

Podcast Transcription – Sep 2007

Podcast Tour Guide:

- Emily Davis: 2nd Violinist of the Philharmonia Orchestra

[Emily Davis]

Welcome to the Philharmonia Orchestras first video Podcast.

Coming up, we'll be looking at the refurbished Royal Festival Hall, and what it means for us to be back here, as well as taking a whistle-stop tour of Beethoven's 9th Symphony. But first, we've got an interview with conductor Christoph von Dohnányi

[Christoph von Dohnányi]

I was still a kid when the war was over and consequently missed about five years of making music. We didn't deal with music so much then, we dealt with bombs. I finished school early at the age of sixteen in 1946, right after the war and had to decide my next move in life. I was in between and decided to study, and so I studied. I studied Law for two years before I realised I wanted to pursue a career in music which I found to be very hard in the beginning."

It is pretty difficult to find the original intention of a Classical composer nearly 200 years later, and as a result, a lot of research is required into the times, reading and dealing with the art of these days. Once you have performed a piece of music many times, you should under no circumstances think you know it. I am very stubborn in going back, viewing the piece as if I had no knowledge of it. I apply this approach to every programme that I do, even if I have done a piece many times, it is not a matter of knowing the notes or the dynamics, it is the matter of what do I do with the piece, and what is the composer asking me to do?"

[Christoph von Dohnányi]

The Conductor and the Artist are very important assets, but let's face it; in the days of Beethoven, Beethoven played his own compositions if he performed at a concert and did not perform a Mozart recital. Similarly, Mozart performed his own pieces. He knew Haydn and Bach, but the best days of music were the days when the composer performed his own music.

It is a wonderful experience to communicate with young musicians and composers wherever you are. I like to conduct student orchestras and things like that, to find out how young people think. I believe this is important because to keep music alive, you have to deal with the young ones.

I have a certain sound in my head that I want the orchestra to achieve. They must accomplish this sound and I don't care how they do it, as long as it sounds right.

[Emily Davis]

This season is our first in the newly refurbished Royal Festival Hall, having spent the past eighteen months next door. The painstaking renovation program involved removing every part of the hall before re-fitting with some subtle improvements for a twenty-first century audience.

These seats for example, are 1951 originals but reupholstered and repaired with much more legroom.

Earlier I spoke to the Philharmonia's managing director David Whelton.

[David Whelton]

Well, I think it is an iconic building, it is the situation it finds itself in on the Thames that makes it most remarkable. I think that this refurbishment, this rebuilding, certainly on the outside, has actually brought that once more into focus. The hall is now re-connected with the river. It looks absolutely magnificent.

[Gillian Moore]

Well if you come into the Royal Festival Hall you might think "*I wonder what all the fuss is about?*" because so much has not changed. The reason it has not changed is because this is a great architectural building, it is a grade 1 listed building.

[David Whelton]

This building was built in the Arts and Crafts tradition of 1951, so you can now really appreciate the care and the thought that went into the design of this building, the natural materials which were used and the emphasis of relating it to the external environment. These things are now here back for all of us to see; it is a huge pleasure to come here.

[Gillian Moore]

What we have been able to do in the foyers is make it much more transparent, restoring all the space that had been changed over the years and restore it back to its original, beautiful, light transparency. So a lot of shops have gone from the foyers, a lot of the office spaces are gone, and you have got 35% more public space. The key change however, is of course, in the acoustic which had been seen as the big problem of the Royal Festival Hall. The acoustician Larry Kirkegaard has worked for two years to make it more resonant.

When the Festival Hall was built, I think the acousticians then were frightened that it was going to be too resonant, so they filled a lot of the gaps with absorbent materials.

[Emily Davis]

It is a lot warmer, more responsive and actually clearer. We can hear a lot more of what is going on around the orchestra in the different parts.

[David Whelton]

It is much better and we are still finding out how to get the best out of the hall. Although having said that, when you have experienced conductors come in, it just sounds great.

