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# Pappano's Sound of Music

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By PAUL LEVY

For classical music buffs, this year is one of frenzied celebration, marking both the centenary of Mahler's death and Liszt's birth 200 years ago. For Antonio Pappano, an accomplished pianist whose large music portfolio includes the directorship of the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, it marks an opportunity to delve deeper into the symphonic repertoire that he loves, as he tours Britain and Continental Europe with the Italian orchestra.



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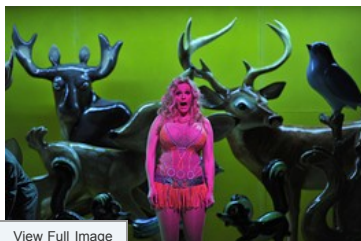
Antonio Pappano conducting at the Royal Opera House

"Touring does do something wonderful," says Mr. Pappano, whose principal job is as music director of the Royal Opera House in London. "It's a completely different experience to be sharing meals, buses, trains and hotels with the orchestra or other members of the company. You get to know each other in a totally new way, as people, not as violinists or as singers or as stage technicians. It gives you an intimacy and new bonds that can't help but spill over into the music-making." It is Mr. Pappano's fifth year as director of the orchestra, which was founded in 1908, and has been conducted by Mahler himself, as well as by Strauss, Stravinsky, Toscanini and Furtwängler.

Mr. Pappano moves seamlessly between the slightly disparate worlds of symphonic music—the touring program, he says, includes "Mahler One—except in Manchester, which has had plenty of Mahler already; the Liszt First Piano Concerto with Boris Berezovsky; Respighi's Pines and Fountains of Rome and the Verdi 'Aida'

Sinfonia"—and that of opera, where his latest, weirdest triumph involves Anna Nicole Smith, whose turbulent life Mr. Pappano helped turn into a lyric theater piece for the Royal Opera House.

The fact that he is so comfortable with different kinds of music is mirrored by his trans-Atlantic background, and where he lives now. Born in London in 1959 to Italian parents, Mr. Pappano went to high school in Bridgeport, Connecticut. He is married to an American, Pamela Bullock, and in addition to their place in London, the couple has an apartment in Rome and a "weekend retreat" in Umbria.



Corbis

Eva-Maria Westbroek as Anna Nicole in the Royal Opera's production 'Anna Nicole.'

When the Royal Opera named the pianist and conductor as its music director in 1999, it was a daring move. Though he was already filling a similar role at another world-class opera company, Belgium's La Monnaie, Mr. Pappano was just 39 years old at the time—making him the youngest director in the celebrated opera house's history. It was a risk that has paid off. Since taking up the Covent Garden baton for the 2002-3 season, Mr. Pappano has garnered the love of audiences and critics alike, and the Royal Opera has renewed his contract at least through 2013. "This is my number one

job," Mr. Pappano said, sitting on an Egyptian-motif tapestry-covered sofa in his spacious, daylight-filled Royal Opera House study-cum-office. "Running an opera company is a very



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different thing from directing an orchestra—there are all the visual and theatrical elements you have to pay attention to as well as the musical. The combination of the opera and the orchestra jobs is perfect for me. I had felt something lacking in my musical life—and the immediacy and intimacy of my relationship with orchestra is exactly what I needed. Here at the opera, I have contact with the theater—words, acting, scenery, costumes—which are also tremendously important to me."

Singers say that working with Mr. Pappano, whose father was a singing teacher and whose wife is a vocal coach, is a special experience. And the director, for his part, says, "I cherish singers, and I understand their problems and needs. They have, after all, always to be conscious that the words are part of what they do. I have to help them to get the words heard by the audience, and understand what they mean as well as how they're set."

The Royal Opera job means his attention isn't limited to his musicians or singers. "Part of my plans are to involve the public much more in seeing how we put together a production," Mr. Pappano says. "I'd like audiences to see the backstage stuff and the huge amount of work that goes into everything, from building sets and designing and making the costumes to the rehearsals. For example, the *Sitzprobe*, the seated rehearsal—that is the first time the singers and orchestra meet together—is always a revelation. It can be difficult to integrate them with each other, but it's always full of fascinating detail—you get huge insight into the music from this."

Peeling back the layers of how a modern-day opera about the sad real-life tale of an ex-Playboy Bunny came to be made shows just how interesting and intricate those inner workings can be. In the earliest stages of the development of "Anna Nicole," before she was even the subject, Mr. Pappano was focused on the music. The director said he told composer Mark-Anthony Turnage that "I wanted him to draw on his interest in jazz, and not to think in terms of standard operatic music. In light of this, we discussed possible subjects—we didn't want to adapt a previous work, like a play or a film, or try to make a mythological story fit a modern-day narrative or anything like that." Soon after Mr. Turnage met librettist Richard Thomas (of "Jerry Springer: The Opera"), they hit on the idea of Anna Nicole Smith.

When director Richard Jones got involved, "everything changed over and over," Mr. Pappano said. "Unusually for a new [Royal Opera] commission, we decided to workshop the production. So we got in some singers and listened to it, changed our minds again and again, moved this bit here and that bit there....We were a quartet—composer, librettist, conductor and director—working right up to the last minute. It's like putting together a musical, a terribly complicated business."

Mr. Pappano seems to thrive on the complexity of his multiple roles, though it does come at some cost. The pianist, much in demand both as soloist and accompanist, doesn't find much time to practice these days.

He doesn't shy away from the big questions, either. How are the cuts in arts budgets affecting his two jobs? "Italy's worse. First, because everything there is politics. But second, because they are so dependent on direct public subsidy," he says. "Here, at least, we have—and are taking—opportunities to raise money from private sources. Not to the extent that this happens in America, but we are still not completely dependent on government funding. Of course, public money is a big part of our budget, but we are not crippled by the cuts, as I fear really happen in Italy."

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