

MTT in Luxembourg

## Keeping Score: a commitment to music

Ariel and Guy Wagner

**Michael Tilson Thomas, or MTT as he is known to his many fans and friends, was in Luxembourg in September with his San Francisco Symphony and gave us an inspiring account of Mahler's *Eighth Symphony* (cf. p. 14). Just as inspiring - even more so, in a way - was the overview he gave to the press earlier on in the day of the SFS's five-year educational programme.**

It is called „Keeping Score“, the title being of course a play on the double meaning of „score“, as both a sporting tally and a musical text, and is „designed to make classical music more accessible to people of all ages and musical backgrounds.“

MTT took over Leonard Bernstein's famous Young People's Concerts and is totally committed to the idea of bringing classical music to the people - the young in particular - and vice versa. He personally spends about three months of the year teaching, among other things, giving long-distance master classes over Internet 2. So it follows that the SFS educational programme is an ambitious one, attempting to reach out to anyone and everyone who is curious about classical music - or could be persuaded to be so.

It makes full use of the possibilities offered by today's media: there are series on national TV and radio, presented by MTT himself, an interactive multi-media web site, DVDs containing documentary material as well as live performances, a proactive schools education programme aimed at promoting classical music as a core subject by giving teachers professional assistance and training throughout the school year, and a mentoring scheme.

This last is perhaps the most original idea, involving as it does an active social role for the members of the orchestra as individuals. Each one is obliged to be mentor to at least one young musician, guiding their musical footsteps, supporting them along the way and generally looking after their interests.

The first of the TV programmes is due to begin this November and is called „Revolutions in Music“. In three one-hour episodes, MTT will be talking (freely, as the programmes are unscripted) about three visionary composers whose compulsive and obstinate originality transformed musical writing for ever: Beethoven with his *Eroica Symphony*, Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and Aaron Copland's transition in the 1930s, against the background of the US politics of the day, from a modernist to a



Photo: GW

Michael Tilson Thomas enjoying his stay in Luxembourg

more popular style of music. Using a structure borrowed from the cinema, explanations of the stories behind the works - the personal circumstances and general situation the composer was writing in - are interspersed with cutaways, illustrating the passage being referred to, or showing live performances. And the members of the orchestra are invited to contribute their ideas - not necessarily the same as those of their boss, apparently - and talk about how they prepare themselves technically, emotionally and musically for performance.

The radio series, *The MTT Files*, is to run parallel to the TV shows and comprises eight episodes of one hour each. As its title suggests, it is more general and eclectic in character: MTT exchanges ideas and experiences with some of the many artists, from all walks of musical life, he has encountered during his career. He also tells stories from the history of music - „I. Stravinsky's Copyright Blues“, for instance, describing the composer's epic struggles to wrest control of his masterpieces back from the Soviet publishers' collective - which give a fresh perspective on ideas developed in the TV show.

If you visit the web site at [www.keepingsscore.org](http://www.keepingsscore.org), you will be confronted by an engaging proposition: „How do you start a revolution? Try E-flat.“ You can find out more about *Revolutions in Music* by clicking on links to a general preview of the series as well as trailers of the three episodes.

The site however is a work in progress and aims to go much further: airtime, as we know, is expensive and it is not

always possible to go into as much detail as is desirable. So after going live this autumn, the site will be developed over the next few years to allow those interested to dig more deeply into the ground covered in the TV and radio shows by means of an integrated information system. In a discussion, for example, of why the first movement of the *Eroica* is so long, visitors will be able to visualise the score and play the passages in question.

There are also to be interactive games in which children can match music to paintings, for instance, or test their own feelings about a piece against what they have been told about it.

The *Keeping Score* programme is aimed at people of all ages, but the most important educative targets are children and young people - for reasons that should be obvious to anyone concerned about the world we are bequeathing to future generations.

The driving force behind the project is the conviction of MTT and his orchestra that musicians are not just there to play music but that they have a responsibility towards the music they play. The project is a demonstration of their commitment to ensuring that in years to come there will still be musicians playing classical music and audiences coming to listen.

To safeguarding the transmission of a precious cultural heritage - before it is too late.

To warding off the day, in some distant dystopic future, where there are no longer enough musicians left to perform Mahler's *Symphony of a Thousand* ... and no audience left to care.