

A "Cervello in Fuga" Around the World. An Interview with the LSO's Lorenzo Iosco

Julian Sachs (February 23, 2011)



An interview with Principal Bass Clarinet of the London Symphony Orchestra Lorenzo Iosco

On February 23, 25 and 27, the [London Symphony Orchestra](#) [2] will be in New York performing



Mahler symphonies at [Avery Fisher Hall](#) [3], led by their Principal Conductor [Valery Gergiev](#) [4]. Sitting in the wind section will be Principal Bass Clarinet Lorenzo Iosco, an exceptionally talented young Italian musician who grew up in the hills of Tuscany and is now traveling around the world with one of the greatest orchestras, as well as performing with the orchestra of the [Teatro Real](#) [5] in Madrid. I-Italy had the opportunity of asking him some questions on the eve of his third visit to New York.

What brought you to music and the clarinet?

The choice of clarinet was made for one simple reason: my grandfather was First Clarinet of his town band and until I turned six (after which I moved to Tuscany with my parents) I listened to him every day playing opera tunes and songs from the 1930s. Wanting to follow in his footsteps, among other reasons, I enrolled in the band of a nearby village, San Giustino Valdarno, choosing to play the clarinet.

You are a perfect example of the so-called “fuga di cervelli” [brain drain] which represents today’s cultural class in Italy. What steps took you away from Italy?

After getting my conservatory diploma and gaining experience in the [Orchestra Giovanile Italiana](#) [6] [Italian Youth Orchestra], at age 20 I began auditioning for various orchestras and after a few failures, due to lack of experience, I won the audition for clarinet and bass clarinet in the [Orchestra Sinfonica di Roma](#) [7], my first real job! There I gained my first true symphonic and operatic experiences. I have many fond memories of the time spent in Rome and all the people I met in that splendid atmosphere.

After a few months I enrolled in a bass clarinet competition at the Teatro Real in Madrid, in a

period of economic boom for Spain and, consequently, for the Spanish cultural scene. I decided to give it a shot, and after a morning spent auditioning I won the seat. Obviously, in Madrid, working conditions and the quality of life are drastically superior to those in Rome, also because the Teatro Real is considered the best opera orchestra in Spain.

But I didn't feel it was time for me to settle down, so I decided to continue preparing for more auditions. After a wonderful year, playing the most beautiful pages of operatic repertoire of all time (among which Berg's *Wozzeck*, Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*), I thought it would be a good moment for me to return to Italy, more precisely at the [Teatro La Fenice](#) [8] in Venice, where a clarinet competition had just been announced. I prepared and went. Here is where my first real disappointment struck, as I failed to pass even the first phase of the competition, the so-called “eliminary phase”, where the axe falls upon those the jury feels don't even have the requisites to play in an orchestra. I asked for an explanation and was told that my performance was “exuberant” with “too many dynamic excursions” and that I should continue my studies because they didn't feel I was ready to work in an orchestra. It is easy to imagine how I felt as my self-esteem plummeted at hearing those words. But I kept wondering if I actually should take such criticism seriously, and if being “exuberant” and these “dynamic excursions” they spoke about actually were flaws, since I strongly believe these are attributes a musician should have.

It turned out that these flaws led me to win an audition and its following trial period with the London Symphony Orchestra. From that moment on I was torn between Madrid and London, until one day, in New York, during a month-long US tour with the LSO, under the baton of the great Valery Gergiev, the whole orchestra unanimously voted to offer me the job of Principal Bass Clarinet, after which I moved to London on a permanent basis, occasionally collaborating with the Madrid orchestra, as well.

This will be the third time you come to New York with the LSO. What do you think of the city and its public?

What can you say about such a fantastic metropolis? Well, first of all it is a city where I would love to live, because of the extraordinary combination and mix of different cultures and ethnicities, co-existing peacefully and respectfully! This is my view of New York, not to mention the consequences this environment has on artistic and cultural activities (and culinary, as well). It is a true capital that represents what the whole world should be like.

As I mentioned before, New York has also a great meaning for my career, since this is where the LSO



asked me to join the orchestra officially on a permanent basis.

On January 15, 2011, you played your British solo debut, performing Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, a milestone for every clarinetist. How did it go? Do you have future plans as a soloist?

Although I began my orchestral career playing bass clarinet, I never gave up the opportunity to cultivate the clarinet, the instrument I began with and never abandoned. When I was offered the opportunity to perform the most classic of classics for solo clarinet and orchestra, I tried to take advantage of it to personally get to know this score better, while never abandoning those canons determined by decades and centuries of interpretations. On this occasion I had the luck of working with a new youth orchestra, [Kantanti Ensemble](#) [9], made up of former students of the main schools of London (the Royal Academy, the Royal College, the Guildhall School, etc.), a team with a brilliant and decisive sound, which I hope will continue to grow in the future. After this series of performances, both the orchestra and myself were so satisfied that I was offered another collaboration (possibly for next year), probably performing Aaron Copland's Concerto.

Do you miss Italy? Are there any hopes for its musical and cultural scenes after the government's recent cuts to the Fondo Unico per lo Spettacolo, the government funding of the public sector of the arts?

Well, I must say that wherever I am I never forget Italy and those who are dear to me, with whom I keep in touch all the time thanks to today's technologies. Whenever I have a break I get on a plane and visit family and friends, so I don't feel this separation so badly.

As far as the political and cultural situations are concerned, I don't miss Italy at all: the two aspects are strongly interconnected and interdependent, and today's political situation in Italy leaves no hope for a change of course. I believe that a rebirth of hope for the future could only come from a radical and definitive change of the political and social structures of the nation.

Being able to travel around the world and see how different countries relate to culture and how orchestras are managed, what are your feelings about your Spanish and British experiences in contrast with Italian and extra-European systems?

My experiences in Italy, apart from my formative years at the Conservatory in Florence and a brief experience with the Orchestra Giovanile Italiana linked to the Scuola di Musica in Fiesole, are limited to my year in Rome and my audition in Venice. The latter was very meaningful for me, because it shed light upon the questionable recruitment systems of Italian orchestras, which allow for favoritism and partiality. Outside of Italy I respect the way orchestras are managed, especially in England, where I found the musicians to be highly concentrated and serious, unlike what in Italy I would refer to as *pressappochismo* and *guaglionaggine* [literally 'sloppy-ism' and 'childishness'], even though they try to promote these as 'creative disorder' – but they don't always succeed.

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