

A MEETING WITH THE MAESTRO

VASILY PETRENKO THE BACKGROUND

Vasily Petrenko (VP) was born in St. Petersburg in 1976, coming from the same city and tradition as the great Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich, his birth being almost exactly one year after Shostakovich's death. Beginning his music education at the St. Petersburg Capella Boys Music School (the oldest music school in Russia) at the age of seven, VP studied conducting under Ravil Martynov, learning from influential figures such as Mariss Jansons and Yuri Temirkanov, and going on to win a number of conducting competitions in countries including Russia and Spain.

VP was appointed chief conductor of the State Academy of St Petersburg in 1994 and since then has gone on to work with many of the world's most prestigious orchestras including the London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia, Russian National Orchestra, Orchestre National de France, Czech Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the San Francisco, Boston and Chicago Symphony Orchestras. Equally at home in the opera house, and with over thirty operas in his repertoire, Petrenko made his debuts in 2010 at Glyndebourne Festival Opera (Macbeth) and the Opera de Paris (Eugene Onegin). He has made a number of notable recordings including Beethoven and Shostakovich Symphonies, and his concerts regularly receive highly starred [reviews](#).

Now Chief Conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and the EUYO (since 2015), EUYO Communications Assistant Rebecca Humphrey caught up with him last month between tours for a quick interview ...

INTERVIEW

Rebecca Humphrey (RH): You were appointed Chief Conductor of the EUYO last year, with your first concerts in that position this last summer. Meanwhile you have a really flourishing career around the world. What was the moment when you thought about the EUYO, 'this would be an interesting next move', and why did you want to do it?

VP: Having conducted the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain and United Kingdom, and EUYO in 2008,



Vasily Conducting EUYO in Bolzano, Summer Tour 2014

it felt like a natural step. Working with youngsters has been one of my priorities for many years and it's so exciting to see a group of extremely talented musicians transforming into a great orchestra within just a few days! Its great achievements, amazing energy and freshness and their open minds is what makes EUYO so unique. Most of all, it is such a joy to see young musicians from so many different countries working together for their future and for the future of classical music!

RH: As chief conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, you divide much of your year between these two places as well as being with the EUYO and with guest orchestras. How different are the Liverpool and Oslo orchestras, both musically and in the way in which they operate (including their audiences)?

VP: Of course, they are different – any orchestra reflects the mentality of the place it is based, and the mentality of Norway and North West England vary greatly. In England, the rehearsals and performances might be more structured, in Oslo, the mentality is a little more closed so the rehearsals might feel more private. English players are very quick to launch into learning something new, but they might want to move onto the next piece after some time. In Oslo, the musicians tend to take time to think more deeply about each piece. But what unites the two orchestras is a willingness to work hard, progress and improve and to perform and inspire audiences. There is also an amazing atmosphere in both orchestras - a lot of warmth and friendship, good humour and closeness. It is always great fun to be with both orchestras!

RH: You have recently become Liverpool Citizen of Honour. What does this mean to you?

VP: This is great recognition of RLPO, of our work and role in the cultural life in Liverpool and abroad. I always feel



Photo credit Mark McNulty

that any award is a success of the team, and I couldn't have received it without them! I actually reside in Liverpool now and it's great to live in such a creative and vibrant city; there is so much happening culturally, and you see it at the weekends with live music everywhere and everyone becoming involved. The people are also incredibly warm and friendly – they will speak to you about their day and are very open with their emotions. It is wonderful to feel so welcomed by the place in which you live.

RH: You travel extensively, with performances lined up in the spring with the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal in La Maison Symphonique, and with the Oslo Philharmonic in Hong Kong Cultural Centre: Concert Hall. How do you find the lifestyle of the touring musician?

VP: That's the life of the modern conductor, performing every night in different cities with different orchestras. Every day is different - new emotions, new pieces, and it takes many hours to prepare for each concert and then it's over and you move onto the next city. It does require lots of hard work but it's very exciting to be moving so quickly and to get to know the possibilities of each orchestra wherever it is I am conducting.

RH: Having studied conducting from a young age, was there a moment that you can look back on and think - that's when I knew I wanted to be a conductor?

VP: It's very difficult to give an exact date, it's a gradual process of understanding what you want in your life. I studied in a very special school in Leningrad, now Saint Petersburg, which produced Choral Conductors by the time you graduate. So, from 7 years old you know that you're going to be a conductor, if you're working hard and lucky enough to finish the school. Throughout the time, I became inspired by my surroundings and developed confidence through competitions. But what I discovered about conducting an orchestra is that there is so much to control and change and be aware of. With a choir, there is just one instrument – the voice. The orchestra can change dramatically in sound and I found that very exciting.

RH: With more aspiring musicians out there than ever before and in a really quite challenging period for employment in many places, what advice do you have for young orchestral musicians?

VP: Love what you do and work very hard. Think of the larger picture and where you see yourself in five or ten years' time and what you need to do now to get there. If you are really in love with your profession, you can work all hours of the day and improve yourself constantly – there simply is no other road to success.

“Petrenko stamped his authority all over the work: a fine sense of lyrical line matched the clarity of structure, but most deeply engaging was his control of the changing mood and temperature. Manic, ecstatic, passionate, tender, urgent: Petrenko brought a core integrity and logic to Mahler’s outpouring of music.”

- *Rian Evans, The Guardian*

Vasily’s performance is[...] rich in mood and character, strong in overall conception [...] The lasting impression is of a conductor with an intelligent, informed but deep love of this music.”

- *BBC Music Magazine*



WANT TO HEAR MORE?

You can catch Vasily Petrenko in London, Oslo, Montreal, Hong Kong, San Francisco and also Grafenegg, Austria for the opening concert of the European Union Youth Orchestra’s Summer Tour 2017. See a full list of his upcoming performances [here](#)

#EUYONewsletter



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FEATURED RECORDINGS:



Shostakovich:
Symphony No. 7,
2013



Shostakovich:
Cello Concertos Scriabin,
Symphony 2014 No 3, 4



Scriabin:
Symphony No. 3, 4
2015

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The EUYO is funded with support from the European Union’s Creative Europe programme and from the 28 member governments of the European Union, under the auspices of the International Youth Foundation recognised in the United Kingdom as a charity, Reg. No 281420.
 VAT No GB 2404275 91