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AN INTERVIEW WITH ADRIANO

The conductor Adriano (known by his first name only) first came to international prominence in the 1980s as the dedicated and inspirational conductor of a series on the Marco Polo label. The works featured include music by Respighi (on whom Adriano is one of the world's foremost author ties), Pilati and Strong. His film music discs include scores by Auric, Honegger, Ibert, Bliss, Herrmann, Khachaturian and Waxman.

The interview is Adriano's most extensive, candid and forthright interview to date. In it he challenges our assumptions about the conductor and about music-making. Adriano stands as evidence that there are other routes to the podium than those we traditionally associate with the conductor.

This interview is exclusive to MusicWeb. It was conducted by Rob Barnett by e-mail during December 2001/January 2002.

Can you remind me of your basic biographical details?

I was born on July 10th, 1944; the same year's day as Carl Orff and Marcel Proust, two other artists I admire very much. I was very happy to personally meet Orff in 1973...

Were your parents or family at all musical?

My parents were musical (my mother apparently having a concert diploma and my father playing the violin) but I could never see nor hear at home any proof of that; no piano, no recordings, no concert-going ... For unknown reasons, after their marriage, they had given up music and that is why perhaps I was not allowed to learn it myself. When I told them I wanted to play an instrument my parent's reaction was as if I had asked a thing of which I was not even worthy. The relationship with my parents was a very difficult one: I had not seen them until I was 11 years old. I had grown-up with my grand-parents, to whom I owe my strong will and artistic habits, my need of liberty and my anti-authoritarian attitude towards conventional education systems such as schools. As a boy I knew already that if one wants to learn something, you have to discover it alone and must take possession of it, to keep it for life. This no matter in which domain of art, culture or human aspect. I am aware and proud of the fact that the things I can do best I have learnt without teachers.

Your education...

I had to follow my parent's advice and studied at a technical gymnasium, since I was not allowed to follow a literary direction. My parents did not want me to study Latin and Greek and it was decided that I would become an architect. I had much passion for literature and already at the age of 15 I was reading novels in Italian (my mother-tongue),

German and French, mostly by classic authors or theatrical plays. I identified myself with Cervantes' Don Quixote, this is the book I have read and re-read many times. Later on, after I had learnt English without any lessons at all, I became addicted to Dickens, Wilkie Collins and to Gothic novels. I had also discovered the American author Charles Brockden Brown, whose books remain one of my favourites today.

In that respect you are probably better read than many native English speakers. I am familiar with The Woman in White by Wilkie Collins though I know there are many other substantial novels by Collins. Dickens is well known but not widely read now. Who is Charles Brockden Brown? The other names are familiar.

Brockden Brown (1771-1810) was the first American “Gothic” novelist and also the very first author who had made a profession from his talent. He wrote six very impressive novels, among which “Arthur Mervin” and “Ormond, the Secret Witness” are romances based on the 1793 yellow fever epidemic of Philadelphia. His masterwork “Wieland or the Transformation” is a profound psychological analysis of a man, torn between mysticism and dementia. He is terrorised by an imposter, a ventriloquist, who gradually transforms him into a madman and murderer of his family, after making him hear an apparently supernatural inner voice. Brockden Brown's works are more realistic and moralistic than the works by English Gothic writers. In a way I still don't understand why he is classified in this category. These works are not even set in typical Gothic environments as those by Ann Radcliffe and others. Brown's oeuvre is practically unavailable today. I was lucky enough to find an expensive 6-volume facsimile print of 1970, lacking, alas a critical study on this great author, who was a widely cultured man, interested in politics, medicine, psychology, sciences and detection. I consider him a precursor of Edgar Allan Poe, another master in describing the abysses of the human soul. Another author I like very much is Thomas Preskett Prest (1810-1879), who was a British journalist and musician, besides being the author of various Gothic novels. His “Varney the Vampire” is a congenial Vampire novel, published in 1847, which must have inspired Bram Stoker's “Dracula”. Incidentally, my dream would be to compose a (chamber?) opera based on Stoker's novel, whose libretto I have already drafted. It follows faithfully the original story and style. I hope to be able to accomplish this dream still during this life, but who is going to commission and finance this? I would need a two-year's sabbatical. I think previously composed operas on Vampires from Marschner's “Vampyr” to Robert Moran's “The Dracula Diary” have not come out well, since they are not based on Stoker's masterwork. Only Philip Feeney's ballet “Dracula” has found a subtle way to transpose Stoker to music.

Going back to literature do you know the works of H P Lovecraft – I wondered if those dark fantasies have any echo in the work of fellow American Brockden Brown.

At present I am reading the collected stories of Henry James, but Lovecraft is still on my list of writers to discover. Do you know the gothic novel “Vathek” by William Beckford

and are you familiar with two musical interpretations of the work? There are tone poems by Horatio Parker and a very little known tone poem/ballet by the Portuguese composer Luis de Freitas Branco. Of course I know and have in my library Beckford's "Vathek", together with Walpole's "Castle of Otranto" and Polidori's "The Vampyre". I knew about Horatio Parker's poems, but had no idea about Freitas Branco's work, another composer I admire very much.

I am sorry. That pleasant excursion was my fault. If we can return to your family background...

