I recall seeing a bustling room filled with top-secret activity – Schimmel doesn't reveal the source of its mineralised material to anyone.)

The Konzert Series has been on the market since 2000 and the instrument Reyes is playing is the second biggest-selling model from Schimmel's range. One minor gripe with the Konzert upright is that it does not have a sostenuto

Simon Loat, Alberto Reyes and Dawn Howells at Peregrine's Pianos in London



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pedal; the middle pedal is a practice pedal. But other than that, says Reyes, 'it does not have many limitations'.

Upright testing complete, we move on to the grand pianos. Reyes takes some time to acclimatise to both the Schimmel Classic options, the C169 and C189. These are all made from exclusively German-sourced parts and start at £32,900. They both sound great, but Reyes feels more comfortable with the C189. 'I don't feel the small one [the C169] has the same range of colour,' he says. Further investigation reveals that he finds the action on the 189 easier to handle, 'though that might be possible to fix with the help of a piano technician'.

In the showroom, nestled against its larger relations, the 169 seems tiny for a grand piano (it's the smallest grand that Schimmel makes). But as Loat and Howells explain, they often end up swapping the 189 for the 169, as clients try the instrument in the larger setting, then feel the 189 is too powerful when they get it home. Reyes likes the upper mid-range in this model. 'Often, as the strings become shorter, pianos lose their voice a bit. This piano [189] feels very secure in this section.' As ever, context is important. 'It's about the right piano for the right room,' says Loat.

In that sense, the final piano, the K230 Konzert Series grand is deserving of a huge space. Reyes plays with breathtaking energy considering we are approaching the end of the second hour of testing. As expected, the concert grand, Schimmel's pièce de résistance (priced at £42,800), is the best of the bunch. 'This is a beautiful piano,' says Reyes. The Schimmel sound works well in all sorts of repertoire, and Reyes plays some more Scarlatti and Chopin. He seems pleased with the results.

'The balance is ideal. If a piano is too velvety, you lose clarity. On the other hand, a bright piano that is too aggressive is also a nightmare.' It all comes down to personal preference. Reyes reminds us that some pianists, such as Horowitz, adore a bright tone. Others prefer something softer. Reyes concludes that the K230 it is 'one of the finest' concert grands he has ever encountered: 'It's a piano you could play on any stage in the world.' **IP**