

# philharmonia orchestra

## **April 2009 – Podcast Transcription**

### **Sam Burstin – Viola**

Welcome to the podcast. This month we feature music from pianist Nikolai Lugansky and violinist Nicola Benedetti, but first, we took a trip on the London Eye with Lorin Maazel.

### **Lorin Maazel**

I first came to London about half a century ago. I was very young and very green and enjoyed the support of the orchestra and eventually, later on, the very personal and human support of Maestro Klemperer who asked me to help him when he was busy directing the orchestra. Those were years in which I was learning so much, technically, as a musician but the Philharmonia helped me because it was – and still is – one of the finest repositories of the classical music tradition. A great orchestra passes on a tradition it has developed over the years and has nurtured from generation to generation very homeopathically. You bring in younger players very slowly and they learn from the older players and they pass on what they have learned to the younger players when they, themselves become older. So that tradition is kept alive.

As you get older people expect pearls of wisdom to drop from your mouth and it's a very bad habit to get into. You think you're now at the age where sagacity is expected from you; you are a sage, a guru. Then you begin to sound very pontifical and sententious and I still try to avoid that.

Extract from *Music for Cello and Orchestra*

I have trouble conducting my own music from memory, believe it or not because I'm so emotionally involved. I get terribly carried away and I can lose it. But in the process of composing music you have various options and alternatives and when you choose one the alternatives stay there. In a moment of stress I'm always afraid that one of the other options will come forward and I'll suddenly be conducting something that hasn't been published – that would be very embarrassing. So to protect my musicians, my audience and myself from an embarrassing moment I usually put the score of the music I've composed on the stand.

[Speaking about *Music for Cello and Orchestra*] It's a tragic piece: the protagonist is conceived as a lost soul, pummeled by an indifferent fate – more or less the average citizen who goes out into the world, full of enthusiasm and gets kicked about by fellow humans and bad luck, and ends up rather poorly. The flute piece on the other hand, is very pixyish, very 'Puckish' and was actually written specifically for Sir James Gallway who is, in fact, just that himself.

Extract from *Music for Flute and Orchestra*

He didn't ask me to write a certain kind of piece for him. The only thing he asked me to get to him was the music on time which I was not managing to do, and in fact, I finished it in the post office. I was in Salzburg conducting sets of opera performances and I heard from Sir James that if he didn't have it by the next morning he was going to quit, and he was absolutely right. So I found myself writing the last bars in the post office, and the post office – this is a credit to how musical the Austrians are – stayed open an hour later in order for me to finish the piece.

Extract from *Music for Violin and Orchestra*

[Speaking about *Music for Violin and Orchestra*] It's a very different story and it's really a rather nostalgic and not without a certain hopeful feeling – it's certainly a rather romantic feeling; there are quite a few tunes there. The last tune is a rather tender theme I think, with a great deal of sentiment. No sentimentality because I have none in my nature.

Being able to survive is very important and I feel sorry for my colleagues who burst into very unfortunate attacks of perspiration halfway through the first movement of something. They're not fit and it does not prove that you care more about the music. In fact, it proves that you care less about it because a real pro keeps focussed on musical values. Everything else has to be physically up to playing the five sets to win Wimbledon.

I'm very well-focused. I've learnt how to bring just the energy required at that particular moment to make the musical or technical point, because being nervous makes one perspire. Being overly concerned with self makes one perspire. Not being properly prepared makes one perspire and also being out of shape, so one of the ways to sort out a truly professional musician is to see what state he's in when he walks off the podium after the last movement.

### **Sam Burstin**

Maestro Maazel conducts a selection of his own compositions across the series, beginning with *Farewells* in Dublin's National Concert Hall and London's Royal Festival Hall on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> of April.

*Music for Cello and Orchestra*, performed by Han-Na Chang in Basingstoke and London on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of April, and Sir James Galway performs *Music for Flute and Orchestra* in Cardiff on the 4<sup>th</sup>, a matinee performance in London on the 5<sup>th</sup> and in L'Auditori in Barcelona on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

Nikolai Lugansky joins the Philharmonia for two performances of Rachmaninov's second piano concerto in April. This piece is one of Rachmaninov's best-loved works. Nikolai Lugansky took us on a guided tour.

