

younger audiences to the opera. But what about all the baby boomers? There's an older generation too who I think would like to see a work with new eyes or hear it differently.'

While Runnicles enumerates some of the shortcomings of the repertory system, a key advantage is being able to 'fine tune' a particular production through frequent performances. In America, 'it's always a sad moment at the end of a short run of a production, knowing it will be seven or eight years before it reaches that stage again. Just when

you've brought a *Tristan* to the level where you feel it's glorious, everyone's comfortable, and you can play with it, then it's put on ice.'

Runnicles is well aware of how ferociously territorial Berlin's musical politics can be but seems undaunted. He mentions an ongoing dialogue with Daniel Barenboim – 'for whom I have the deepest respect and friendship' – about possible direct collaboration and harmonising of repertory choices. 'Many are used to confrontation and paranoia in Berlin, but I'd like to think it could

be about collaboration. There's room for all these theatres.'

Thomas May

Donald Runnicles' next operatic engagement will be a production of Strauss' Elektra with the Mannheim Opera which opens on 14 December 2008 in honour of the 30th anniversary of his conducting debut. Visit www.mannheim-nationaltheater.de. He takes up his post with the Deutsche Oper Berlin in August 2009.

A Fresh Start

Born and raised in a small Tuscan town near Puccini's villa in Torre del Lago, **Nicola Luisotti** first came to international attention conducting *Il trovatore* in Stuttgart in 2002. His charismatic debut at San Francisco Opera as guest conductor in *Forza* in 2005 led to Luisotti's appointment by David Gockley as the company's new music director, beginning next autumn. The genial conductor shares his optimistic outlook for his time in San Francisco with **Thomas May**

Thomas May: You and the San Francisco Opera Orchestra fell in love with each other during *Forza*. What happened?

Nicola Luisotti: I remember this first reading with the orchestra with huge emotion. As I describe this amazing experience, I must also include the wonderful San Francisco Opera Chorus. *La Forza* is not so easy and I expected that I would have to stop the rehearsal many times. Well, we read the score, the new critical edition from Philip Gossett and his staff – the first time that that score was played. The response of the orchestra was so great, even that first time, that I was exhilarated. Together we immediately created a wonderful feeling between us, one that grew each day until the last performance. I remember this as one of the most exciting times of my musical life.

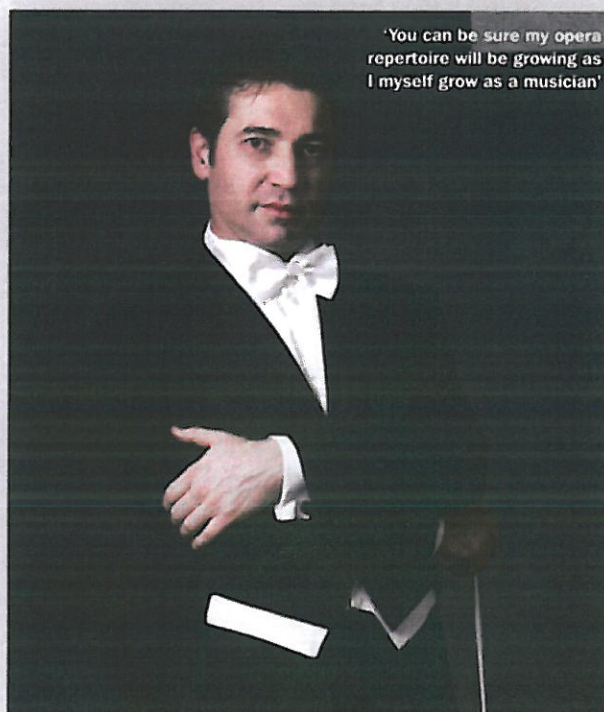
TM: What aspects of the SFO Orchestra impress you most?

NL: The capacity that this amazing organism has to create colours. When I was young I was really fascinated by the pipe organ. I even had a dream that one day I could become an organist. Well, in a way, I realised that childhood dream. The orchestra is a kind of big 'organ', but with so much more possibility – not just keys and registers, but instruments and people, with their own experiences who share with you the whole incredible project named music. In this sense, I can see all the great work that Donald Runnicles, whom I have great respect for, has done with the San Francisco Opera Orchestra and Chorus. I am so pleased and humbled to be his successor and look forward to making beautiful music in the future with this wonderful group of artists.

TM: Do you have any new directions in mind for the orchestra and by extension the company?

NL: With my staff, I have some idea about the direction that we have to take to let the company continue to grow. Of course, I have not yet arrived there for my first season. I have still to go there and feel the theatre, so it is premature to speak about grand future plans. But one thing I can already say is that I think it is very important to showcase the artists of the orchestra and chorus. I am planning to spotlight them with two symphonic concerts every year which will be important for both the musicians and our audiences.

TM: You have ambitions in the concert hall as well. In fact your repertory in the concert hall is more extensive. What do you say to those who are con-



'You can be sure my opera repertoire will be growing as I myself grow as a musician'

cerned that your opera repertory is limited to Verdi and Puccini? How do you anticipate expanding that repertory – and what areas would you like to explore more?

NL: Yes, you are right, I like conducting a lot of different symphonic repertoire and look forward to conducting new orchestras such as the Philharmonia in the UK, the Atlanta Symphony, and, of course, the San Francisco Symphony. But David Gockley and I are talking about new opera repertoire for me. It is too soon to announce these plans, but you can be sure my opera repertoire will be growing as I myself grow as a musician and my experience with San Francisco Opera begins.

TM: Who have been your most important mentors as a conductor?

NL: One of the most important mentors has to be the composer. Our principal duty, in fact, is to respect and try to comprehend every wish of the writer of the music. But what is even much more important is to try to love the music that we are called to conduct.

Nicola Luisotti will be with San Francisco Opera this season to conduct Puccini's La bohème from 16 November to 7 December 2008. He takes up his position as SFO's music director in September 2009. Visit www.sfoopera.com