

## **Podcast 10 – June 2008 - Transcription**

### **Fiona Cornall (Second Violin):**

Hello and welcome to this month's Podcast. My name is Fiona Cornall and I'm a second violinist in the Philharmonia Orchestra. This Month's Podcast is an end of season special and we're starting with the young conductor currently taking the classical music world by storm, Gustavo Dudamel.

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### **David Corkhill (Principal Percussion):**

He's terrifically exciting, he really means it, he's totally committed and he's totally passionate. He understands this music. He knows what it's about.

### **Michael Turner (Viola):**

His sheer enthusiasm for the music is just astonishing.

### **David:**

He's been preparing for this concert for a long time and we've seen it in the diary and we've been preparing for a long time as well. The spring has been coiled several months ago and as it gets closer it gets more and more compressed and at that first downbeat we do all the polite "a very warm welcome to Gustavo Dudamel etc." But then the first downbeat that spring is released.

### **Michael:**

He's got that rare star quality and he has a very clear idea of what he wants and also an incredible musical intelligence. I think he's a phenomenon.

### **Gustavo Dudamel (in rehearsal):**

Slow...oh but it's too piano the last note...[sings]

### **Dudamel (interview):**

I love to be with the Philharmonia Orchestra because they are a great group of musicians. And also they have a beautiful soul. They are so open and we enjoy to make music. I'm very happy to be here.

### **Paul Edmund-Davies (Principal Flute):**

You know sometimes you just wonder when is he going to stop! He's got Duracell Plus right the way through him. He has an incredible amount of energy but it's not just the energy, it's the enthusiasm as well. And that's very infectious.

### **David:**

The Philharmonia Orchestra absolutely gives 100% for any conductor. Now, if we then get 150% back (which we do with him) then we give even more!

**Dudamel (interview):**

They're wonderful musicians and I love to give to the musicians a place where they can be free.

**Dudamel (in rehearsal):**

That's so beautiful the colour. Perfect but don't play the crescendo...[sings]...we try to have something like...[sings]. Maybe a little bit less pressure but a little bit more vibrato in the D flat...[sings]...OK, can we try 1<sup>st</sup> violins this beautiful line, Number 1.

**Maya Iwabuchi (Leader):**

It's kind of daunting having to play for him because he knows exactly what I'm going through and if I'm making a mistake and why. Any technical or musical deficiencies I might have as a violinist he would very well understand I'm sure.

**Dudamel (in rehearsal):**

Number 1, first violins...You know, this is the thing, it's not really a diminuendo. It's only to have more intensity but less sound...[sings]...and then we come back, Can we try bar 3 of 1, directly?

**Michael:**

It's always done from a point of view of real experience so that's great. And he's grown up through the system in Venezuela where he's had to learn the nuts and bolts of how orchestras work. So, for somebody of his age he's got a great grasp of what it is that's required from a conductor. I think he's one of us and we know he's after a great result and I think he's getting a great result.

**Dudamel (in rehearsal):**

The change to the A string, give a little bit more...[gestures using baton].

**Maya (in rehearsal):**

Right well then maybe let's just start on that bow. Sorry about that. I know that I know what you want. So can we just do that?

**Dudamel (in rehearsal):**

Yeh. We'll go up one time, let's try.....no, directly bar 3.

**Dudamel (interview):**

Yeh! You have to think about the music. You have to think about the complete world, the complete universe that is a symphony. Because details of course are important but even more important is the complete line, the complete vision.

**David:**

He's completely aware of the sound everyone is making in the entire orchestra. And in a sense he wants everyone at times to over blow and completely demolish whatever's around because of the history of the piece. He wants it to be terrifying; he wants it to be horrible. Not all art is beautiful and pretty. Some art is really repulsive and he wants this to be a real demonstration of the kinds of things that Shostakovich lived through.

**Dudamel (in rehearsal):**

Great! Let's have more sarcastic displays...[sings]. More band sound...[sings]. But it's not a band to celebrate it's to go to the [gestures a noose]. This accent that we have there we change for a sforzato (sorry Shostakovich)...[sings]. The end of the phrase; Can we this more meno mosso, poco meno? Great. And it's this note; 5 after 27. Give it a little bit more there! So beautiful...a little but more ugly?

**Dudamel (interview):**

And always we have a beautiful connection. I think that from the beginning when I was in the academy and I was conducting and learning with Maestro Dohnányi and also with the musicians of the orchestra was so beautiful. It was immediately a beautiful connection.

**Paul:**

From previous experiences some conductors just literally conduct it through and let the music simply speak for it but he guides us through it and that's the big difference between a conductor who just wants a performance and someone who actually wants an event. It'll be very interesting to see what happens in the concerts but certainly he's got the orchestra in a very energy fuelled feeling.

**Fiona:**

Maestro Dudamel can be seen conducting Brahms' first Piano Concerto with Piotr Anderszewski and Shostakovich's Symphony Number 5 in the Royal Festival Hall on June the 5<sup>th</sup>. He also conducts Dvorak's Violin Concerto with Gil Shaham and Tchaikovsky's 5<sup>th</sup> symphony in Basingstoke on the 7<sup>th</sup> and in London on the 8<sup>th</sup> June.

