

## **Sir Charles Mackerras Interview**

### **Paul Edmond-Davies – Joint Principal Flute**

Sir Charles, this is a rather unusual moment for an instrumentalist because even though we have worked since the beginning of the 1980s together, we don't really or haven't had the opportunity to talk to one another in this kind of manner, so I'm very interested to ask you a whole load of questions. I didn't realise that you actually started off as an oboist.

### **Sir Charles Mackerras – Principal Guest Conductor**

Well I even started off as a flautist.

### **Paul Edmond-Davies**

That's right, yes. But you saw the light.

### **Sir Charles Mackerras**

But my first non- keyboard instrument was actually the flute but then I read that there was a great shortage of oboe, bassoon and horn players and that there were scholarships going at the Sydney Conservatorium to study those three wind instruments and so I thought, well it would be nice to play the oboe. So I switched from the flute to the oboe, but my chance really came when I joined the Sadler's Wells Opera as 2nd oboe and cor anglais on tour, but also I was doing repeteuring, teaching the singers their role and doing a bit of off-stage conducting. In those days they didn't have television monitors and things to help to keep you together with the off stage chorus' but there was the intermediate conductor, that was me, who looked through a whole in the scenery and looked at the main conductor in the pit and followed him.

It was during this time that I got to know this gentleman. I had just bought a score of the Dvorak D minor Symphony in a shop in Kensington and I was studying this while drinking a cup of coffee in a cafe and this man opposite me says "Oh, I see you are studying the music of my country!" So we got into a conversation and I tried to tell him of my ambitions of becoming a conductor and all that, he said "You should go to Prague and study with Vratislav Talik". And he said "As a matter of fact I've just come from a meeting for 6 British students to go to Prague to study and 6 Czech students to come to England." The reaction against the Nazi occupation was the Russians and the Communists and my wife and I were in Prague as the Communists took over. We couldn't really stay with the communists there so we went and I went back to Sadler's Wells and that's where I started my conducting.

**Paul Edmond-Davies**

I think I'm right in saying that you started your relationship with the Philharmonia Orchestra in 1955, so can you tell us a little bit about your first experience with the orchestra.

**Sir Charles Mackerras**

I got to know Walter Legge, who was of course the famous founder of the orchestra and he took a certain interest in me. At that time the people who were conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra all the time, particularly in recordings, were Giulini and Klemperer. Both of whom suffered a lot of ill health, so they were always planning, Legge was always planning to do recordings with them and suddenly they were ill. And at very short notice he was always getting me to come in and take the sessions, which is how it happened that so many of, there's so much light music which I recorded with the Philharmonia in the old days, which came from that fact that Klemperer and Giulini were constantly backing out, suddenly cancelling at very short notice. And I used to go in and conduct, not the same repertoire as they were supposed to do like the Verdi *Requiem* or Beethoven Symphonies or something but always light music.

**Paul Edmond-Davies**

What are your plans for the future with the Philharmonia?

**Sir Charles Mackerras**

I've got concerts in October which are built around the two Dvorak Symphonies, one of those being the historic Dvorak 7th Symphony, which changed my life and made me into a Czech specialist.