My father's disillusionment with his son increased after he came to see me as an anti-militarist. He was a professional army instructor and had become later a Swiss military attaché. He had hoped, of course, that I would take this direction too. Last but not least, my parents had to face the fact that I was homosexual. I actually never really suffered, nor even felt sorry for having deluded my parents in such manifold ways. I knew exactly that I was more important and that, as soon I was away from home, I would start to live the way I wanted, since I was firmly decided to become an artist, eventually a dramatic actor. At the age of 20 I realised also that a musician's career from an instrumentalist's side would be quite hopeless, since I had started too late at the Conservatory. I had to finance these studies by myself, by working as an office clerk. Little by little I realised that the narrow-minded teaching methods of the Zurich Conservatory clinched with my tastes, ambitions and my innate impatience to learn as much as possible in short time and only the things I found necessary. I had got a bad reputation at that institution anyway, since I was already composing piano pieces before having basic harmony lessons. But basic knowledge of musical writing had been already learned by myself before entering the Conservatory and I already criticised some old-fashioned notation clichés as, for example, the way vocal parts were written, making them appear out-of-the musical pattern and phrasing since their notes were bound together with beams only if two nearby notes belonged to a same syllable of the singing text (a writing technique I discovered later on that Arthur Honegger was trying to promote). I also enrolled in a piano class and my teacher, Prof. Steinbrecher (which means rockcrusher and quarryman), could not easily crush nor quarry me. I regularly intervened during theory classes with questions which my teachers apparently had never heard before, or which were simply regarded as insolent, such as "why is it forbidden to do this in harmony, why is this piece considered as weak, why a fugue has to end up like this, or how exactly does music reach one's heart, intellect and senses etc. in order that we get excited and creative?" I was the cause of a little scandal when I came into class one evening with the score and a recording of Ives's Fourth Symphony, to prove that to write music is like painting, that its creator is absolutely free to do what he wants as long as he feels it from inside, and that the use of traditional harmony is a very personal matter. That was around 1966, at a time I had already started collecting LPs and discovering my love for Russian music. I must admit to having learned my whole musical culture from LPs not from music teachers, otherwise I would have remained bogged down in German Romanticism. The next scandal I caused was as a result of an audio-visual lecture on Tchaikovsky I had arranged at the Conservatory. It was a kind of multimedia show with music examples, texts and photographic

projections, trying to illustrate Tchaikovsky's life and tragedy as a homosexual. I went so far to say that if Tchaikovsky had not discovered himself as a homosexual, his music would never have embraced such depths. Gosh, was I a militant at that time! The invitation to leave the Zurich Conservatory was decided upon mutual agreement. I felt free again and decided to go on learning largely as an autodidact. I did however convince myself to start taking singing lessons. The two teachers I had were more progressive than many and helped me very much. I remained faithful to them for 8 years, but I never really wanted to become a professional singer. I found this orientation too limited for my more creative nature. At the age of 23 I had pretensions to be involved with music, but had none of the talents nor the technique one needs to become a so-called professional, able to wave about diplomas, master-classes and references. A mentor of mine at that time was Hermann Leeb, a marvellous and highly cultured musician and the head of classical music at Zurich Radio. He gave me a lot of courage and admired my highly personal and passionate way of living music. He introduced me to Ernest Ansermet and to Josef Keilberth without saying to me that he had already guessed that a conducting career would be eventually something to try. Both conductors, whom I deeply admired, allowed me to attend rehearsals and Keilberth was kind enough to even buy extra pocket scores for me before attending his rehearsals with the Basle Symphony. The first classical works I could ever hear and see in a rehearsal were Gluck's "Iphigenie" Overture (the Wagner version) and Max Reger's "Böcklin-Suite" under Keilberth's baton. After these encouraging acquaintances, I also met Paul Sacher, who gave my enthusiasm a first blow when he told me that in my case it were as if I wanted to become a general before having finished my soldier's formation. I went home in a crisis, although Keilberth had already said to me that there were many excellent conductors who could not play an instrument, and many instrumentalists had become uninteresting conductors. He also said that it was important to be able to read the music of a score with the mind and not to play it on the piano, that it needed a special dimension a vast general culture, of which, at least, I could already be proud. The relationship with Ansermet had considerably deteriorated after I had told him that I had become addicted to Arnold Schoenberg's "Gurre-Lieder" and that I had found in Franz Schreker's opera "Der Ferne Klang" the meaning of my life. After both Ansermet's and Keilberth's death I had the chance to see a few other conductors at work, especially Rudolf Kempe, but never really was given lessons. In Zurich I was Kempe's neighbour and he was very nice to me. In exchange for my admiration he used to lend me scores. In Berlin I was allowed once to attend a rehearsal of Herbert von Karajan, an event which I will never forget. As far as composing, I had submitted my primitive piano pieces and songs, mainly in the style of Satie (another composer on which I had made an unfortunate presentation at the Conservatory) to a Zurich resident composer a former student of Aaron Copland, who found those early pieces somehow interesting but "too romantic". He taught me following Hindemith's concise book of harmony but at least admitted that I was free to create my own harmonies. He encouraged me to experiment with electronics and "musique concrète". Little by little I was receiving commissions to write stage music of that kind for small theatrical groups. In the seventies I had already formed an actor's group (apart from pantomime lessons I had never taken acting lessons), and we performed plays which I had written and with my music and with me directing and performing. Since my family background

had been quite a grotesque one, I found myself very much at home in the domain of Ibsen and Strindberg and discovered the absurd world of Ionesco and Beckett. My plays were written in that style. We made little tours through Switzerland and were getting some very bad reviews since an enfant terrible-like attitude towards theatre by an unknown young man like me was not acceptable in those days. Only recognised playwrights like Beckett, Ionesco and Bond could dare to say grotesque and extreme things on stage. I remember very well the scandalous Zurich première of Edward Bond's "Early Morning" since in the middle of the play I found myself sitting almost alone in the Zurich Playhouse, totally fascinated and self-satisfied, and thinking "yes, if Bond and others like Ionesco use such style, why shouldn't you use it?" To me it was somehow the same kind of language which had slumbered within me since a long time. Still regularly working as an office clerk, I was already very active at that time and had also started making ink drawings of rather pornographic content, but they sold well and I could use the money for other artistic activities.

What direction did this take?

