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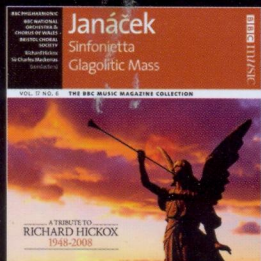
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# ARTISTS' ENTRANCE

How do instrumentalists at the start of their careers make the transition from college student to orchestral professional? **Rebecca Franks** finds out about a new orchestra helping to open doors

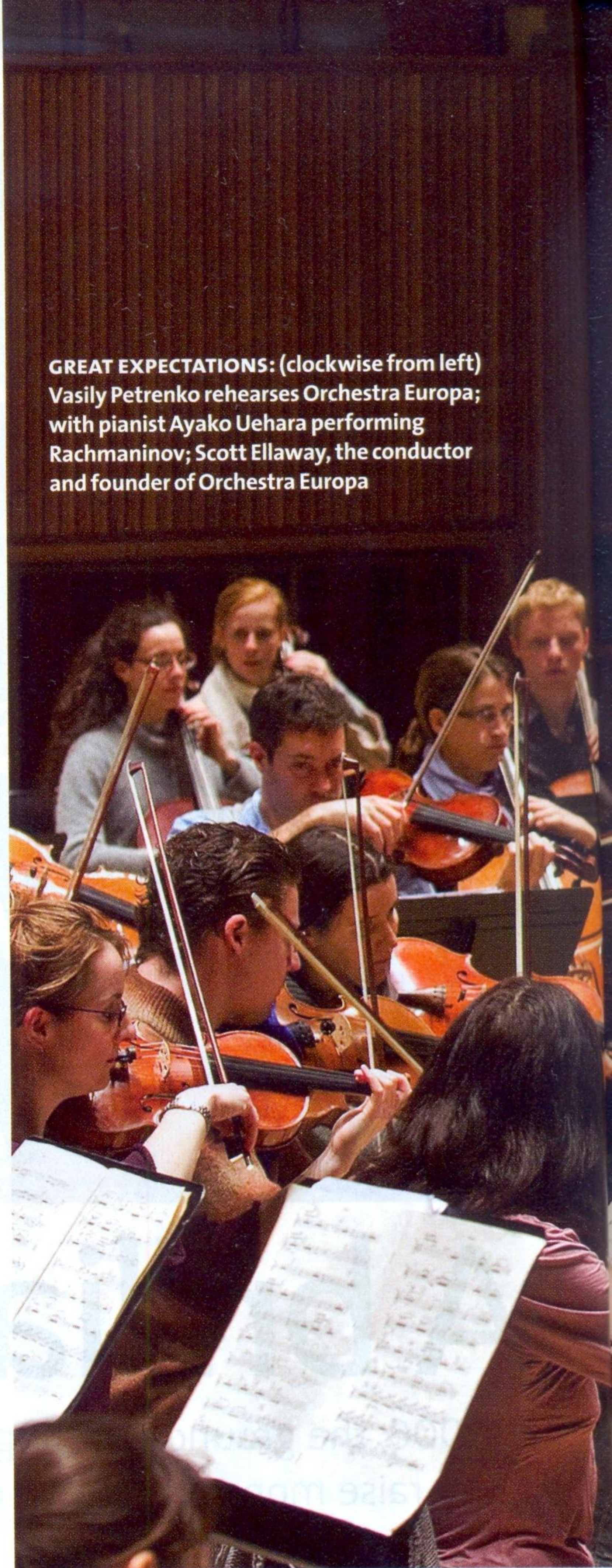
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Life for young orchestral musicians can be tough. In many other professions the career path for graduates is clearly signposted and well trodden. Solicitors and accountants vie for training contracts, barristers complete pupillages and doctors undertake hospital residencies. But what should a musician who wants to carve out a career as an orchestral player do after graduating? Once the safety net of regular lessons is removed, and the support of fellow music college students disappears, the only way to go is to launch headlong into fiercely competitive – and notoriously strict – auditions and trials. 'It's quite rare to get a full-time orchestral job before 30,' says Vasily Petrenko, principal conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. 'Young musicians find they haven't got the necessary experience of playing in a professional orchestra, and at the same time they have all the technical abilities.'

Several schemes have been set up to help bridge this gap between conservatoires and professional orchestras. The Southbank Sinfonia, for example, set up in 2002, offers its 32 players a full-time position for eight to nine months in an ensemble with coaching and support and a bursary of up to £7,000.

