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Pierre-Dominique Ponnelle

Composer & Conductor



Pierre-Dominique Ponnelle was born in Munich in 1957, the son of the renowned opera, film and theatre director Jean-Pierre Ponnelle and actress/director Margit Saad. He studied at the Richard Strauss Conservatory in Munich with Rochus Gebhardt for composition and with Richard Böck and Peter Falk for conducting. He subsequently went on to study with Otmar Suitner in Weimar and Herbert von Karajan in Berlin and Salzburg.

As a conductor, he has appeared at opera houses in Kassel, Innsbruck, Marseille, Nice, Zurich, Košice, Bratislava, Dushanbe, Bishkek, Tashkent, Almaty, Baku, Timișoara, Lvov, Odessa, and the Deutsche Oper am Rhein. On the special occasion of the 10th anniversary of Slovenian independence in 2005 Ponnelle led the premiere of the opera "Brata" by Alojz Ajdič at the Ljubljana State Opera (at the composer's request).

He has performed at the Festival dei Due Mondi in Charleston and Spoleto, the International Music Festival in Bratislava, and the Mozart Festival in Würzburg. He further conducted the Radio Symphony Orchestra in Baden-Baden, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Leipzig, Bucharest and Luxembourg, the Symphonic Orchestra in Essen, Wuppertal, Berlin, São Paulo, Vladivostok, Genoa and Valencia, the Philharmonia Hungarica, the George Enescu Philharmonic in Bucharest, the Orchester National de Lyon, the State Orchestra of Greece, Slovenia, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Lithuania, Slovakia and Ukraine.

From 1992 to 1996 Ponnelle worked with the State Philharmonic Orchestra of Belarus in Minsk, first as Principal Guest Conductor, then as Principal Conductor. The focus of his work was on Brahms, Bruckner and Mahler as well as Russian composers, particularly Dimitri Shostakovich. With the Philharmonic Choir he conducted works such as Brahms' "A German Requiem" and Verdi's "Messa da Requiem". He led the world premiere of the 9th Symphony for Electric Guitar and Grand Symphony Orchestra by the important contemporary Belarusian composer Dmitri Smolsky. The success of his years in Minsk were documented on 4 CD recordings released by Musicaphon and BMG (with works by Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Shostakovich). The Belarusian television broadcasted many of his concerts. Bayerische Fernsehen produced the 90-minute documentary "Gesang der Vögel", with Ponnelle's work at the Munich Philharmonic playing a central role.

He has further conducted the Philharmonic Orchestras of Strasbourg, Monte-Carlo, St. Gallen, Basel, Dresden, Munich, Zagreb, Ostrava, Brno, Wroclaw, Krakow, Oradea, Cluj, Lvov, Donetsk, Yalta, Dnepropetrovsk, Charkov, Ufa, Rostov-on-Don, Yaroslavl, Kazan, Volgograd, Voronej, Nijni-Novgorod, Saratov, Irkutsk, Novosibirsk and St. Petersburg.

At a time during which most of the major former Soviet cities were, despite their great cultural wealth, were barely known to the West, Ponnelle's built cultural bridges through his own personal initiative. He brought the great German symphonic works to audiences that, in many cases, was hearing this music for the very first time. As such, he conducted the premieres of Mahler's 6th Symphony in Irkutsk as well as Bruckner's 3rd in Ufa.

Ponnelle's musical contribution for improving cross-border understanding also includes a festive concert in the Ukrainian town of Chernivtsi in honour of the great Yiddish folk actress Sidi Tal where, on her 20th anniversary of her death, he conducted a Beethoven program with the local Philharmonic orchestra. He further performed Shostakovich's 7th Symphony with the Philharmonic Orchestra on the 50th end-of-war anniversary in the Siberian Krasnoyarsk; a particularly special event given his German background and the fact that the so-called "Leningrad" symphony was written during the siege of the city of Leningrad by the German army.

He has composed the music for seven documentary films, "Italy Land of Promise" (directed by Christian Rischert), which were produced by the Bavarian Television. His chamber music was performed at the International Festival of Contemporary Music "2 days and 2 nights of new music" in Odessa, as well as at the Rostov-on-Don festival "Rostov-on-Don".