[Gillian Moore]

A very important part of the reopening of the Royal Festival Hall was the idea that we were welcoming back our resident orchestras. All of the orchestras took part in what we call the 'Overture Weekend', which was a whole weekend of free music and events. We had 250,000 people visiting. The Philharmonia was very much part of that, indeed they played a performance of the last movement of Beethoven's 9th Symphony with 1500 singers.

[David Whelton]

We always had in our mind "*How were we going to open the Festival hall with Christoph von Dohnányi?*" For me, it was always going to be Beethoven's 9th, why? Because it was one of the great works which opened this hall, it is a work with which the Philharmonia is incredibly closely associated through Otto Klemperer and Herbert von Karajan, and it is a work that Christoph is very closely associated and does better than anybody.

[Gillian Moore]

They are of course going to open their season in October 2007, with Beethoven's 9th, conducted by Dohnányi. There is no better piece to symbolise all the values that we are working towards together.

[Emily Davis]

Well it is very special, particularly now that the whole of Southbank has been rejuvenated with the restaurants and the bars; there is a real buzz here that is very exciting to come to work to, especially with the fantastic London Eye and the river skyline. It is a great place to come. We are very lucky.

[Emily Davis]

Across this series of Podcasts, we will be presenting listening guides to pieces we will be playing. Our opening concert in the Royal Festival Hall includes Beethoven's 9th Symphony. Here is Luke Crookes with some things to listen out for.

[Luke Crooks]

A symphony is an orchestral piece of music normally in 4 separate sections, called movements. It's a bit like going for a four-course meal but in the case of Beethoven's 9th Symphony, it's a feast. I'm going to pick out some of my favourite parts of the piece for you, starting with the first movement.

Our first course or movement uses this rhythm (right) repeatedly throughout. I think Beethoven does this to bring a sense of drama and tension so that the

listener wonders “what’s going to happen? Where’s this piece of music going to go?” When listening to the first movement see if you can hear how many times Beethoven uses this rhythm, not only in the melody but also in the accompanying parts. In the second movement Beethoven also uses rhythm as a dominant force. This time Beethoven also attaches it to a melody and uses it in the style of a fugue. This means he begins the theme in one of the orchestral sections and once it’s running he begins exactly the same thing in another section. See if you can hear, as it enters each section.

The third movement is slow, which is a welcome change after the heavy first movement and the quick second movement. I think it’s beautifully romantic and one favourite bit of mine is in bar 25. The time changes to 3 time and the strings enter with a beautiful lilting melody.

In the monumental 4th movement Beethoven does something never done before in a symphonic work – not only does he have full orchestra but also adds 4 solo singers and a full choir – the effect is magnificent. Beethoven used one of his favourite poems by Schiller for the text of the vocal parts. The poem “To Joy” celebrates the idea of brotherhood and equality amongst men. The resulting “Ode to Joy” is one of the most famous pieces of the classical music repertoire and simply exhilarating to experience in the concert hall. My absolute favourite part in the fourth movement is when the orchestra is going at full tilt, but not only that - so are the choir and solo singers. These examples are just my choice – I’m sure you’ll develop your own - but I hope you enjoy listening to Beethoven’s 9th symphony.

[Emily Davis]

You can see us perform Beethoven’s 9th Symphony in the Royal Festival Hall on the 25th of September, as well as performances at the Anvil in Basingstoke on the 22nd of September and in Vienna on the 30th of September as part of our week-long residency at the Musikverein.

Our season opening with Maestro von Dohnányi also includes concerts at De Montfort Hall in Leicester on the 18th of September and the Corn Exchange in Bedford on the 19th of September, as well as a performance of Strauss’s Ein Heldenleben at the Royal Festival Hall on Thursday the 4th of October.

For more information on all these concerts and to book tickets for London, call Free-Phone: **0800 652 6717** or visit: www.philharmonia.co.uk

We hope you have enjoyed this Podcast, our first in the series of six. You can see longer versions of some of the features in this Podcast via the website www.philharmonia.co.uk, where you can also book tickets and find out some more about the orchestra.

Our next Podcast will be released at the end of September and you can subscribe to the series via the Philharmonia website or iTunes.

We look forward to seeing you soon.