In America, the New World Symphony (NWS) in Miami offers gifted players a three-year fellowship to help prepare them for their careers. Other orchestras focus on giving concert experience – such as the European Union Chamber Orchestra and European Union Baroque Orchestra – and many professional orchestras offer apprenticeship schemes. But as yet there hasn't been a full-size, permanent symphony orchestra for young graduates in Europe, even though youth orchestras for players under 24 – the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain and European Youth Orchestra being two obvious examples – aren't thin on the ground.

Scott Ellaway, a 26-year-old conductor, spotted this niche several years ago and decided to set up a symphony orchestra for postgraduates musicians. Launched in November 2008 at a concert in Cardiff under Petrenko's baton, Orchestra Europa aims to give young professionals the chance to play core orchestral repertoire regularly with world-class conductors and soloists, and offers them training in community and outreach work – in short it aims to provide an experience of life as a professional orchestral musician in one of the established orchestras. 'We're absolutely the last stage in development,' says Ellaway. 'We're

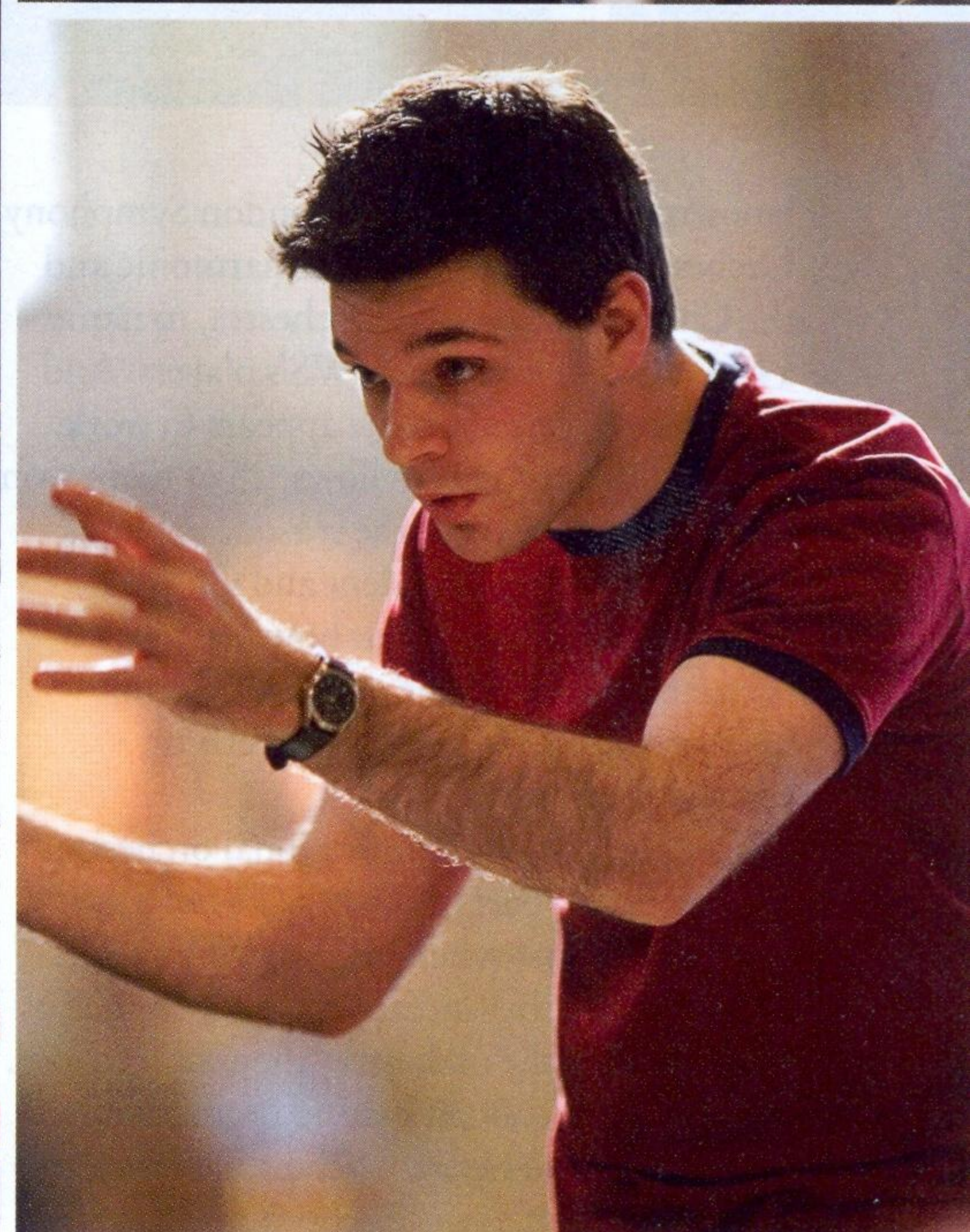


**GREAT EXPECTATIONS:** (clockwise from left) Vasily Petrenko rehearses Orchestra Europa; with pianist Ayako Uehara performing Rachmaninov; Scott Ellaway, the conductor and founder of Orchestra Europa

not another National Youth Orchestra. The musicians have already decided they want a career as orchestral players. Orchestra Europa is a public face of an academy of orchestral music, where there's coaching for our musicians, chamber music and career advice.'

