

Preview

Gianandrea Noseda & Massimo La Rosa to appear with The Cleveland Orchestra at Finney Chapel & Severance Hall

by Mike Telin



The *Risorgimento* that united the Italian peninsula's crazy-quilt of city states and regions into a single nation during the nineteenth century will be reenacted in a small way at Finney Chapel in Oberlin and Severance Hall this weekend, when guest conductor Gianandrea Noseda (born

and raised in the North near Milan) and Cleveland Orchestra principal trombonist Massimo La Rosa (a native of Sicily) join together in Nino Rota's *Trombone Concerto*. (Also on the program, Rachmaninoff's *The Isle of the Dead* and Prokofiev's *Symphony No. 6*).

It gets even better with an Italian composer in the mix. “Two Italians in Cleveland playing music by an Italian composer,” Noseda said. “The ingredients are intriguing.” “When I found out that my solo debut would be conducted by Mr. Noseda,” La Rosa recalled, “I immediately thought to myself that the Rota concerto would be the right thing to share with our audiences.” There are also parallels between composer, conductor and soloist. Both Rota and Noseda were born in Milan, and the first performance of the concerto took place in 1974, the year La Rosa was born.

Though they hail from opposite ends of modern Italy, Noseda and La Rosa (both making their Cleveland Orchestra debuts as guest conductor and soloist) share a strong sense of identity as Italians, and their upbringing and musical philosophies have strong parallels too.

La Rosa grew up in Belmonte Mezzagno, a small town outside Palermo, and began playing trombone in the community band at the age of nine. Noseda grew up in Sesto San Giovanni, an industrial suburb of Milan, and attended a technical college at the same time he attended a conservatory.

Both La Rosa and Noseda are committed to communication between musicians and audience. “I like to become like a clear window between the composer and the audience,” La Rosa said. “I like to remind myself with a little saying, 'Share what is right; don't show you're right.'” Noseda agrees. “We wish to share the musical emotions with the musicians of the orchestra, and through them, to get to the heart of the audience. This is our job, our

art, but not because we are the producers of art, we are the reproducers of art. We are just the persons who make the composers' worlds audible today.”

Both also feel a strong need to connect to the community. As Noseda says, “The people in the city should feel that the orchestras and opera houses are very much connected with them and their lives.” La Rosa has gone further than merely playing concerts. “I have done many solo appearances, and some of those have been benefit concerts to help other people.”

These parallels came out clearly in separate interviews with Gianandrea Noseda and Massimo La Rosa. We spoke to Noseda by telephone in Pittsburgh, where he was guest conducting the Pittsburgh Symphony. La Rosa responded to our questions by email from Miami, where The Cleveland Orchestra was in the middle of its Miami Residency activities.

Gianandrea Noseda

Mike Telin: It's a pleasure to speak to you and we look forward to your debut with the Cleveland Orchestra.

Gianandrea Noseda: Thank you and I'm looking forward to my first meeting with The Cleveland Orchestra.

MT: With Massimo as soloist, you and the Rota Trombone Concerto, perhaps this is the Italian set of concerts.

GN: Yes it is the flavor. Rota is a great composer and more famous for the movie music he wrote for Fellini, but he also has a remarkable catalogue of music written for symphony. This is not a long concerto, but it is incredibly well written and I am happy to share the stage with Massimo. Two Italians in Cleveland playing music by an Italian composer. The ingredients are intriguing.

MT: But adding to the intrigue are the two Russian composers. You served as the first foreign principal guest conductor at the Mariinsky Theatre, and that position was very important to you early in your career.

GN: Absolutely! I'd say it was a turning point because I had the possibility to approach the Russian repertoire not from a point of a foreigner. Of course I was a foreigner but I spent time there and lived the life that the Russians were living at that time. And to get close to their musical tradition was good for me.

MT: Since then you have certainly developed a busy and impressive career for yourself. How do you manage to stay healthy and focused?

