

ANDY SMITH, PRINCIPAL TIMPANI - 40 YEARS AT THE PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

Andy Smith – Principal Timpani, Philharmonia Orchestra
Mark van de Wiel – Joint Principal Clarinet, Philharmonia Orchestra
Keith Bragg – Principal Piccolo, Philharmonia Orchestra
Simon Oliver – Double Bass & Chairman of the Philharmonia Orchestra
Sam Burstin – Viola, Philharmonia Orchestra
Michael Harris – Bass Clarinet, Philharmonia Orchestra
David Thomas – Former Violinist, Philharmonia Orchestra
Ann Baker – Cello, Philharmonia Orchestra
Esa-Pekka Salonen – Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor, Philharmonia Orchestra

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Andy Smith

Hi. I'm Andy Smith. I'm the timpanist of the Philharmonia Orchestra, and I have been for a very long time, or it seems like it.

Mark van de Wiel

The first time I ever heard you at very close quarters, shall we say, was my first ever rehearsal and concert with this orchestra, which was Tchaik. 6 in Wells Cathedral. I was slightly confused because in my clarinet part (and this is a pencil marking which is still there) towards the end of the last movement there's a passage where the orchestra will build up and you play a very loud note, followed immediately by a chord from all of the rest of us. You play on the first beat of the bar; we come in slightly after that. And in the part, in pencil, I didn't understand what it meant, there was a large arrow by the rest where you play, and the word "Thumper" and I had no idea what this meant, but I soon found out.

[Music: Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 6]

Andy Smith

When I first joined the orchestra, David Mason who was the principal trumpet just decided that he was going to call me Thumper, and ever since then the word "Thumper" has stuck.

[Music: Mahler: Symphony No. 5]

I suppose it's something to do with the way I play. I don't hold back if I feel that the quality of the sound that's needed is warranted, so I mean I'm really not frightened of "thumping" it, as they put it.

[Music: timpani demonstration]

I think my whole career has been guided by fate. I was a pianist; I went into the Leicestershire School Symphony Orchestra as a pianist. So, when I got to college, I did piano and oboe as first study, and because I'd got a little bit of experience, they put me in 3rd Orchestra at college, but the conductor was a guy called Vernon Hanley. It wasn't long after I'd done a couple of rehearsals for Vernon, he caught me coming off the stage and he said "When are you going to come and play for me at Guildford?" - I thought he was joking. It took an amazing amount of cheek, because I said to him "If you give me enough concerts, so I can buy some drums and a van, I will supply the gear for nothing, as long as I get enough concerts to be able to pay for the drums and the van" and then the next day Kathleen Atkinson, who was his secretary at that time, phoned me up and offered me a whole year's work with the Guildford Phil, and that was it - and the first concert was *The Rite of Spring*, funnily enough ... (laughs) and I've been playing *The Rite of Spring* ever since, I think.

[Music: Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring]

Keith Bragg

It goes back to my first experience of the orchestra coming in, and all around me there were these players who were you know, very famous and huge characters, and huge players musically, and of course Andy is one of those people; he's kind of a defining feature of the Philharmonia Sound, and I gradually got to know him, you know, over the years, and always loved him and respected him very much as a person, alongside the great playing.

[*Music: Holst: The Planets*]

Simon Oliver

My first memory of Andy is Japan, we were doing Mahler 5, and I've never heard timpani playing like it, it was amazing. And because of the bass playing, we're very close to the timpani, and I just turned around and I just thought, "Who is that man playing the timpani?" and it was a memory for life, because it was an epic performance.

Sam Burstin

The moment that I will never forget is when we were doing *Also sprach Zarathustra* by Richard Strauss, and the opening starts with this deep, deep, C chord, just bottom C, and then you get the famous trumpet "baaa, baaa, baaa... ba-baaaah!" that thing – very famously used in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and then the timps start with these triplets, and they get louder and louder. And I was sat at the back of the viola section, so I was right in front of the timps, and I could almost *feel* these timps before I heard them, and each time this phrase happens it got louder and louder and louder, and it got to the point where it was almost ridiculously loud – I could feel the sound filling the hall. But, and this is the key thing with Andy, it was never an 'ugly' sound, it was never brutal; it was always a rich sonorous kind of 'WOM'.

[*Music: Richard Strauss: Also sprach Zarathustra*]

Michael Harris

I know he got this nickname of "Thumper" and David said it always, because a timpanist in a way is, after the leader, probably the most important member of the orchestra, and Andy was always sensitive to this wonderful sound that the orchestra has always made.

David Thomas

His playing is without doubt the greatest timpanist I've ever heard.

Ann Baker

I remember being in a car going to a concert and a friend playing me some music and they said could I identify the orchestra, and I remember it was *Heldenleben* and there was one point where there was this enormous timpani note, and I just looked at my friend and said "That's the Philharmonia, because I said, that's Andy Smith!" and it was.

Esa-Pekka Salonen

I kind of knew Andy before I knew him, because every time I heard the Philharmonia live, before I actually ended up conducting them, I really paid attention to the timpani. And then of course when I started working with the Philharmonia, I realised what an important musician he was.

There have been more than a handful of situations over these 30 years when he has completely saved me, and everybody else in the orchestra. He's just that kind of a musician, rock-solid – but very sensitive; lots of fond memories.

Andy Smith

When I joined the Orchestra, they were a bunch of people who firmly believed that they had something worth preserving. We have a lot to offer still, and I think the public appreciate that. I do think that they appreciate and see the commitment that we give when we're on the platform - they only know the half of it – the commitment, the amount of time we spend travelling, the amount of time we spend rehearsing and all the rest of it, juggling family ties and sorting all sorts of day-to-day problems out, just so we can sit on the platform and play for them, it has been a privilege, a pleasure, and an honour, to be the Orchestra's timpanist for the last 40 years.

[*Music: Beethoven: Symphony No.5*]

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