Orchestra Europa's members are drawn from across Europe and can stay in the orchestra for up to three years, giving six concerts a year. Auditions are planned for next year; the current members were recommended for the orchestra by their music colleges. 'Everyone's here by choice and really interested in pursuing a career in orchestral playing,' says Fraser Kelman, 25, Europa's first oboist. 'I think that it helps everyone is at postgraduate level – we're that bit more experienced, refined and focused.' One of the orchestra's attractions is its European base,





says Alexandra Hjortswang, a 24-year-old violinist from Sweden: 'Being a musician is so much about networking. None of us can expect to get a job in the country we want to be in. You have to go to wherever there's a position. So it would be great to have a network of contacts over Europe.'

Following two small-scale pre-season concerts in Oxford in spring 2008, Europa's first six-concert season features an impressive array of soloists and conductors – violinist Tasmin Little plays Mendelssohn in March, conducted by Martyn Brabbins, while in May Europa heads to The Sage, Gateshead to perform Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* under Yan Pascal Tortelier. Behind the scenes, meanwhile, a partnership with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra is being established. 'There are 16 RPO string players involved

## 'Being a musician is so much about networking'

in supporting Orchestra Europa musicians during the rehearsal process,' says James Hutchinson, head of the RPO's education department. 'There's a second strand of education training – they're developing their skills so they can go on and deliver education projects – that's now become increasingly important.' On top of that Europa has linked up with the European School in Culham and the King Solomon Academy in London, where Europa musicians will be going in to help coach young players.

The inspiration to set up a European orchestral academy came from across the Atlantic. In 2005 Ellaway flew to the US to see first-hand how the New World Symphony (NWS), an orchestral academy set up 21 years ago by conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, is run. 'When I came back,' says Ellaway, 'I thought, "Gosh, there's nothing quite like that [Symphony Orchestra] in Europe working on a full-time basis, with great conductors and soloists. Could we create something like it?"' Each year around 30 new recruits head to the NWS's Miami home to join an 87-strong orchestra that gives regular concerts, records CDs, and tours Europe and the US. For 35 weeks a year, its members receive a weekly stipend, a small apartment in one of two specially converted hotels and, most importantly, coaching from players in world- ▶





ON STAGE: (from left) Petrenko conducts at St David's Hall, Cardiff; pianist Ayako Uehara takes a bow

renowned orchestras – the London Symphony Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, to name a few, all work with the NWS's players. And the three-year programme appears to work. 'Last year from the 87 fellows, 25 of them won jobs over the course of the season,' explains Howard Herring, president and CEO of NWS. 'If you think about how few jobs become available in the orchestra world, for us to have 25 winners is something we're very proud of.'

Forging links with professional orchestras has been a key part of the NWS's success, not least because when players audition for full-time jobs they already have experience of working with the orchestras they want to join. With just one concert behind them, there's a long way to go before Orchestra Europa establishes itself as the European equivalent of the NWS, but the response from the RPO suggests that Europa could be a valuable recruiting ground. 'When their musicians do trials there's 100 per cent possibility that they're going to look at the RPO,' says Hutchinson. 'So it's fantastic for us in being able to secure some of the best young talent.'

Of course, Ellaway will be hoping that the RPO will look on his orchestra just as keenly, but first it has to become established as a stand-alone orchestra. And its future plans are indeed ambitious. 'We're on a three-year cycle starting off performing concerts in the UK, then next year we're going to Europe to take part in festivals,' says Ellaway. 'Hopefully after that [we'll do] a bigger tour around Europe. And we're putting out feelers for where an orchestra like this could be based. That's when I'd like to do something similar to the New World Symphony – where the orchestra's

