

Esa-Pekka Salonen Interview Transcript

Esa-Pekka Salonen, Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Philharmonia Orchestra from September 2008:

It's a difficult city, let's face it. Traffic is awful, it's so full of people, and it's expensive and dirty and the Tube doesn't work and the trains are crap, and there's all that. But at the same time it's endlessly fascinating.

I think London is completely amazing at the moment. I'm always sure that the depth and volume of London arts life and more specifically musical life is unlike any other place on the earth. The fact that there are so many orchestras competing and there's so much going on is sometimes trouble, but mostly it's inspiring because it really forces us to think of new solutions and think of something that really has an identity.

What I'm really hoping to be able to do, apart from the purely musical things, i.e. doing fascinating things with the Philharmonia, I'm really hoping to be able to connect with the arts life and be able to tap into the amazing variety and volume of arts in London, This is something, that kind of arts scene that exists in London, that's something I've been missing actually.

Well if I somehow had to describe myself as a musician in one word, I think 'curious' would be the word. Endlessly fascinated by music. Why is this piece a masterpiece and why is that piece not a masterpiece, why has a melody like *Greensleeves* survived for hundreds and hundreds of years and several hundreds of thousands melodies haven't, what is it? And I think it's that journey I'm on still.

It is usually quite difficult to listen to classical music and trying to relax. To clear my head after a concert I've conducted I knock off a couple of whiskies then listen to some rock music really loudly in my car – like *Foo Fighters*, *Radiohead*, *Bjork*, that sort of thing.

Interviewer:

Did you download the most recent *Radiohead* album?

Esa-Pekka Salonen:

Yes I did, in fact. They're certainly very interesting and the kind of innovation that goes into that music is not very alien to what we try to do on our side. I went to the website and I was hit by this moral feeling that these people are colleagues on some level. They're richer but colleagues nevertheless! So I'm not going to download it for free. So I paid twelve pounds I think which is more or less the price for a normal CD in the UK at the moment or something like that maybe. So I feel very good about myself!

One of the many amazing things about The Philharmonia of course is the flexibility. The almost uncanny ability to identify with whatever music they're playing. A historically informed Beethoven sound; they can go from that to the lush sounds of Messiaen just like that and there are not many orchestras that can do that. There seems to be an intuitive, very natural understanding between myself and the players. The kind of change of gear between a dress rehearsal and a concert is amazing because the Philharmonia really is a sort of concert animal.

That is the whole point of playing music for people. That you do absolutely 120% every time you do anything otherwise it makes no sense. Why are we doing it otherwise? And that's also what makes a live performance worthwhile because this is something you will not get from a recording.

Interviewer:

Do you remember how you felt during that first concert with the Philharmonia?

Esa-Pekka Salonen:

Already kind of impressed with the way they played, at the dress rehearsal the sheer quality of the playing and the sound they made; but then when the concert started and they started putting out, I was beside myself: I thought, "Yeah, this is it, this is fun!"