

philharmonia orchestra

Lorin Maazel Interview

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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, pummelled 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-focussed. 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.