In 1977 I had enough funds to finance a couple of chamber music recordings on an own label and that was the launching of Adriano Records, another idealistic enterprise of mine trying to promote obscure repertoire. That caused me a lot of envy over here, including some anonymous insult letters. Anyway, everything I was doing during those wild years seemed shocking to the petty bourgeois Swiss world. I think this was because I had the courage to do so without any traditional musical background. The first LP of Adriano Records was a world première, Joachim Raff's magnificent Piano Quintet and the second Respighi's works for violin and piano. I had bought Revox Studio equipment and was doing a producer's and sound engineer's work without even having consulted a professional. Within 10 years I built-up a catalogue of 9 LPs which were followed later by 3 CDs, after I had also bought an early Sony PCM digital processor. From time to time I was also hired as a sound engineer to record studio sessions or live concerts, or as a sound reprocessor of historical recordings. On my own label I had reissued historical recordings with composers Ottorino Respighi and Franz Schreker as performers, reprocessed from rare 78rpm discs from my collection. What I am telling here is but a part of the period between 1964 and 1979. 1979 was an important turning point for me, since my activities became oriented towards Respighi, in connection with his Centenary. I won't repeat here all what was done, since it can be read in the Respighi Homepage on the same MusicWeb link. Almost ten years of my life were dominated by researching, studies and promoting activities of Respighi's work. In 1987 the final another turning point followed, enabling me finally to make my dream true by mounting the podium of a symphony orchestra and conducting.

Can you tell us more about your musical training?

As far as instrumentation technique is concerned, I learnt this not only from various textbooks (including a huge 4-volume treatise by Charles Koechlin) but I also took care to stand by every kind of musician at work. I spent ages sitting beside instrumentalists rehearsing their orchestral and solo parts, in order not only to learn instrument technique, possibilities and colours, but also musical interpretation, phrasing and dynamics. I went to dozens of chamber music and concert rehearsals and, since I was already a singing student, another concern was to find music's breath and organic connection with the human body. I went to occasional dancing and pantomime classes to study rhythm in connection with body expression and was always fanatically trying to find out the mechanism of music, i.e. how it came that it had to be written down like this and how the steps between a musical piece as a score and its interpretation could be explained. I had of course struggled myself through Ernest Ansermet's study "The foundation of music in human consciousness", one of the most important books on music after Busoni's "Aesthetics of Tone-Art". In the early seventies I had also met with H.H. Stuckenschmidt, one of Germany's most famous and cultivated musicologists and attended some of Willy Reich's lectures on contemporary music at the Zurich University. In 1968 I became a close friend of Dino Ciani, one of Italy's greatest pianists who tragically died in a car accident in 1974. This way of getting into music, is, I think a much satisfactory and productive one than to sit during years in Conservatory classes. This free, very personal system of learning is the best, I think, to avoid learning to hate music. Having still maintained contact with some Conservatory students, I really got the impression that music remained there an absolutely technical, dry thing, and how could one ever love, or learn to love such a thing? Nowadays, Conservatories have more modern and attractive systems I hope, but at that time, in Zurich, it was dreadfully uninspiring. I still feel a bit queasy walking by this grey and heavy building sometimes today. Funnily enough, when I enter the main doors of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory or the Gnessin Music School where I had made the acquaintance of many interesting professors and students, I feel totally at home ... I am a fervent opponent of all kinds of school systems anyway and I still feel frustrated for having been compelled to squander my best younger years, by systematically having to learn so many unnecessary things, especially after I was not interested in them at all, and could not learn those I really wanted. Not to speak about religion and philosophy, two absolutely ridiculous, even impertinent subjects the school direction had imposed on us "technical section guys" a few years before our graduation, in order eventually to put us on a higher level.

As a conductor are you associated with a particular orchestra?

I am very happy to be able to work with the Moscow and the Radio Bratislava Symphony: it fulfils me totally with joy and it is a wonder I could do this for over 12 years now. They know me very well, they love me and we have a wonderful collaboration together.

Why are so many recordings of obscure repertoire being recorded in Russia - is this purely a commercial issue or are there other reasons?

Orchestras from East European countries are certainly less expensive and surely friendlier than most orchestras over here, and this is not only as far as obscure repertoire is concerned. With the two ensembles I was allowed to work thanks to Marco Polo/Naxos, the Radio Bratislava Symphony Orchestra and the Moscow Symphony, many recordings of current repertoire have been done as well, of course with other conductors. Such “low budget” orchestras have other advantages: they are more open towards unusual repertoire; they are more flexible regarding schedules and not under total spell and control of a famous chief conductor who fears that different guests may have an influence which may ruin his own. Frankly, most star orchestras of today sound to me rather impersonal and boring: they have played their repertoire so many times under so many different great conductors that one feels that they are unable to totally forget what was done before and bring out something which may be “new” but not totally new except in a very few cases which will make history. It takes a new chief to totally renew his players and only then would he eventually reach his dreams ... if he has any. Nicolaus Harnoncourt has told me that the Berlin Philharmonic had first turned its nose up before finally agreeing to approach a radical interpretation of Brahms' Symphonies, meaning hard, and perhaps extra work. With the Moscow and Radio Bratislava Symphony I can work feeling as if they are totally fresh. They play exactly what I want without fuss and without that terrible burden of past tradition and memories of past stars. Famous orchestras may be technically perfect, but this does not impress me; there is often almost no soul behind, the inner world of the composer cannot be found, and therefore not be sung out with all the passion such a noble and magnificent enterprise deserves! Great conductors of today like Riccardo Muti and Claudio Abbado have become so dull and so commercial that I am desperately looking for something else than just a fabulous routine interpretation, or sometimes even a surprisingly bad rendering. Listen to old recordings of the Orchestra della Scala, so rich in atmosphere and freshness and compare them to many of today's CDs, it's simply sobering! But this comes mainly from the fact that these orchestras play repertoire too frequently and unusual pieces are belong to just an alibi domain. The forgotten Romantic repertoire or the one of the turn of the Century has so many treasures to discover and to make part of a more frequent scheduling that audience would start to like, if they are properly educated and prepared. But star conductors and soloists are rather lazy or too busy and prefer playing and recording their limited list of works over and over and everywhere again, fabricating the legend that it is their audience who wants this, which I don't believe. I know many people who are sick and tired of always hearing the same Schubert, Mozart and Beethoven performed in a more or less similar way by those I call the dictators of classical music. This phenomenon, which is of course an invention not only of the stars but also of their agents, causes a perversion of the music itself, since the listener seldom enjoys the music for itself. He automatically starts comparing the present interpretation with that he heard not long ago or 20 years ago or in a recording in his collection. Music becomes secondary, the listener becomes a critic and the work itself does not reach its goals, which are its approach to the heart and the soul. Of course, the times of great conductors of the Furtwängler, Toscanini and Karajan generation have gone, but they were able to create musical performances where the musical work was profoundly approached and respected. A concert with such people

was not just a celebrity show – a “must” at any price - but became an event, a celebration every time.