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**Fiona:**

The Philharmonia promotes new music through the Music of Today series. These free performances take place in the Royal Festival Hall at 6pm before the main evening performance. The Music of Today concert in June showcases three up and coming composers. We spoke to the people involved in the concert to find out more.

**Mark van de Wiel (Joint Principal Clarinet):**

The music of today series consists of concerts which take place in the Royal Festival Hall before a concert by the full orchestra. It's particularly nice for us I think to be doing these concerts. I think we play better if we play a wide range of music because our experience with symphonic music and classical music feeds into the sounds we make with the contemporary repertoire. On the other hand, working on this challenging contemporary repertoire I think helps our skills in the main concert with the orchestra as well, and I think probably with same thing applies to the audiences. I think you probably listen in a very interesting way maybe to the evening concert if you've just had the filter of something a little more adventurous or unusual at 6 o' clock beforehand. Julian Anderson has often arranged it that the June concert consists of music by young composers. I think originally it was by people that he was teaching.

**Julian Anderson:**

This year the idea was – let’s take a fixed group of about ten players and one soloist for each of the three pieces but it’ll be a different one [for each]. So we’ve got a double bassist and a clarinetist and a horn player and each of them take their turns to be solo and then they go back into the group for the other two pieces and play in the ensemble. This is the great virtue of working with fabulous players like those in the Philharmonia Orchestra. They will really collaborate with composers, they like working with composers, they like exploring their instruments, exploring new sounds, new possibilities. So we’ve been doing that. I’ve been looking very closely at the scores at every stage of their compilation to try and help the composers in terms of making them realise what’s the best way of writing down what they want to hear because there’s this paradox; you’re having to write down on paper something which is actually not on paper. When you finally hear it it’s a sound.

**Akiko Ogawa:**

Everybody has been really, really helpful throughout my composition process, especially Mark actually because I kept on emailing him and asking him whether this is possible or this is not. Everybody’s been really helpful.

**Mark:**

We’ve been very involved with the composers. We each had a workshop with all three of them. Now that that’s happened we’re working with them, talking to them on the phone, obviously from time to time I’m getting emails – “Does this trill work? How should I write this? Is this a good effect? etc. etc.”

**Akiko:**

I feel that it’s been the best experience that I’ve ever had because I got to work with real performers and I knew who I was writing for. It really did help.

**Julian:**

We’ve had lovely workshops with the ensemble, soloists and Baldur Brönnimann, the conductor. And the atmosphere is one of really happy collaboration. I’ve been delighted with what the composers have written, I think we’ve three very exciting new pieces coming up and I think this is a very good bunch this year and we’re going to get some very exciting stuff happening. So I hope people can come along.

**Fiona:**

The Music of Today concert takes place at 6pm in the Royal Festival Hall on June the 5<sup>th</sup>. The programme features the world première of three newly commissioned works by Akiko Ogawa, Trystan Rhys Williams and Steve Potter, conducted by Baldur Brönnimann and presented by Julian Anderson. The concert is free and un-ticketed, so do join us!

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**Fiona:**

At the opposite end of the orchestral spectrum, the Philharmonia will be performing two concerts in June revisiting the Golden Age of Hollywood with Broadway star Kim

Criswell at De Montfort Hall in Leicester on the 18<sup>th</sup> and Bedford Corn Exchange on the 19<sup>th</sup>. John Wilson conducts the orchestra in our *Songbirds of the Silver Screen* programmes, featuring music made famous by Judy Garland, Julie Andrews and more...

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**Fiona:**

Also coming up in June the Philharmonia Orchestra will perform all four Brahms Symphonies in two concerts with Maestro Lorin Maazel. My favourite Brahms Symphony is No. 4 but my some of my colleagues have different opinions – we got them together to find out what they think.

**Gordon Hunt (Joint Principal Oboe):**

Well I think as an oboist Brahms would have a special place in any players' heart really, but perhaps of all the symphonies, number one has the most delicious solos to play. It's the one I met first when I was a kid, really unexpectedly actually, playing first oboe having never seen it before in a summer school orchestra, and of course I was absolutely bowled over, and I haven't stopped being bowled over by it, I still love it, I still love playing it. I think it's so beautifully written for the instrument, for a start the solo in the slow introduction, with this sort of cross between six eight which it's written in and three four which it sounds like. It immediately is so clever at the same time as being beautiful.

**David Corkhill (Principal Percussion):**

Like Gordon, I first encountered my first Brahms symphony, which was the second symphony, when I was a student. I just love the way that Brahms structures his pieces. It's so lucidly clear what he's trying to say. The material itself is very compact. The very first three notes, this D, C sharp, D in the cellos and basses which comes back time and time again, and even at the beginning of the last movement it's the same three notes. His economy of material is extraordinary, which is typical of the Austro-German school of Beethoven of course, but I just love the way he just focuses everything on important, essential material and discards anything that's not important.

