

JANUARY VIDEO PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Julian Milone, Second Violin, Philharmonia Orchestra:

Hello, and welcome to the Philharmonia Orchestra video podcast. In this month's podcast we speak to conductor Vladimir Ashkenazy, look at our forthcoming Messiaen concerts and join the Philharmonia's Creative Orchestra.

January sees the return of our Conductor Laureate Vladimir Ashkenazy for three concerts with pianist Evgeny Kissin. Principal cellist David Cohen met with Maestro Ashkenazy to find out how he made the transition from concert pianist to conductor.

David Cohen, Joint Principal Cellist, Philharmonia Orchestra:

Maestro Ashkenazy, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to me between rehearsals. I would like to talk to you about our next projects with the Philharmonia Orchestra.

Vladimir Ashkenazy, Conductor Laureate of the Philharmonia Orchestra:

A pleasure.

David Cohen:

I wanted to start off by asking you about the way you see your relationship with the Philharmonia Orchestra.

Vladimir Ashkenazy:

Well it's one of the best orchestras in the world, so for me it is a great privilege to stand in front of such good players. It is a great pleasure to be here because I know at least we will have 'very good' performances, and sometimes if I do 'quite well', then even great performances!

My first believably strong love for music was connected to the symphony orchestra. The first time I heard a Symphony Orchestra, I was absolutely blown over! I thought it was the most incredible, most wonderful thing that ever happened to me and ever will happen to me. I spent all of my pocket money on orchestral concerts in the Moscow Conservatory and learnt a lot of repertoire, but I never, ever dreamt of conducting.

My father-in-law (my wife's father) had an amateur orchestra in London, and he asked me if I would like to try conducting the *Corilian* Overture. I said I would love to, but how do you do the first C? He said it is very simple, you just do this (waves baton). He did something, but I couldn't imitate him. So I came and conducted the Overture (it was pretty awful from me) but some things I thought I did sort of musically well and I enjoyed some sounds. Then one day, my mother said "why don't you conduct in England?" So I conducted the Liverpool Orchestra once, and then the Philharmonia came up, and I said "well" (nervous laughter), "I'm too nervous". So I did it, and I did one for Tchaikovsky. A one-hour piece! The orchestra did everything they could to play well for me. They were so nice, just like now! I conducted the *Manfred Symphony* by Tchaikovsky in the Royal Festival Hall and we had good reviews, can you imagine!

After the second concert (which was a repeat) I invited the orchestra out, offered them a drink, and I will never forget that I took some players around and I said "Come! Come! Come here I want to ask you something!" And I said "be honest with me it is really difficult to play with him because I don't really know how to conduct" and he said "yes it was sort of difficult but we like what you are trying to do. We like your music making. Please come back, we would love to play with you again. You will learn this – we love the music you are making!" I nearly cried you know, it was so nice of him and they were absolutely honest and they encouraged me, so I always came back to the Philharmonia.

David Cohen:

Coming back to the concerts we are going to be doing together with Evgeny Kissin, what is it like for you to conduct a young pianist like Kissin?

Vladimir Ashkenazy:

Evgeny Kissin – actually I call him Zhene, that's the diminutive in Russian - we are very good friends, and I have conducted for him many times and he very often asks for me and I am very pleased that he does. Well of course I know the piano repertoire like few people you know (laughs), and so he knows that at least I do a good job for him, and sometimes very good. So we have a very good relationship in that sense. He wanted to record Prokofiev Concertos No.2 and No. 3 and he wanted me to conduct, and naturally he came to us, to the Philharmonia Orchestra.

Sometimes I'm listening to him in the cadenza or somewhere else and he plays so well I might forget to give a beat (laughs). I'm only joking, I don't think I will forget! But I enjoy it very much; I just wanted to say that I enjoy it very much because he is a tremendous pianist.

David Cohen:

As far as I'm concerned, I think that when you come and conduct the Philharmonia and when we have soloists I think they are very lucky to come and have an orchestra like the Philharmonia but also have you supporting them, making a really special performance every time that we perform.

Vladimir Ashkenazy:

But you know, when somebody plays well, you have nothing to do: just follow. Because it's so good, and when something is not so good you can say "how about doing this or doing that". But in your case, it's just – you are there, everything is fine, just be a part of it.

Julian Milone:

You can see Maestro Ashkenazy with Evgeny Kissin in London and Birmingham on the 17th, 22nd and 24th January.