Given a free hand which ten works previously unrecorded, would you want to record? And why in each case?

Such a list I will never reveal, because I still hope to be able to realise it before someone else gets the same idea by accident or by gossip. But I can tell you what I would like to record myself which has already been done by others: Bernard Herrmann's Opera “Wuthering Heights”, Franz Schreker's complete orchestral works and some works by Respighi like his “Sinfonia drammatica”, “Belkis” and “Ballata delle gnomidi”.

Do tell me more about your interest in Wuthering Heights - that Hermann opera was recorded by the composer himself c1966 - I like the work though I think it is rather static - rather like a cantata.

“Wuthering Heights” is an incredibly beautiful opera which, in my opinion, belongs to the group of best operas of the twentieth century. That it is rather static does not bother me at all, “Tristan und Isolde” is even more static and even less theatrical! A good and sensitive stage director could create a magnificent production. When I first listened to the recording, made by the composer in 1967, I could not believe my ears and felt afterwards totally disturbed for a long time. That such beautiful any lyrical and dramatic music could be written today is the best proof that such kind of music will survive for ever. Another similar shock was caused by discovering Schreker's opera “Der Ferne Klang”... Herrmann uses the ideal, most approachable way to express a drama of human feelings with music today: its music coming out of the heart of a highly sensitive genius. Such a style could appeal to greater audiences and I cannot understand why Opera House Managers never produce it. I would love to rerecord this piece myself with Thomas Hampson in the role of Heathcliff, but this will be one of the many dreams of my life which remain unfulfilled. I still can't believe that I have at least been allowed to do a recording of Herrmann's magnificent film score “Jane Eyre” which is also based on a Brontë piece. I feel very much at home with Bernard Herrmann's music, also as far as his remaining concert works are concerned and, of course, all of his splendid film and radio scores.

What would be your advice to a person considering conducting as a career?

Since my conducting activities are far from being regular or frequent and since I don't get any chance of giving public concerts, I don't feel I should be giving advice to anybody. I still have to learn and to perfect myself! Perhaps I am not wanted on the podium anyway... I have the possibility in one or two years of giving some concerts with the Moscow Symphony and the Radio Bratislava Orchestra, but at this stage I spend more time in dealing with sponsors and agents than studying the scores I want to perform.

You have touched on this a little already but what qualities are necessary in a great conductor?

This I can certainly answer: a conductor must have an enormous overall culture, he must love and respect music more than he loves and respects himself, he should make music alive with passion and tension in order that it reaches the whole body of his audience. After an exciting concert, each listener should leave the hall as shattered and exhausted as the orchestra and the conductor themselves! As already mentioned, I am a fan of the generation of great past conductors like Furtwängler, Toscanini, Karajan, Ansermet, Keilberth, Van Beinum, Beecham, Rosbaud, Golovanov (which I consider one of my absolute favourites), Solti, Cluytens, Fournet and Ingelbrecht. They were all masters in creating incredible performances and could tighten a bow over a whole piece, making a composer's work alive through their great respect, their own strong personalities, culture and charisma. As far as today's conducting generation is concerned, I am very fond of personalities like Edo de Waart, Leif Segerstam, Nicolaus Harnoncourt and Carlos Kleiber; they belong to that group able to make of a concert much more than just a social event or a nice performance, they bring great commitment, even fanaticism into a domain which has become today more a business than it was before.

I am glad you mentioned Golovanov - he is one of my favourites – have you heard his Rachmaninov Second Symphony - as someone brought up on the syrupy somnolence of the Previn (which people criticise at their peril!) I loved Golovanov's sheer virile energy - similarly in the viscerally exciting Francesca. Do you know these works? What is it about Golovanov?

Golovanov is one of the craziest and daring conductors ever and, frankly, some of his interpretations are quite over the top, but still remain congenial. Every time I am in Moscow and walk from the Composer's House to the Tchaikovsky Conservatory or to the Gnessin Music Academy (where I occasionally give singing stylistic master-classes), I pass by Golovanov's house on which front a commemorative sculpture has been placed. I remain there for a few minutes, standing and thinking of the incredible musical personality Golovanov has been and what would have been of some other conductors would have dared to go so far, or would they have at least taken their time to listen to some of his recordings before doing their own dull ones! Listen to Golovanov's recordings of Liszt's Symphonic poems, or to some of his Bolshoi operas, afterwards you want to throw away what has been done by others or you feel as having had a musical revelation. Rachmaninov Second under Golovanov's baton is so exciting that it takes your pants off or gives you a heart problem. Contrarily to this, Rachmaninov's Third is more moderate, perhaps he did appreciate this work less. But as far as his Scriabin renderings are concerned, this will never be alike! Lately I have found a recording of Tchaikovsky's "Pathétique", which goes so far that I think Tchaikovsky would have committed suicide earlier by hearing it. But what is more important, is that Golovanov, by being so highly personal and original, or even really crazy in his tempi, he still respects the composer or discovers in it new aspects. I love his rubato technique and I must say that it is from his that I have learnt a lot, even without having ever seen him at work. No conductor's mas-

ter-class can be compared to a serious and analytical listening to Golovanov's recordings. As far as André Previn's Rachmaninov is concerned (which I have in my collection) I like them very much, he is one of those highly sensitive conductors who can reach great impact and expression by even using slow tempi and great *espressivo*. He understood Rachmaninov's soul, not, for example, as did Lorin Maazel in his recordings. Previn's recent recording of Korngold's Symphony is terribly slow but so compact and so lyrical! This is often very difficult to obtain with an impatient orchestra. Previn is great and I love him also as a composer!

What is your attitude to the recording studio?

I love working in the recording studio. But I am not one of those conductors who repeat over and over again a few bars until they are perfect or the piece has to be edited together *ad absurdum*. I do what orchestra players dream of; I let them play through whole movements. I want that a bow is being tightened over a whole piece; this is the main rule of making it organic. Details can be corrected later, but there are so many unimportant details so many conductors lose their time making the players impatient and nervous, thus deteriorating the quality of each following take. In other words I am not masturbating over “my” orchestras but making love with them.

