

OUT OF THE SHADOW

His father, Artur Schnabel, may be more famous, but Karl Ulrich Schnabel – who was born 100 years ago – was one of the greatest pianists and teachers of the 20th century, says **Stephen Wigler**



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Karl Ulrich Schnabel: 'The very essence of a great teacher'

Several years ago I was one of three jurors invited by the Peabody Conservatory of Music to judge its annual school-wide piano competition. During a break for lunch, we three – the others were the pianists Claude Frank and Tong-Il Han – were joined by Peabody's Leon Fleisher, the doyen of American pianists and piano teachers. Conversation was sparked by Han's observation that nearly all of the most promising contestants seemed to be students of a young Russian émigré, who had recently been appointed to Peabody's faculty.

'He definitely has a knack for getting the best out of a student,' said Fleisher.

'A sort of latter-day Baltimore version of Schnabel?' suggested Han, making reference to Artur Schnabel (1882–1951), one of the 20th century's greatest pianists and teacher of pianists, whose celebrated students included not only Fleisher and Frank, but also Clifford Curzon, Rudolf Firkušný, Adrian Aeschbacher, Lili Kraus, Carlo Zecchi and Leonard Shure.

'Schnabel – yes,' said Fleisher.

'But not the Schnabel you think,' added Frank.

'Karl Ulrich, Karl Ulrich,' Fleisher sang out.

'You were the Schnabel we're most grateful for.'

Most piano aficionados know Karl Ulrich (1909–2001) as Artur's piano-playing older son – a second son. Stefan, had a distinguished career as an actor – who, before the second world war, was his father's teaching assistant in Berlin and, after 1933, in Tremezza on Lake Como in northern Italy. They are also likely to know that Karl Ulrich partnered his father in recitals and on several classic recordings of the two-piano and four-hand repertoire, and that after the war he was part of another two-piano