

## **Sara Mohr-Pietsch and Matthew Rowe discuss the conductor's role**

**Sara:** So when we see a conductor stepping on to the podium, that's only a tiny bit of what they're actually doing. What else does the job involve?

**Matthew:** Well in a sense, what we see on the podium is the conductor being the leader of the orchestra, guiding them through a piece. But the preparation for that goes very deep and a very long way because of course you can't stand up in front of a large group of people and lead them if you don't know what it is you're leading; so the process begins with very, very intensive study of the music. You have to know the score, you have to know the music, what the composer wrote. You have all the information; of course the musicians and the orchestra only have the bit that they play, they have one line of music, whereas we have all the information in front of us. So you build it up and you build it up horizontally, the melodies and the harmonies, the vertical part of the music; you build that up by looking at everything that the composer wrote, and conducting began with composers conducting – they knew what they'd written. But the conductors today are their representatives, and it's the conductor's job to know what the composer wrote, and also not only to know what they wrote, but also to try and work out what it is they wanted.

**Sara:** But with all of that going on, I mean that multi-tasking is 12 things all happening at once, future, past, everything plus reading score, plus co-ordinating your hands doing different things left and right, and there is always that sense with musicians that part of them loses themselves, you know they

lose themselves into the experience, into the emotion; so how does a conductor do all of that and also let go into the emotion of the finale of a great symphony?

**Matthew:** Well if you know it well enough it just happens because you're just in the music, you're not thinking about anything else. You don't really think, 'I need to beat four here, or I need to show a crescendo' – you just feel the music so much inside you that you then show what your priorities are at that particular moment; you feel that the music has to have an accelerando – it needs to get faster – and you then are listening to how it's speeding up and where you've got to get to at the next climax point: you therefore have to judge it. But you're not kind of going, oh we have to, it's not mechanical like that – you're just in the moment with the musicians.

**Sara:** How do you, as a conductor, persuade 80 to 100 people in an orchestra, all of whom are highly trained musicians and have their own very particular ideas about how the music should go and about what they as instrumentalists are capable of – how do you persuade them to come on your individual journey?

**Matthew:** For me it's about respect and trust. If they trust you to help them do the things that are difficult and in the rehearsal they get the opportunities to work on the things that are difficult, I mean, sometimes playing in an orchestra can be very challenging, the distances across the orchestra can be very big, the acoustics can be difficult. You are there to help, you are there to make

their lives easier. And if you can do that, and if you come to an orchestra with good ideas that come from the music and you inspire them, you get them to think, then it's no problem.