



# Ambassador's Activities

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Speech by *HE* Bernard Emié,  
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

at the ceremony to award the insignia  
of *Chevalier* in the *Ordre National du Mérite*  
to Mr Stefano Pace

Royal Opera House, 24 April 2012

*Cher* Stefano Pace,  
*Cher* Tony Hall,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It's a great pleasure for me to be among you today at the Royal Opera House to award the insignia of *Chevalier in the Ordre National du Mérite* to Stefano Pace, Technical Director of this prestigious opera house.

This high honour, established by General de Gaulle in 1963, is awarded in recognition of its recipients' distinguished services to the French nation, and the ceremony is always a solemn occasion.

Today, through me, the French Republic wishes, *cher* Stefano Pace, to pay tribute to your brilliant professional career in the opera world, driven by a genuine love of music, the stage and audiences.

I've been in London a year and have had the pleasure of meeting you at the French Ambassador's residence, at an evening to raise funds for the forthcoming staging of Berlioz's "Les Troyens" at the Royal Opera House – an exceptional production that we're all looking forward to. At the event, I was able to see for myself what a major figure you are in London's musical community, and also a pillar of the opera world in Europe.

Before awarding you your insignia, allow me to retrace your remarkable career.

You are first and foremost a European citizen following in your family's footsteps. "Vous êtes un enfant de la balle". Born in Rome, you began an apprenticeship in stage design as a teenager in your father's workshop, at a time when Italy had a virtual monopoly of building sets for theatre, opera and cinema in Europe. You had the opportunity to use your burgeoning technical skills to support great creators like Giorgio Strehler and Franco Zeffirelli, on the greatest European stages.

You then studied architecture at the University of Rome, where you obtained your degree in 1985. As the subject of your thesis, moreover, you chose "Opera everywhere: 'Lohengrin' at the Palais Omnisports de Paris-Bercy", and it earned you a distinction from the examining

committee. By covering this theme, you were already revealing your passion for opera and also recalling its mission to appeal to the broadest possible audience.

You began your career as a set designer in 1977 at the Teatro del Giglio – the Opera Theatre of Lucca. You went on to oversee the creation of more than 100 theatre, opera and ballet sets on the world's most important stages, and to design more than 40 sets for many Italian theatres in Rome, Naples and Catania... before heading to France in 1994 to take up the prestigious posts of Assistant Technical Director and then Technical Director at the Opéra National de Paris, where you remained until 2005. I should also recall that your love of France is such that you requested French nationality, obtaining it in 1996.

Being Technical Director at the Opéra Bastille, a few years after it opened, was a tremendous challenge. You led a team of more than 400 people there, taking over responsibility for an impressive budget and displaying consummate diplomatic and social skills. Your talent lay in meeting the artists' demands – using the remarkable toolbox that is the Opéra de Paris to make their wildest dreams come true – but also coping with tough technical and human problems: how to make the impossible possible on a theatre stage? How to push back the boundaries while yielding to safety rules and staffing constraints? In short, you managed to combine two temperaments often said to be incompatible but nevertheless both essential for a great technical director: that of the acrobat, reaching for the stars, and that of the geometrician, eyes glued to plans and scale models but also regulations, flow charts... and computer files showing your budgetary limitations.

Allow me to mention a few of your finest creations.

You built the superb set for Berlioz's "The Damnation of Faust" at the Théâtre du Châtelet in 1991, directed by Yannis Kokkos, himself the favourite set designer of directors of the calibre of Antoine Vitez and Jacques Lasalle. You designed the concert backdrop for the Palais Garnier in Paris in 1995, as well as the scenery for Maurice Béjart's ballet "Le Mandarin Merveilleux" at the Opéra Bastille in 1999. The Rudolf Nureyev Foundation entrusted you with the role of Technical Director for creating the tomb of the great Rudolf, designed by Ezio Frigerio, in the Russian Orthodox cemetery of Sainte-Geneviève-des-Bois, where the dancer and choreographer Serge Lifar was also laid to rest. You've advised major architects on building theatres, including Frenchman Paul Andreu, for whom you created the lighting and

audiovisual equipment in the four halls of the majestic Grand National Theatre in Beijing. From 2005, you were also Production Manager and Technical Director at the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía in Valencia, Spain; architect and set designer for the project to renovate the legendary Teatro di San Carlo in Naples; Artistic Director of the Teatro Massimo Vincenzo Bellini in Catania; and Technical Director of the Teatro Carlo Felice in Genoa.

Finally, in September 2010, you were appointed Technical Director of the Royal Opera House in London, quite simply one of the finest opera houses in the world, which I'm lucky enough to visit very often to witness its sublime creations.

May I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to your wife, who has been at your side and inspired you throughout your career, supporting your professional commitments.

For the whole of this exceptional career – combining artistic success, commitment to one of the most prestigious French cultural institutions, and now your contribution to Franco-British friendship – the French Republic has decided to show you its gratitude.

*Stefano Pace, au nom du président de la République et en vertu des pouvoirs qui nous sont conférés, nous vous faisons Chevalier dans l'Ordre national du Mérite./*