How did you become involved with Naxos/Marco Polo?

I became involved with this company in 1987 when I was asked if I could record some film scores by Arthur Honegger I had rediscovered at that time. It was actually Klaus Heymann to whom I owe having been allowed to mount the podium and in all these years I have realised 29 CDs for him, all featuring unknown repertoire. The Marco Polo Film Music series is actually an idea of mine. I also suggested they start making classical music videos. The very first series of them (they are being reissued on DVD today) were written and directed by myself. Having received good reviews and my further projects having found Mr. Heymann's interest, I was able to continue and since I had the reputation of being a Respighi expert, he allowed me to conduct 6 CDs of unknown pieces by this composer.

What are your recording plans?

At present, all my recording plans with Marco Polo Naxos, even those which had already been approved, have been cancelled with the reason that my obscure repertoire does not sell well enough anymore. Now I am preparing 4 recordings of symphonic music for another company who still believe in me and who had been trying for years to give me some work which my Marco Polo/Naxos connection had prevented. Earlier on you mentioned various Respighi works you would like to record. So far as the “Sinfonia drammatica” is concerned there are recordings by Downes (Chandos) and Nazareth (Naxos)

What special insights do you feel you can bring to this work?

I cannot tell this right away since I should go over the score once more and restudy it. I might even find another approach now, than the one I remember having had earlier. I do not want to compare myself to Downes and to Nazareth, who both have done splendid readings of this rather difficult piece, but I can imagine myself doing even a more passionate and dramatic version, giving the listener an idea how Respighi must have felt when he wrote this Symphony, just at the time of the outbreak of World War I. Incidentally, there is another Symphony of the same title I would love to perform or to record one day, written by an obscure composer called Antoine Dewanger, but nobody was interested in this project since the orchestra requires an extra ensemble of nine saxophones!

How would you rate and recommend your 6 CDs of Respighi. For someone who knows the Roman Trilogy which of your discs should they purchase first?

Frankly, I rate my own Respighi CDs as rather OK, seeing the very little time I was given to rehearse and record them, but of course, many things could be improved. I think "La Primavera", a very difficult work for the players, singers and conductor, has come out very well and one feels everybody's passionate involvement with this great, ecstatic work. Since I have done recordings of works by Respighi which were practically all world premières of his less-known repertoire, it is difficult to recommend any of them to a music-lover who just knows the Roman Trilogy: he should rather continue discovering more famous works by Respighi first, and there are a lot of them!

My favourite Respighi is "Church Windows" ("Vetrata di Chiesa"). I recall hearing the piece in a BBC Radio 3 broadcast one early morning circa 1973 and was completely caught up in this rich and generously spirited epic - the final window is glorious - are there comparable works in the Respighi catalogue.

Church Windows is an orchestration of his "Three Preludes in the Gregorian Mode" for Piano, with the addition of a new piece. Whilst being very impressive and colourful, I think this suite is rather superficial and the musical impact holds together in a better way in the original piano version. It's a good showpiece for orchestra, not giving a conductor a great and deeply challenging work.

Oddly enough with the exception of Pines of Rome I am not specially drawn to the Roman Trilogy. How do you rate these works?

I prefer "Fountains" above all, it's like Wagner's "Rheingold" compared to the rest of the Tetralogy. Spontaneous, transparent, chamber-like music coming out from a purely romantic soul. At that time, Respighi had not discovered the Gregorian modes, which

does not mean they had afterwards made the Trilogy less good, but it was just the end of Respighi's youthful and exuberant period and he too used to say that 1916 was the year during which he started to feel himself a mature composer. "Pines of Rome" and "Roman Festivals" are, certainly, very exciting but belong to the same category of orchestral showpieces as "Church Windows", in which further dimensions cannot be found other than an excellent and showcase-like display by the orchestra.

Do you know the composer Joseph Marx - his superb "Castelli Romani" for piano and orchestra really deserves a proper commercial recording as do his songs with orchestra and the "Herbstsymphonie". Have you heard any Marx?

In earlier times I used to sing Joseph Marx's songs, especially his "Tuscany Spring". This composer is, similarly to Respighi, highly eclectic and would deserve an imminent rediscovery. Incidentally, this composer has written an obituary of Respighi, a recollection of his two meetings with the composer in Rome and essays on a couple of his works. As far as Marx's orchestral works are concerned I am not daring to propose them to anybody in these difficult times for the classical recording industry, especially now I have lost my commitment with Marco Polo/Naxos! But this composer figured on my proposal list 10 years ago

You mentioned your work on reanimating ancient recordings. What do you consider the strengths and weaknesses of the current state of the art?

This is a question which would need a book to answer, or a serious symposium talk. What can be said, as far as musical interpretation is concerned, is that everything was done more seriously and with more commitment in earlier times, since the commercial pressure and all the exaggeration of artists jetting around the world was not there. The music business was not yet a commercial business; it was a serious artistic enterprise. Those stars were not under such pressure! This can be heard by listening to the few first minutes of a historical studio or live recording! The performer's personality comes through immediately, not only in a stronger way, but in a more honest one. Of course, today we also have honest and serious musicians... The other disadvantage today is that music is being performed mostly with a preoccupation with technical perfection, almost sound engineering. This is not only at the occasion of a recording, but at concerts. There are conductors who only listen to the sound effects or to the balance of their ensemble, not realising that this is also a subjective thing and different not only in a listener's ear, but also because he is listening from another position. A good conductor should be able to obtain from his orchestra the very balance the composer had in his mind. Hearing some Debussy on CD today is like watching a Walt Disney documentary. On the other hand we have conductors who try to recreate historical orchestras with historical instruments and historical temperament, but they ignore that fact that our 'ears' have also developed in the meantime and we now want those imperfect instruments which were playing quite wrong at that time to sound perfect today!

Which historical recordings still await deserving reissue on CD and do all historical recordings merit this.

