



# Theme & Variations

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Monthly column about the world of such music that people usually call *classical*. Subjects of abundant subjectivity and, at times, little free of controversy. Those that all musicians talk and discuss about, but never come to firm conclusions.

Those that allow the enthusiastic public to satisfy its curiosity and, by the way, to build communicational bridges and viaducts between the stage and the audience. And so that no one dares to take the themes less seriously, the variations will be commented and discussed exclusively with some of the best musicians on the planet.

## Soloist vs. orchestra musician: a question of profile or a false question?

Certainly, there are those who are exclusively soloists or orchestra musicians. But considering the musical macroclimate as a whole and the plurality of species that intervene in it, it is reasonable to say that both cases belong to the category of exceptions. How many soloists do we know who do not play or record, at least once in a while, a trio or a quartet with other colleagues from the musical Olympus? Or how many orchestra musicians do not venture, more or less frequently or regularly, into other branches of interpretation? And how many artists embody both *métiers* without being considered neither soloists nor orchestra musicians? In this order of ideas, it would be relatively easy to admit that in fact these specialities merge together.

However, my experience also tells me that the music world establishes, in countless (too many!) cases and situations, a manifest and even excessively rigid distinction between the profiles of soloist and orchestra musician, in a kind of "either... or...". Sitting as a jury of an orchestra audition or even at any concert or recital, I often hear comments like «he (or she) plays like a soloist» or «has more of an orchestra musician

FEATURED GUEST

## Emmanuel Pahud



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At only 22 years old and after winning several international competitions, he became principal flute of Claudio Abbado's Berlin Philharmonic, which he would drop between 2000 and 2002 to fully dedicate himself to his solo career and teaching. He returned to the orchestra already with Simon Rattle as chief conductor, but simultaneously pursued a fantastic solo career that includes appearances in front of the greatest orchestras and, in a unique case among flutists, an exclusive contract with the record company EMI Classics. Simply put, one of the greatest in the world.

character». On the other hand, I confess that countless (too many!) times I let myself fall into the temptation of "labelling" other colleagues in the same way too, without actually being able to define with total foresight the criteria of such judgment. Legitimate, understandable and even opportune, depending on the case and the situation? No doubt. But it would be wise to try to distinguish the line that separates a mere assessment from prejudice.

Gone are the days when studying in London was more for soloists and studying in Cologne was more for those who aspired to be orchestra musicians. Globalization has made it possible to dilute such presets, which, after all and given the fact that in England there have always been excellent orchestras and Germany has always trained top soloists, are more than questionable generalizations. Today, almost all European universities and music academies have solistic and orchestral training programs, alongside or separately. At the same time and in defence of possible depreciation about who "only" becomes an orchestra musician, it is imperative to keep in mind that, nowadays, it is impossible to win an orchestra audition for a good or very good orchestra without being a good or very good "soloist", in addition to the innumerable number of orchestra musicians who make parallel careers as soloists of great quality and success.

One of the most famous and prestigious and, indeed, one of the most interesting cases I know, is undoubtedly Emmanuel Pahud. «I never had the specific dream of becoming a soloist, being a member of the Berlin Philharmonic or having a contract with a record company», says the French-Swiss flutist, who sees his career as «a constant development» in which he acts as a «researcher» and «keeps discovering new things every day». One of his main discovering sources is precisely the orchestra, where he learns a lot «from conductors, guest soloists as well as from the own colleagues». He also emphasizes his fascination for the «social component» and «generational interaction» of the orchestral environment, aspects that he surely missed when he decided to leave the Berlin Philharmonic in 2000, embarking on a solo career and teaching the flute class at the Music Conservatory in his home town Geneva. When I ask him about the reasons, both for leaving the orchestra and for returning in 2002, especially considering that, in one way or another, he was already considered one of the best flute players on the planet, Emmanuel confesses to me that both decisions were entirely motivated by «personal and family reasons» and he never disregarded one thing or the other. He chose both.

After all and since the two profiles do not seem to be as far apart from each other as is sometimes supposed, it is worth mentioning and highlighting what is perhaps the strongest link between them and, by the way, a great passion both of Emmanuel's and my own: chamber music. These days, fortunately, it is unlikely to find a great soloist who does not "dialogue" with the pianist or with the orchestra and the conductor who accompany him, to the detriment of the more than outdated tradition of the autopilot super-soloist and the "rest" which just follows blindly. Likewise and despite the proper hierarchies, what a modern orchestra and conductor seek in each interpretation is precisely a common sound and an expressive harmony. Is it an orchestra not, above all, a wide group of chamber music? If not, it should. And to counter those

who like to label and differentiate based on supposed profiles and vocations, as if they were incompatible or contradictory, Emmanuel Pahud underlines that his Berlin Philharmonic is and has always been historically «a gathering of soloists who share the same passion, the same interest and the same desire to finally sound good together». Bingo, and it really works!