GN: As a modern conductor you need a lot of stamina and good health. To be fully engaged during rehearsals and concerts with all of the orchestras I am associated with you do need a bit of strength. But of course everything starts from a deep love for the music. It is the engine that moves our lives.

MT: The orchestra sent me an article by Federico Rampini that was published last April in the "Repubblica." I was fascinated because you spent so much time talking about the economics of orchestras and culture in general. And as a conductor in the modern era you need to have an understanding of how the economics that drive orchestras and opera houses works.

GN: Absolutely! You cannot close your eyes and do what you have to do without considering the situation in which we operate. I was of course [talking about] the situation with the opera houses in Italy But [this extends] all over the world because the situation is not different. We are all on the same boat.

What I strongly believe is the fact that we have to rethink our duty in our society. But, we cannot loose the quality of our performances, otherwise people will start to wonder why they have to support live performing arts. So when we are performing [the quality] is the only thing we need to take care of.

BUT, we also have to be very involved in the society. For instance when I am in Turin where I am music director of the Teatro Regio, I try to be present at many activities for young people and to invite people who want to come to the theatre to see how an opera house functions — all the rehearsals, the chorus, the wig and costume departments. And sometimes you realize that people don't even know and can't imagine how rich the activities are in an opera house.

The same can apply on a smaller scale with symphony orchestras. You have the management who are working to hire artists and to invent programming that will reach the audiences and subscribers, but also reach new people. You also have to create educational programs and promote music to the youngsters. At the same time you have to organize touring because you want your orchestra to be known outside of your city and your country.

It is an incredible job, and to do it, I am convinced that orchestras and opera houses [have to] be very connected with the lives of the people who live there. The people in the city should feel that the orchestra and opera house are very much connected with them and their lives. Not something elite or very distant.

MT: It does appear that orchestras have started to engage with their communities — the fruit is beginning to appear on the tree. I was also impressed with the way in which you spoke about the differences in funding the funding systems of the United States and Europe. It always seems to me that people on both sides don't really understand the other's funding system.

GN: Yes they are completely different systems. I have to say from the Italian point of view and being the music director in an Italian opera house, we have a bit to learn about the way that art is supported in America. We are used to the government supporting all of our activities, and now of course they are cutting back due to the crisis, so we have to increase the level of the private sponsorship of the companies supporting the theatre. Probably we will never get to the point of having eighty-five or ninety percent coming from private sponsorships, but to find a good balance would be a goal to achieve in the next

five to ten years. Lets say sixty percent public and forty percent private, that would probably help our musical life in Italy to [once again] become healthy.

MT: You also said that New York's economy is being saved, at least in part thanks to the resilience of its cultural industry: how do you explain your thoughts to someone who is skeptical that culture can save anything?

MT: I think that during difficult times artists in general have throughout our history had the courage and ability to see much further, and that is the point. Sometimes artists [tell the] truth before the truth is accepted by everybody else.

Perhaps nobody is interested in what Gianandrea Noseda thinks but perhaps they are still interested in what Mahler thought at the end of the nineteenth century when all of the frictions in Europe would lead fifteen years later to the first World War. You can hear it in the music of Mahler, Stravinsky and late Dvorak, they were pointing things out that society was not ready to accept. So I think today, there is an opportunity to see where we can bring our world together. Sometimes composers can show us the way to go — respecting [each others] differences but also loving the differences.

We are in a very interesting and difficult time, but whoever has the courage to look inside himself and lead without arrogance, can suggest things by saying 'why don't we try this way?' and art can help do that. Sometimes society is a little bit resistant but we need to continue.

MT: That's a wonderful response. You have also said that you are fascinated by the United States and you do live here part of the year; what fascinates you about this country?

GN: I like this country because you always have the [attitude] that if you want to do something you will find a way to do it. Of course I'm European, so I come with a different perspective, but I like the fact that if I want to do something I can put all of my efforts, find good people who share my ideas and achieve my goal. This is something that is fantastic in the United States.

