

# philharmonia orchestra

## **4 September 2009 – Podcast Transcription**

### **Vladimir Ashkenazy**

I left Russia when I was 26, it's quite young to leave your country and face the world but I had been to the West before, so in a way I was prepared for a different world. But it's one thing to go to the West as a visitor and another thing to stay there as a resident.

The fact that you are suddenly your own master – not in Russia, you are not your own master, just a cog in a huge wheel – then you come to the West and you see that you have to decide for yourself on everything, practically everything... But I was lucky in the sense that I had been to the West before, and secondly, more importantly, my wife is a Westerner – her help is beyond valuation.

I never thought I would conduct ever, I thought it was much too complicated, and why should I do it! All of my time is consumed by my piano playing because I have to practise so much, concerts and everything, I'll never be able to conduct, but it came little by little, bit by bit.

For me, when I started to conduct, making music with the orchestra was very difficult: because I wasn't a professional conductor I had to learn how to communicate. But being a part of that music was natural for me. It took some time for me to be comfortable in front of an orchestra, but eventually, I'm now as comfortable as one can be.

I'm very fond of both Rachmaninov and Shostakovich - I met Shostakovich a couple of times actually, I was there at the first performances of a lot of his music – the Tenth Symphony, Eleventh Symphony, First Cello Concerto, very interesting – he was a wonderful person, not only a great musician, a great composer. He had a very difficult life in the Soviet Union because he was censored by the authorities, but he managed to create great music.

I love English music, I've done it quite a lot, and I'm very fond of a lot of British music, a lot of composers. I look forward very much to doing Elgar 1 with the Philharmonia Orchestra. I've conducted this orchestra for so many years and all the time I've said I would like to do Elgar with you, why don't you do it – well I ask for it and it's given to someone else, finally after so many years I am given Elgar 1, I can't wait. I've done it many times with other orchestras, but never a London orchestra, so finally... and they know it so well it will be so easy to rehearse.

Nothing can be compared to a live performance because you have to give now, at this point, everything you have; and nobody is perfect, you can't do everything as you envisioned, prepared, but you do your best and hope for the best. I manage sometimes to play quite well!

It's a very difficult life, a very hard life, an exposed life – I never thought I would become a professional conductor, but here you are! I became a professional conductor. I can't wish for a better life.