*Extract from Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2*

### **Nikolai Lugansky**

It is probably the most famous, the most popular and the most played piano concerto of all time. In 1897 he premièred his first symphony and Glazunov, a great Russian composer conducted it. It was a disaster. It was so bad for Rachmaninov that he didn't compose again for almost three years and he fell into a depression. He met a doctor whose name was Nikolai Dahl who told him he would be healthy, have force and write a new piano concerto. I don't know how much Rachmaninov paid for this doctor but the result was that he did become healthy and he started to write a second piano concerto.

*Extract from Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2*

The music seems to come from the heart; from creation, but not at all from construction. But it's wonderful if you can see from the score how interesting the construction is. The bars I just played form enough material for almost one third of the concerto. This motif will open the first movement [he plays various extracts based on one motif]. Then in the reprise, the culmination of the first movement when the orchestra plays a march, the piano plays the same motif from these five notes. If you don't find these chords you cannot remark on them. Maybe this is good because the music seems as though he brought it from his heart and it immediately goes to yours, and maybe that's what is most important about this music.

*Extract from Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2*

Each movement after the first begins in the same tonality. The concerto is in C minor, so the second movement starts in C minor and modulates into E major [plays extract]. This is the clarinet melody which is very popular I think. It is used in pop songs – Celine Dion sings it. It's probably used in some films: this wonderful, lyrical melody which has some adventures in the second movement [plays extract].

The finale starts in the tonality of the slow movement – E major – and immediately modulates back to C minor [plays extract]. The main theme is very energetic, and the second theme reminds me a little of the second theme of the first movement, with an even more oriental element. At the end of the finale this theme culminates in a big explosion – the most powerful orchestration of all five concerti is No. 2. The only pianist who could cut through the orchestra with his hands and his force was Rachmaninov himself.

### **Sam Burstin**

Nikolai Lugansky performs Rachmaninov's second Piano Concerto with conductor Jukka-Pekka Saraste in Bedford and London on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of April. The programme also includes Rachmaninov's *The Isle of the Dead* and Stravinsky's *The Firebird* Suite.

This month, Nicola Benedetti will be performing the Sibelius Violin Concerto with the orchestra. We spoke to her to find out more about this remarkable piece.

### **Nicola Benedetti**

*Audio Extracts – Sibelius's Violin Concerto*

I remember hearing on the radio or at a live concert, some clip of Sibelius and it was part of the first movement, one particular explosion that is one of the best moments in all violin concertos.

It's much more bleak and there are these huge long lines all the time, and you have to think of a much larger picture than you do with a lot of other violin concertos. In the first movement, you don't really arrive anywhere until the end and you have to transport yourself somewhere for this piece, I think.

For the last few years I was doing stupid amounts of concerts, a lot of travelling and a lot of tours with concerts and a flights everyday, and never being at home. I decided I didn't want to spend the next year doing just that and because I just turned twenty-one this summer I'm really still in a studying phase - well I should be! So I want to continue doing that and I'm planning to take more time out.

My first major London concerts were with the Philharmonia and they have been so nice and so supportive. I've played three major concertos with them over a period of time and a couple of other one-off concerts, and each time they have made me feel like it's a real experience. I think part of it is also because they're interested in continuing working with people throughout their development. I was still really young when I first started playing with them and to play with one of the biggest orchestras in the world was such a new and nerve-wracking thing – it still is today – but three years ago it was even more so. I very much felt that I was being supported and I was amongst friends. I wasn't just being judged and I think it is really unusual for an orchestra that great to be giving off that kind of vibe to a young soloist. Looking at the concerts we're doing in the future, I'm excited to show my progress as I go along.

### **Sam Burstin**

Nicola Benedetti will perform the Sibelius Violin Concerto in Leicester on the 28<sup>th</sup>, Cheltenham on the 29<sup>th</sup>, and London on the 30<sup>th</sup> of April. The programme also includes Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances*.

The Music of Today series continues this month with a portrait of Hans Abrahamsen on the 7<sup>th</sup>, conducted by Andre de Ridder. Entrance is free and un-ticketed.

Philippe Jordan conducts two concerts in London on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>. Featuring piano concertos by Beethoven and Brahms with soloists Lars Vogt and Hélène Grimaud.

We hope you've enjoyed this month's podcast. See you in May for a further look at the Philharmonia's Vienna series and the life and work of the great Gustav Mahler.