Where there is merit it is not only because of the musical works, some of which have been forgotten, but also for the splendid artists performing them. It's only the past from which we can learn and even my knowledge of singing stylistics would be too limited if I had not studied old singer's recordings over and over again. That's why I love immensely to work with singers: most of them have not the slightest idea who those old singers were and had never listened to their recordings and don't know about tradition and stylistics! During one of my latest Moscow singers' workshops at the Gnessin Academy, I had a Chinese baritone interpreting "Pagliacci's" Prologue. I said to him that I liked it very much, that he must have listened to Tito Gobbi's recording, after which he felt totally frustrated because it was true. I encouraged him saying to the remaining pupils that on the contrary, this was the way of studying.

Are there any historical recordings already issued that you consider have been done a disservice because of the restoration decisions and why?

Already before the coming of the CD, some companies reprocessed historical recordings with so-called electronic stereo, which is dreadful. I am glad that EMI has gone back to Callas's original masters for their CD reissues! Some other mono-reprocessings have been filtered in a way that the music sounds as if it were being performed under water: neither the sky nor the waves are there anymore...

Have you been steered away from some composers by record companies?

Of course I have, since most big companies think in a purely commercial way and are run by managers who don't really like or know music from an artist's point of view, but artists have always been in need of depending of uncultivated or greedy patrons, since money itself is the greatest antagonist of culture. Those patrons, actually, make their own reputation through a thing which does not belong to them since they don't understand it and become very powerful and rule the world of arts. As far as recording companies are concerned, there are, fortunately, some exceptions, especially through the work of some idealistic managers of smaller labels.

...Or to some composers by record companies?

Well, the recording companies are a kind of mafia and how they treat artists has nothing to do with music either. If one is a star, he will be promoted no matter what rubbish he performs or how routine-ridden or even bad he has become, he even dictates what he

wants to perform from his limited repertoire. As the mafia does, they would like to kill or to possess their competitors and under these politics artist have also to suffer. I was very lucky to be successfully able to propose my obscure repertoire to Marco Polo, but that was at the time classical rarities were selling well. Still, I see with satisfaction that labels like Hyperion and Chandos carry on with this repertoire riding on an exuberant courage. I don't understand Marco Polo for cutting down so drastically: I am not their only victim! Hyperion and Chandos may have terrific sponsors. I was able to find sponsors for five of my own Marco Polo and Naxos CDs. That was a hard work, but the funds I still could receive seem not to be enough future any recordings more.

What would be your ten desert island CDs and why?

I would be in need to know if the desert island has electricity. But one mainly comes to a desert island by accident and not by own will, so he has not the time to put together his favourite CDs...

Are there plans to reissue the Adriano LPs onto CD?

No, there is no money around anymore for that. The money invested in making those LPs was not covered by sales. The whole enterprise was done on an idealistic basis anyway.

Do you think that too much obscure music is being recorded today?

This may be true, but on the other hand, compared to literature, there is still a huge amount of unperformed music lying around in archives and collections which should be investigated.

Do you relish or aspire to a position of chief conductor of an orchestra somewhere?

Apart from the fact that this would be absolutely impertinent, seeing the lack of repertoire experience and orthodoxy formation I have, I do not want to conduct repertoire and be under pressure to direct concerts every week here and there or to go on tour with programs fixed years in advance, or being imposed by agents to flatter stars and audiences. What I would like, is to give a few concerts per year, whose programs should challenge audiences and musicians. It would be a horror for me to conduct Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert and before mounting the podium already thinking that my audience will compare me with other conductors while listening to those great composers and forget the real message of the music. On the other hand I am in a dilemma since I feel the need of performing some particular repertoire pieces like Tchaikovsky's Symphonies or some Mahler, or even some Brahms (the composer for whom I have the greatest re-

spect), because I have the impression of being able to give some very personal (but still respectful) renderings... I would in any case love to become a more frequent guest of the two orchestras I have worked with for all these years, but they cannot pay me. Forthcoming concerts with them are already planned as “no fee” jobs and I even have to find sponsors financing rental costs of the orchestral material, or paying my travel expenses. If I was rich, there would be no problem and I could realise the concerts I would like to do. Those eastern orchestras are quite poor financially speaking, as everybody can guess.

Have you conducted at all in the UK or USA?

Of course not, I still have to struggle for conducting jobs in Eastern countries after even over here in Europe I seem not to be wanted.

Do you think that your decision to base yourself in Switzerland has hindered your progress as a conductor?

I think so, but I am almost sure that also elsewhere I would have encountered difficulties with my orthodox or insufficient musical formation. Unless I would have encountered another discoverer à la Klaus Heymann. My first intention in younger years had been to emigrate to the USA, but I never really had the courage and the means of taking such a step. I would have gone to the USA to make money as a photographic model (I had some contacts already) since in those years I was quite successful in this field too. I feel not totally happy under Switzerland's narrow spiritual horizons and its provincial attitude towards creative arts.

Going back to Respighi... I was fascinated by the flood of Respighi opera recordings from Hungary - why Hungary? Do you know anything of the background to those Hungaroton recordings?

Maestro Gardelli, who did those recordings, was then a regular conductor in Budapest and I guess that no Italian opera ensemble would have agreed or been able to do these recordings anyway. The Italians were never really fond of Respighi. Already in his youthful years, after he had left his native Bologna, the Bolognese never forgave him for leaving Rome and in Rome he was more successful as a teacher than a composer. Respighi's renown was established abroad, when he toured Europe and the USA. The Hungaroton label had always been a first-class label promoting less-known repertoire, already during its LP era and I really appreciate this wonderful enterprise, although Gardelli's tempi are generally a bit too sleepy.

Not so long ago there was a flurry of correspondence regarding allegations of Respighi's fascist allegiances. I know that you refuted these allegations and did so with considerable style and evidence. That episode set me wondering about why composers we love we also have to see in the best possible light as personalities. It is as if a composer's music or our love for it is somehow so fragile that it would be damaged if we dis-

covered something about the composer's life, politics, crimes or allegiances that we deplore. Aren't these things two quite separate issues?

