

Remise des insignes de la légion d'honneur à Yan Pascal Tortelier – 09 février 2017

Cher Yan Pascal Tortelier,

Je suis heureuse de vous accueillir ce soir, en présence de votre épouse, de l'un de vos fils et de vos amis, pour saluer en vous l'artiste et le chef d'orchestre de talent, qui a fait rayonner sur les plus grandes scènes du monde le répertoire et la culture française.

We met recently and I was struck by the modesty with which you described your career and your meetings with eminent figures such as Nadia Boulanger, Isaac Stern and Pablo Casals, as well as your fatherly pride when talking about your two sons: Maxime, an accomplished conductor who is with us this evening, and Sébastien, who has forged a fine career in theatre. I also noted your gratitude and admiration towards the people who had a decisive influence in your career.

They include your parents, of course, who were both great cellists: Paul Tortelier, who had a profound impact on the French musical landscape, and Maud Martin, who, you've told me, had an innate flair for communication and from whom you inherited a deep understanding of music and its humanistic role.

We've also talked about a friend we have in common, Michel Plasson, with whom you worked as Associate Conductor of the *Orchestre national du Capitole de Toulouse*, and you stressed the major impact he had on your career as a conductor. Because before devoting yourself entirely to conducting, you pursued a brilliant career as a violinist for forty years. That experience as an instrumentalist nurtured and forged your approach to conducting: you're a musician and interpreter first, a conductor second. You told me that being a musician is a privilege for you, because it's a lifelong passion which nourishes the soul.

I also like the way you've described your job: beyond the technical aspect and giving a sense of tempo, in your view a conductor must be able to inspire: inspire orchestral musicians and, with them, the public. I've also highlighted the importance you attach to work. You were, admittedly, a precocious child: you started playing the piano and violin at the age of four, and won first prize for violin at the Conservatoire de Paris when you were fourteen. But you've always worked on training your ear, and continue to do so, since you're one of those remarkable artists whose unique talent develops and blossoms over time.

Your career has put you at the helm of some of the greatest orchestras in Europe, Asia and North America, where, among other things, you directed the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. Your rare understanding of instruments and orchestration, and your kindness, energy and passion for communicating have made you one of the conductors best loved by artists. Perhaps that explains why the members of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra unanimously appointed you their Chief Conductor last year. And it's these same qualities which led you to become the Sao Paulo Symphony Orchestra's Guest Conductor of Honour in twenty-eleven, after three years with the orchestra as Principal Conductor.

Throughout your career, you've worked hard to promote the French repertoire, enabling foreign audiences to discover the works of Dutilleux, Ravel, Debussy, Lili Boulanger and Messiaen. You've been active in propagating French music, particularly by championing rarely-played composers such as Florent Schmitt. Your orchestration of Ravel's *Trio* – which has been regularly picked up and played internationally since its creation – and your impressive recording career with the Chandos label have also significantly raised the profile of our musical heritage.

I also want to emphasize your outstanding role in promoting and developing Franco-British friendship. After serving as Principal Conductor and Artistic Director of the Ulster Orchestra, you led the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra for 10 years. This successful collaboration included many appearances in the famous BBC Proms and a memorable tour of the United States to celebrate the orchestra's sixtieth birthday.

The strong ties you forged with one of Britain's greatest orchestras earned you the title of Conductor Emeritus. The title is proof of your artistic excellence but also highlights the tremendous contribution you've made to raising the profile of our culture here in the UK, where you've lived for nearly thirty years.

Allow me to finish this speech on an anecdote you recounted to me yesterday: when you were a boy, an eminent colleague of Massenet's tested your musical ear and your skill at listening. On turning to your father, who wanted to know if you had a gift, he concluded: "Be sure that boy makes it!" So it's not only the accomplished conductor and musician that I'd like to honour this evening, but also the promising boy who managed, by dint of work and passion, to raise the profile of our culture beyond our borders.

For all these reasons, the Republic has decided to award you the most prestigious of distinctions. This evening I have the huge pleasure and privilege of presenting you with your insignia.

Yan Pascal Tortelier, au nom du Président de la République et en vertu des pouvoirs qui nous sont conférés, nous vous faisons chevalier dans l'Ordre national de la Légion d'honneur.