But at the same time as this kind of very structured way of working which could be boring I guess, he nevertheless has this fantastic sense of pace, and keeping you waiting. And it kind grinds on quite slowly to begin with: the horns and the horns again in different keys, and then there's kind of a descending thing in the strings and a little timpani roll, and this wonderfully creepy rather threatening trombone moment...

**Christian (Principal Bass Trombone):**

Yes, brilliant brass chorale.

**David:**

Extraordinary. I mean it really gives you the shivers. Totally out of nowhere. And then this hemiola and then this ravishing first violin melody which you've been waiting for ever since the piece began.

**Maya Iwabuchi (Leader):**

Well, as opposed to you two, the third symphony was the last Brahms symphony that came to me and I'm not quite sure why that it. I don't think we play it as often as the other symphonies because of the quiet ending – nothing more profound than that.

What's incredible about this work I find is the depth of emotion that comes out of the writing, and pain and pathos that comes out of the writing. Yet somehow there's redemption in the end; in the last movement at the very end. I think you travel through a very, very deeply felt experience or journey and you end up in this place where you find peace at last. And I think that's something, as one gets older, which is an important experience to have and to attain.

**Christian:**

Coming full-circle now, from the four of us! The Brahms fourth symphony was the first of the Brahms symphonies that I came across in the National Youth Orchestra conducted by Christopher Seaman. And I had a fantastic time performing it with him.

The first movement especially for me; there's something in the very mellifluous writing of Brahms' music that really appeals to me. It feels completely natural. In fact, I'd go as far as to say that it feels like the most natural thing in the world. The first movement of Brahms' Fourth Symphony – this might be a bit controversial – but also the first movement of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony I find to be one of the most organic, perfectly structured pieces of music ever. In the way that it climaxes at a certain point and it builds towards that in a very natural way and then dies away again.

And I feel that, not just with the first movement but if one were to take the symphony as a whole it's like a complete journey. Not that the other three symphonies aren't but there's something about the Fourth Symphony that leaves me personally with an enormous sense of satisfaction. It's wonderful and I absolutely adore it.

Now, of course, the fourth movement is the movement that we feature in on the trombones and out of all the chorale passages that Brahms gives us I would say that this is the best one.

**Fiona:**

As well all the Symphonies we'll also be performing a second concert on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June which includes Brahms' Requiem, so do join us if you can.

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**Fiona:**

As part of the Vaughan Williams series of concerts, Richard Hickox conducts two semi-staged performances of the opera *The Pilgrim's Progress*. We spoke to Richard Hickox to find out more.

**Richard Hickox:**

if you take forty years to write a piece and to finish a piece there are going to be all sorts of experiences that are going to come into that work, so it was incredible struggle for him but when it came out, boy it's fantastic.

It had the most difficult birth of any piece by any composer I can think of. I'm not sure Vaughan Williams ever really thought it would be performed. Although I think it's incredible music and I think the performance as a whole, rather the work as a whole, has an incredible impact as a performance. There are very different styles in the opera, which make great contrast, but you can tell for example at the beginning of act 4 was the very first thing that he wrote. It's written in a very spare style: very small instrumentation. I think act 1 is quite incredible and absolutely through-composed.

It has, unfortunately, a chequered performance history, and the first performance at Covent Garden wasn't good, it was thrown on really with a very amateur looking production and it was savaged. And then three years later it was produced by E.J Dent at the Arts Theatre in Cambridge and it was a massive success.

I've just conducted it in the Sydney Opera House, it was the Australian premiere, and it ended with a standing ovation. And that's the kind of response this piece has.

But it has huge logistical problems, and I think there are 37 solo roles which you can double-up a bit but you need 20-25 singers. But that's a big cast.

I've just returned from Australia and looked at the plans which the designer has done which are very exciting. In Sadler's Wells the orchestra will be on stage so it will be a semi-staged concert performance. He's designed the most incredible set which features the orchestra at the front of the stage, with the chorus going immensely high, and then there are various walkways through the orchestra, around the orchestra and above the orchestra.

Because it's probably a once or twice-in-a-lifetime opportunity to come and hear a really great work, with the Philharmonia Orchestra with 25 soloists and a chorus in fantastic music. And it's such a colossal undertaking to put this piece on, that it's very unlikely to be done in London again until the next anniversary. And it is a spiritual and radiant experience that you'll never forget.

**Fiona:**

The Philharmonia Orchestra performs a semi-staged production of Vaughan Williams' *The Pilgrim's Progress* at Sadler's Wells theatre on Friday the 20<sup>th</sup> of June at 7.30pm, and a matinee performance on Sunday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June starting at 4pm.

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**Fiona:**

This is our last Podcast of the series, but we'll be back in September. The orchestra starts another fantastic series of concerts and Esa-Pekka Salonen begins as Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor.

We hope you've enjoyed the podcasts and hope to see you again on September 1<sup>st</sup>. In the mean time, do keep in touch with the Philharmonia over the summer and let us know what you'd like to see next season. Thanks for watching!