What's simply human behind an artist's production which is delivered to the world, can turn out to be often quite disappointing, mainly because the aura or the pedestal we consumers and promoters have placed them on for a long period has become too high. Earlier composer's biographies were written without the communication and information possibilities of today and are often nearer to literature than to objective studies. The most famous case is that of Mozart. I remember very well the shocking reactions at the time first more objective and private Mozart biographies were published. Before that, Mozart was considered an ethereal being, almost a saint. His music was played in function to this and I am very grateful to Nicolaus Harnoncourt for having had the courage to make tabula rasa of all those clichés, by interpreting Mozart's music in a radical way, exempt of all the silly burden of past legends. But there are many composers, whose lives are totally uninteresting from a biographical view: they did not murder, they weren't homosexual, they had no extramarital affairs, they did not become blind or cripples, they had no freaky mortal accidents and we still love their music. Art can certainly survive without necessary knowledge of its creator's personality, but there are some cases like Gustav Mahler (of whose music I am also a great lover), whose biography should be investigated by conductors in any case! He belongs to those composers I call “autobiographical composers”, who wrote musical diaries. The way their music has to be played can only be found out by reading their life, letters and contemporary testimonials. Of course, I always feel a bitter taste on my tongue when I listen to Wagner's music, but his antiracist ideology is a political matter, involving more than just literary or biographical dimensions, this involves human rights. To conclude this theme, there are also some biographers who are concerned about their own reputation above the one of the composer they are writing on, and the case of Fascism towards Respighi could be seen from that point. This case looks like an amateurish and totally undocumented gossip which is being exhumed again and which was circulating in Italy since 1949 among some of Respighi's envious fellow-composers. I have been able to find a sufficiently minimum of negative proofs to defend this case. The fact that a composer subscribed to the Fascist Party did not prove that he was convinced of this ideology anyway. It was merely a matter belonging to a syndicate able to get a job to survive; it was not even opportunism, it was just necessary to get the appropriate working permit as a teacher or musician. From this point of view we can call all of Respighi's fellow composers Fascists as well, with the spicy little difference that most of them had in fact dedicated compositions to the Duce and Respighi not even a single note!

You mentioned Schreker's “Der Ferne Klang” - that almost Delian pilgrimage after a sound - just like pursuit of the grail - a lovely work - do you see any parallels between Zemlinsky and Schreker and are there other Germans who merit attention - what about Thuille, Bungert and Hessenburg?

Schreker and Zemlinsky were Austrian and not German. Schreker's “Der Ferne Klang” is not just “lovely”! It is a world in itself containing different styles and conceptions of

music, wild, passionate and at the same time esoteric, one of the greatest masterpiece of the 20th century. Between Schreker and Zemlinsky I see only period parallels. Zemlinsky's music is not as abysmal and crazy as Schreker's, but great and so lyrical! Schreker cannot be clearly defined or packed into traditional definitions. It's one of those works which proves that the history of music as it has been written till today is absolutely incorrect and narrow-minded. Zemlinsky had once commissioned Schreker to write him a libretto, based on the theme of the tragedy of an outcast ugly man and Schreker had produced "Die Gezeichneten", but he suddenly so fell in love with the subject that he used the libretto for himself. Zemlinsky therefore arranged that Oscar Wilde's "Birthday of the Infanta" was transformed into a libretto - a subject, incidentally, which had already inspired Schreker to a youthful ballet-pantomime 14 years before. In the musical past of both countries more discoveries could be made, especially from the time of the turn of the century, a period I like very much. As far as Germany is concerned, among the dozens of projects I once had proposed to Marco Polo, symphonic works by Waldemar von Bausnern and Jean Louis Nicodé were figuring.

Can you explain why it is that the age of the CD - since 1983 - has seen such a broadening of the recorded repertoire?

I think it has nothing to do with the medium, but with the fact that it was the time in which the saturation of current repertoire was already felt. I am sure many producing companies were receiving letters with suggestion from music lovers to discover this and that. Of course, already during the LP era, there were some pioneering labels, like Vox/Turnabout, Urania, Westminster, NKF, Opera Rara and others who produced great things, and, what is even more important, there were many pirate or private labels immortalising broadcasts of live performances of important, rare or obscure works. Without those labels, my musical culture would be less wide for sure!

There has been talk for a few years now of the film industry using increasingly sophisticated software to create virtual actors. Do you think that a parallel development may be seen in classical music especially at the leading exploratory edge or in revival of neglected works? Will synthesiser software and sampling replace the orchestra and conductor with lifelike sound and interpretative inspiration administered by people at keyboards rather than in front of orchestras?

I hope it will not - this would be the death of music. If there comes a day when there is no money around anymore for large orchestral music or opera, let's rediscover chamber music! Modern means and computers can be very helpful in creating music in the sense of writing it down and editing it. For more than ten years I have worked with music software and have not even written one note by hand since then - or to facilitate its diffusion. Music is a human activity and a human experience which cannot be replaced by machines. I have nothing against electronic instruments or electronic music in general, as long as the pieces, written exclusively for this medium, are interesting. However traditional music should not be replayed or re-arranged with electronic instruments.

Which music do you listen to for relaxation and pleasure?

Music is to me such a strong experience that I cannot play it for relaxation, I always feel it running through my whole body, as if I was studying, or performing it myself, or trying to find a better way if the performance is unsatisfactory. I hate music being played in the background since it always keeps my attention; I want to listen to it but cannot because of the foreground noises. I do not listen to music in the car since I don't drive and if ever I did, this would be dangerous since I could concentrate too much on the music! Listening in a car as a passenger is not exciting either. The driver mostly does not listen to it anyway and talks...

Do you think that rare music is now too easily available - if that is not a contradiction in terms?

Rare music should be even more easily available than well-known music, but commercial rules make this situation so grotesque and we are constantly terrorised by musical hits.

Could you tell us more about your composing activities? When did you begin composing?

