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David Cohen: *Joint Principal Cellist of the 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: *Philharmonia Conductor Laureate*

Yes

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 is 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 very 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 to listen to a symphony orchestra. 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 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, and 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, offering 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 was going 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
Evgeny Kissin

Vladimir Ashkenazy

Evgeny Kissin est le plus jeune à la direction en Russie. We are very good friends, and I have conducted for him many many many times and he very often asks for me and I am 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 **report** two Prokofiev Concertos No.2 and he wanted in conducted and naturally came to us, to the Philharmonia Orchestra.

Sometimes I'm listening **to him in the cadenza 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. It is a very creative relationship – I enjoy conducting for him very much.

David Cohen

I think that Kissin is very lucky to basically come and have an orchestra like the Philharmonia, but also have you supporting him in making a really special performance every time that we perform.

Vladimir Ashkenazy

You know, when somebody plays well, you have nothing to worry about. Just follow you know, it's so good you don't need to know anything. When something is not so good you say "how about doing this or doing that", but in Evgeny Kissin's case it's just – you're there and everything is fine and just be a part of it.