As well as performing in concerts, Philharmonia Orchestra players can be found around the country working with young musicians in schools and in the community. In February and April we'll be in Bedford, Bristol and Leicester working with musicians to make our Creative Orchestra: a new ensemble of young musicians, performing on any instruments in any style from heavy metal to jazz. Here's just a taste of what last year's Creative Orchestra sounded like...

Creative Orchestra clip

Tim Steiner, Workshop Leader:

I got involved in Creative Orchestra from a long-term relationship with the Philharmonia, when I began, quite a while ago, using orchestral and classical resources in a non-orchestral and non-classical background.

Pete Fry, Percussionist, Philharmonia Orchestra:

Well it's different in many ways because a lot of the kids there had a smattering of music experience, in fact some of them are really quite good at their instruments.

Creative Orchestra attendees:

I play drum kit and percussion.

Violin and viola and clarinet.

Heavy metal.

Tim Steiner:

I wanted it to become a real sense of being a proper orchestra, so with this an orchestra made up of whoever wanted to be a part of it, and so people aren't excluded because they don't play an orchestral instrument or because they can't read music. Conversely, we actively want people who don't read music and who don't have an orchestral background and know nothing about orchestral music and don't play in large bands. And to get them playing in a large band to create something that's new and quite unique.

Creative Orchestra attendee:

We've got some awesome people to play instruments!

Cameraman:

We've got Omar on cello, and we've got Anne on Bass.

Creative Orchestra attendee:

It's like you've got adults helping children but in fact sometimes the children make up what we play.

Cameraman:

So it's not all Tim then?

Creative Orchestra attendee:

No it's not all Tim. Tim does nothing!

Pete Fry:

Everyone had a role to play and Tim likes his rock and roll and there were a few guitarists there, so he was really focused on them and he was able to speak their language and work out riffs for them that they could play and get involved in and make a musical difference with. I mean we just really got the ball rolling and it was really quite a funky concert! It was great! And again, everyone came away buzzing; especially the parents!

Julian Milone:

If you live in Bedford, Bristol or Leicester and are interested in signing up, please visit www.creativeorchestra.co.uk. It's completely free to take part.

Julian Milone briefly plays the piano

Also in February we start our celebration of composer Olivier Messiaen, with his epic *Turangalila-symphonie* and *Oiseaux Exotiques*. For me, Messiaen is one of the great composers of the twentieth century. His music is truly original and his style remained constant throughout his life, never bowing to fashions of the day. I spoke to some of my colleagues in the orchestra to find out what it is about Messiaen that makes these pieces quite extraordinary.

Alistair Mackie, Co-principal Trumpet, Philharmonia Orchestra:

It's music that is not regularly played and it should be played. It is tremendously exciting, vibrant, melodic modern music. And it is really quite unique and an experience like *Turangalila-symphonie* I don't think can be equalled.

Eleanor Wilkinson, First Violin, Philharmonia Orchestra:

For me, Messiaen's music is very special. I mean he is one of my favourite composers!

Maya Iwabuchi, No.2 First Violin, Philharmonia Orchestra:

It really opens up your senses; you kind of go beyond your five senses in a concert with Messiaen.

Eleanor Wilkinson:

It will also be interesting just to hear all the different birds and you know, studying what it's about a bit, and reading about it and also for me, I just love the harmonies. Just basically what it is about for me makes it very alive and a pleasure to listen to.

Alistair Mackie:

Turangalila on the 7th February is one of the highlights for me of this season. If you have never heard the piece I can guarantee you a tremendous experience.

Julian Milone:

Also this month, don't miss out on performances of Sibelius' Second Symphony under conductor Paavo Järvi with concerto performances from pianist Hélène Grimaud and cellist Steven Isserlis. Performances take place in Canterbury on the 30th, London's Royal Festival Hall on the 31st, Croydon on the 29th, Cheltenham on the 1st February, Bedford on the 2nd and Leicester on the 3rd. Esa-Pekka Salonen conducts performances of Messiaen's *Turangalila-symphonie* on the 6th February in Basingstoke, the 7th at the Royal Festival Hall in London and the 15th in Southend-on-Sea.

Finally, don't forget to look at our new online shop. Why not prepare for some of our concerts in the spring with Sir Charles Mackerras by downloading some of his concerts.

Thanks for watching, and tune in next month for a Messiaen special!