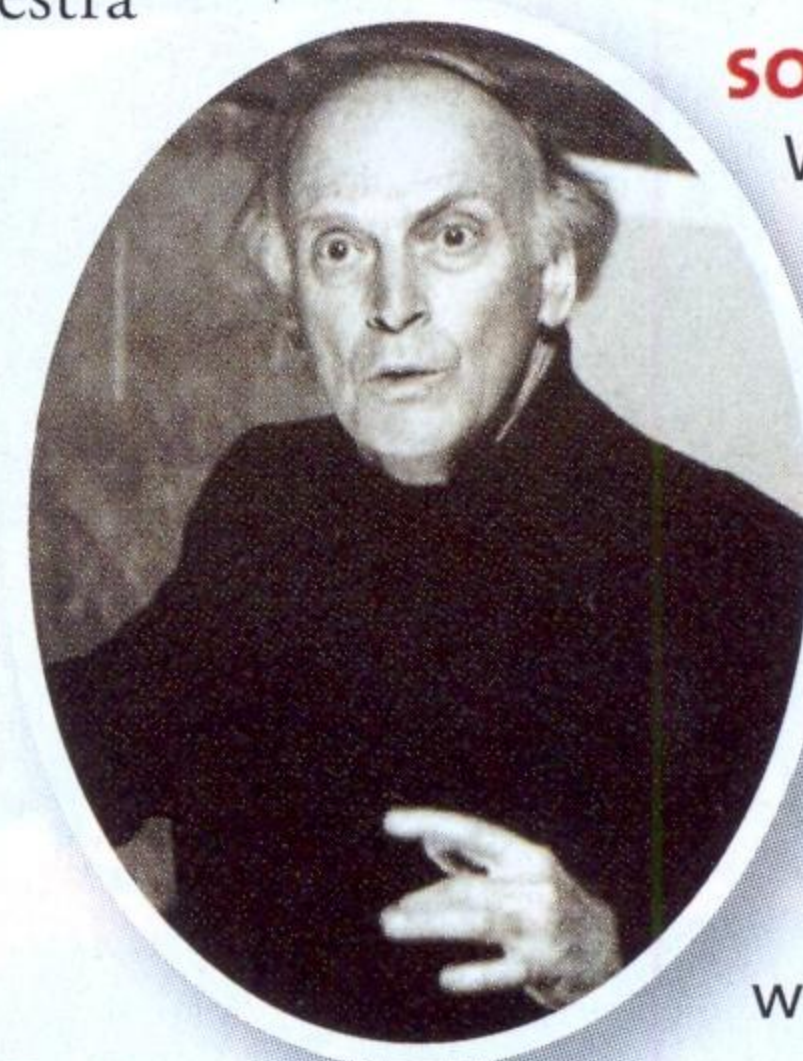
on a stipend, based in one location and we're able to be part of the community.' But projects on this grand scale eat money. 'The orchestra needs between £500,000 to £1m a year,' estimates Ellaway. 'And in order to have security for the future we'll need a multi-million pound endowment, especially if we're going to go down the road of having a permanent base. You can't have a hand-to-mouth existence.' Surely setting up an orchestra in these tough economic times must be a nerve-racking business? 'I'm not jittery,'

## 'It's fantastic for us to be able to secure the best talent'

says Ellaway. 'If an organisation like Europa can get through a situation like the credit crunch, then it deserves to be here. It means we have the right model to get through the difficult times.'

Back to the immediate future, and the musicians are looking forward to their first season as an orchestra. 'With this there's the opportunity to build something through the year,' says Kelman. 'It's one of the best things about Europa – and certainly as a wind player it's quite attractive to be sitting with the same section so there's a chance to develop and blend.' And Petrenko believes Europa's future is bright: 'They have a huge potential because they're great musicians. As with any orchestra they need to play a bit more together but, as they will keep the same group for a year or two, I think in the future they will be absolutely brilliant.' ■

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Formed in 1981, this conductor-less ensemble offers places to between 16-22 players a year. During seven or eight tours across Europe, EUCO gives around 50-60 concerts. Each tour is coached by a professional concert master. Artists that have worked with the group include violinists Tasmin Little and Yehudi Menuhin (above). **WEBSITE:** [www.etd.gb.com](http://www.etd.gb.com)

### EUROPEAN UNION BAROQUE ORCHESTRA (EUBO)

For instrumentalists who want to head into the Baroque realm, this is the ideal ensemble. The 25 or so musicians it accepts each year are given specialist training by the likes of violinist Margaret Faultless, conductor Edward Higginbottom and organist and conductor Ton Koopman. **WEBSITE:** [www.eubo.org.uk](http://www.eubo.org.uk)

### LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA (LSO) STRING SCHEME

Since 1992 this apprenticeship scheme has given 20 conservatoire students a year the chance to play in LSO rehearsals and performances. Players are chosen by audition, and come from London-based music colleges. **WEBSITE:** [www.lso.co.uk](http://www.lso.co.uk)