

At Last! Vengerov's Albert Hall Celebration of Forty Years On Stage

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Maxime Vengerov

Maxim Vengerov is “the greatest living string player in the world today” according to Classic FM. He is also a conductor and an educationalist. During lockdown, he created, (with a dedicated IT team), a hugely successful educational platform which live-streamed his free master classes to students and audiences across the world.

Karine Hetherington from ArtMuseLondon caught up with him this week as he was planning a special celebration of forty years on stage at the Albert Hall with the famed cellist Mischa Maisky and Simon Trpčeski on piano. The three distinguished soloists will be accompanied by the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra with Marios Papadopoulos conducting.

You must feel relieved that the concert is going ahead on September 19th at the Albert Hall, after a two year wait.

‘It was amazing we were able to find a date. We lost Martha Argerich this time because Martha is now playing in Vienna with the conductor Zubu Mehta. But now we have Simon Trpčeski, a great friend and great pianist. We did a recital together at the Barbican at the

beginning of this year. And of course, we have Mischa Maisky, who I've known since I was practically a child.

I was interested to read about you as a boy of five when you first took violin lessons with Gulina Turchaninova, a well-known violin teacher. Whilst being a serious student, you liked to do things your way, even very young. You refused to play one note for her to start with. Are you a little bit rebellious?

Not little bit- a lot! I've always rebelled – but it's more a soft rebellion.

You played your pieces to her perfectly of course in the end. Did your musical parents want you to take up the violin?

The violin was totally my choice. My mother would have preferred me to conduct (she conducted a choir) or play piano. I visited my father's rehearsals, where I sat in the first row of the concert hall as a little boy. He played oboe in the Novosibirsk Philharmonic Orchestra for twenty years. To me, as a boy, he seemed far away in the orchestra- I couldn't see him. I said to myself – why should I play oboe if nobody sees me. I wanted to show off.

You were a child prodigy – Do you like watching and listening to child prodigies?

Yes, it's always so amazing. You see the pure emotions, the soul of the child when he or she is starting to play. Of course, the child learns a lot. Aged seven, I had all the technical means I have now.

I look at two things – at first the technique which will let them progress or not. If you learn improperly, you may have problems later on. Fine muscles are involved. The posture is so uncomfortable. Most people would find it hard to hold the violin in their left hand for thirty minutes. You need to do stretching as well as some strengthening exercises.

Has your playing changed since you were 16 when you became a star? Is your approach to playing and performance different too?

Practically nothing has changed since I was five. I've managed to keep myself fresh and not be tired of music. That's the key – to keep the passion. And to have wonderful teachers, that's very important – my first teacher, Gulina gave me all the tools I need today.

What makes a great conductor?

Body language has to be very clear to the orchestra. Particularly as a guest conductor.

A conductor has to change the sound of the orchestra without changing the orchestra's identity. The conductor brings his own sound, colouring and interpretation to the work. He works as the architect. If the conductor doesn't envision his own sound – it's a waste of time for everyone. Bluntly, orchestras these days don't really need a conductor for

timing, intonation etc they are wonderful musicians in their own right. You know when you are watching a good conductor, however. He doesn't impose himself on the orchestra, he lets the orchestra blend with his own ideas.

On the 19th September you perform Beethoven's Triple Concerto with Mischa Maisky, Simon Trpčeski , and the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra at the Albert Hall?

What do you like about Beethoven?

Beethoven in our time is still contemporary. He speaks for freedom and democracy. His message of peace always prevails over our daily problems and routines. We look up to him. And the Triple Concerto manifests the greatest values in music; to be your own person – not to lose your identity. Also, you must interact with others. The three soloists and orchestra listen to each other – it's like a chamber of music.

Classical music has many challenges today – for one thing we have Tik Tok. A performer has seconds to make an impact? Young people have short attention spans. Will they be bothered with classical music?

Music needs time. You can't learn a great symphony in a second. Over the rest of your life, if you take an interest, your knowledge of the symphony will deepen. You will discover new elements to the music. These days with instant messaging – we only scratch the surface of ideas. So, it's good to have concerts. We switch off our phones and let music reflect our soul.

What do you do to relax?

My friend Rostropovich when asked the same question used to say 'Well, I just never get tense!' He enjoyed life.

Me – I relax by doing something else. I love playing but when I am not performing, I teach and I conduct. Life is so fulfilling when you are allowed to express yourself in music in different ways. Your identity changes. Your sound changes. Each experience in life brings new colour and depth to my play.

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Maxim Vengerov celebrates 40 years on stage in a concert at the Royal Albert Hall, London, on 19th September, with Mischa Maisky and Simon Trpčeski, the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra and Marios Papadopoulos, and students from the Royal College of Music.

Full programme and tickets <https://bit.ly/3Amav87>