In 1964 I rented a piano, to use it more as a vehicle to study music theory than to learn playing. However, with the help of a piano-playing friend, I was introduced to the main rules of playing and started exercising alone, not by doing the usual finger-exercises, but by deciphering easy pieces. At the Conservatory's admission examination I played two pieces from Kabalevsky's "Children's Album" and within a short time I had written a dozen piano pieces myself, and this by pure intuition, since I had no notion of harmony yet. Some of these early miniatures are in the style of Erik Satie, since I had also begun to learn to play his "Gymnopédies". My future piano teacher really hated those pieces. In the Seventies I decided to destroy most of these 40-50 rather funny products, by keeping only 6, and that became, in a way, my Opus 1. In 1969 I offered myself to write a musical play for an improvised theatrical group for a Swiss open-air Festival. I was invited to join as a theatrical director and when I asked what they would like to play, they said they did know yet, and that was just a week beforehand! I started composing a musical play on texts by Sigmund Freud and in this short time I delivered one of my craziest and daring works. It was called "Did you eventually see something naked?" The libretto was based on Freud's reports on his early psychoanalytical sessions "Studies in Hysteria". The musical numbers were songs, dances and interludes. They were written for piano or electronic organ. I orchestrated some of the pieces during the play's rehearsals, since at that festival concerts were being given and players were hanging around asking for music. The most exciting thing was that I had started writing for strings and brass without having any notion at all and, with the help of the players, it worked! The performance of the play was a success and we had to repeat it immediately afterwards, in-between running around to transport the complete set to a tent since a terrible thunderstorm had broken out. A few years later I arranged four of these musical numbers into a little Suite for 5 winds and vibraphone (this instrument was also used at the prem-

ière of the play) and all remaining pieces were destroyed, but I still keep an absolutely exhilarating and nostalgic memory of this first theatrical attempt, getting such a success. Of course I also conducted the music and played the part of Dr Freud myself. Some numbers were also conceived for a rhythmically speaking girls' chorus, who I had convinced to perform wearing only their bras. A separate little piece for bassoon and double-bassoon (or tuba) entitled "Verfängliches" (which means "Something compromising") comes out from the same bulk of music. I had also started writing songs with piano and pieces for violin solo, since another friend of mine gave me the chance of writing some stage music for other theatrical events. In other words, without any complications and without even asking myself what I was really doing, I had become a composer! I had music within myself which I could hear and write down, and that was it. It was, of course, mostly funny and curious music, not all of it necessarily inspired by Satie, but some of it was completely experimental and original.

Do you compose at the piano or do you think orchestrally and write direct into short score or full score?

In all those "composing" years I have remained faithful to myself and to try to hear music in my soul and to write it down with the first and only preoccupation that it could eventually be performed and heard. In other words, it should be dramatic or lyrical, not technically dry. Since I am a very sensitive and emotional person, I must display myself as such. I am in need of transmitting emotions to others, a thing which I am doing all day long by speaking, working or making love with the human being surrounding and liking me. In early times I wrote down everything with the help of the piano, of course, but today, most pieces are first being build-up in my head and written down as nearly finished full scores. Today I have more distance towards my modest output as a composer. I am even able to discover in myself a personal style. Of course, thanks to my fanatical studies of music and music history, I was able to study many scores and gained inspiration from them. I never tried to imitate, since I wanted to remain myself doing something spontaneous and original. In the meantime I have also arranged for chamber group or orchestra songs by Ottorino Respighi, Othmar Schoeck, Hugo Wolf, Jacques Ibert and Modest Mussorgsky. I have arranged a set of 4-hand piano pieces by Respighi for chamber orchestra.

...I can sit down at my computer and start composing without problem at any time of day since I have so much music within myself and the most exciting process is to materialise this, without even counting that one day it could be really performed. I can even destroy the piece after completion, but the thrill of creating it was the real event.

By which of your compositions are you best represented - which are you most proud of and why?

The works which are performed most are my arrangements of Respighi and Mussorgsky songs, and that is quite a honour.

Do you use Sibelius software for composing? Has this changed your approach to composing or is it simply a very convenient medium?

Before using the Sibelius Software, which is great (I could not imagine myself without it any more), I was using the Notator program on a tiny Atari computer. I actually belonged in the late eighties to the first Swiss group writing down music with computer software. This is so convenient that you gain a lot of time. I am a terribly quick thinker and everything I do must be done with a certain speed, if not I get impatient and lose my tension while composing. A composing process is a state of immense tension and excitement; it's like an extended (but controlled) orgasm. I rather prefer to destroy a musical piece in progress than to restart correcting and improving it. My main concern is that it should be made in one casting. Even if it has not been completed yet and its orchestral texture is still in progress, I am always tempted to start the orchestration from the beginning again and redo it completely, or to wait until I have enough time to be able to finish the whole piece or movement in one session. Of course I have written nothing for a Straussian orchestra and I see no need in these times to have such perverse ambitions.

Do you find your compositional activities are affected by the works you are exploring and interpreting as a conductor - if so - how?

Since my conducting activities are more than rare, I have more time to compose, or to simply study scores. Every time you open a score you can find some inspiration! It's something you store in your brain and later on it comes out again as if reworked, or washed with your own washing-powder. It may be just a chord or a little sequence, or an instrumental detail. It may even cause the start of a whole work!

How would you describe the style of your music?

Well, it's lyrical, but with more modern harmonies, of course. Always a conflict between triads and dissonances. Modern chords become melodic vehicles, even if the melody is simpler. Some pieces look as if they were purely constructed, but it's a play of intervals and structures never following traditional rules, it's always rather unreliable, but the musical form is simple. Sometimes I work with variations and amuse myself using old dance forms by destroying them or transforming them into other ones. But the listener should never get confused or irritated; he should have himself a certain control over the piece in order to be able to follow and to enjoy it.

Do you prefer the orchestra as a medium for composition, the piano or the voice - opera?

I would like to compose for every one of these media. Chamber music is great and I adore wind or brass ensembles.

Compositionally speaking who would you say are the three leading influences on your composing style?

Well, I must still come back to Erik Satie, Franz Schreker and Bernard Herrmann, they were all special characters, original and, in a way, “modern” composers for their time, but they still wrote lyrical and organic music coming from their hearts. The influences I received are more from a spiritual view than from a purely technical one, although here and there some small technical ones can be found...