I have to come here to learn, and put [what I learn] in my pocket — then take what I learn back and out of my pocket and try to help Europe. And it is also mutual because I can bring the European cultural heritage here, Not because you are less cultural, but because we have to create bridges and that is the point. On bridges you go both ways not only one.

Massimo La Rosa

MT: Why did you choose the Rota concerto? I think it's a great piece so please tell me as you wish.

MLR: I want to start by saying that playing a solo with The Cleveland Orchestra is a very special opportunity, and I want to thank everyone at The Cleveland Orchestra, particularly TCO's former director of artistic planning, Christina Rocca, for making this happen.

When I found out that my solo debut would be conducted by Mr. Nosedá, I immediately thought to myself that the Rota Concerto would be the right thing to share with our audiences. There are many little reasons that I find the Rota an interesting choice for our collaboration. Both Rota and Nosedá were born in Milan. The first performance of the Rota took place in 1974 (the year I was born), and that premiere was given by Gaspar Licciandone, who is now the principal trombone of the Teatro Colón of Buenos Aires. He was the principal trombone of the opera house in Palermo when I was a student there in 1992. Mr. Licciandone and I reconnected this past summer when we were both teaching at a trombone festival called Trombonanza in Santa Fe, Argentina.

MT: How long have you played the concerto?

MLR: These concerts will be my first performances of the concerto. I've enjoyed working on the piece; it's very challenging to play, but musically it's very satisfying. I find in it a true Italian spirit. This piece has moments of drama, joy, dreaming, at times a feeling of uncertainty and in other moments a feeling of unexpected sophistication. Rota wrote film scores for many of Federico Fellini's movies. In all his movies, Federico Fellini captured, with an incredible genius, the many colors and moods of the real Italy. In my opinion, Fellini and Rota are glued together — essential to each other — and this trombone concerto really shows off that connection.

MT: Do you enjoy playing concertos? And if so, why?

MLR: I try to enjoy every piece of music that I have to play. I like to serve the music — to make my soul richer with every piece I play. The only way I can make this happen is to open myself to the piece, to let my brain go deeply into the piece. I don't like to force the piece to sound like me. Instead, I like to become like a clear window between the composer and the audience. I like to remind myself with a little saying, "Share what is right; don't show you're right."

MT: You once told me about your extensive trombone collection; how many instruments do you own and which one will you be using for the concerto performances?

MLR: I don't have that many anymore. At the end of the day, I always choose to play the same one! At these concerts, I will be playing my new trombone, the A47 Bach-La Rosa model.

MT: Tell me a little bit about the Conn-Selmer-Bach Artisan collection? How did you become involved in that project?

MLR: This project will forever be an incredible honor for me. My first trombone was a Bach model 42, and it cost my father three times his salary. I remember that I was twelve and I felt so lucky, and so guilty. When I recently called my father on Skype and showed him a Bach trombone with *his* last name on it, as you can imagine, it was a very big, emotional moment for my whole family. In a way, I guess I paid him back for his sacrifices the best way I could. This was a big learning process, and I am so very thankful to my friends, the professionals at Conn-Selmer, who are so good at what they do. I think that this trombone will make many players happy. Our intent was to create an instrument with an even more pure and golden sound than the other generations of Bach trombones.

I also developed a new valve system that in my opinion gives more uniformity over the entire range of the instrument. Throughout this project, I kept in mind an old Bach poster that I had in my room for years that talked about turning metal into magic. I think we've done it.

MT: Please tell me anything you think readers would be interested in knowing about the trombone.

MLR: The trombone is such an incredibly beautiful instrument. I love it! Since I've been in Cleveland, I have done many solo appearances, and some of those have been benefit concerts to help other people. In my opinion, I have to say that people love to hear a solo trombone. As you know, I recorded a solo CD, *Cantando*, which has been a very successful project, selling more than one thousand copies, and it's now in its second pressing. I think this shows that people seem to really enjoy the sound of the trombone, and I'm very excited to be able to share my love of the instrument with our wonderful audiences here. I hope this will be the first of many solo appearances with The Cleveland Orchestra.

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