

Inspiring Interview with 34-year-old Met Maestro Daniele Rustioni

Samantha Janazzo (April 12, 2017)



Casa Italiana Zerilli-Marimò (NYU) airs the fifth episode of "Adventures in Italian Opera" with Fred Plotkin. This episode features Daniele Rustioni, a 34 year old Italian conductor who recently completed his debut at the Metropolitan Opera, among many other impressive milestones.

On April 11, [La Casa Italiana](#) [2] hosted opera expert [Fred Plotkin](#) [3] for an inspiring interview with 34-year-old maestro [Daniele Rustioni](#) [4]. Together they discussed Rustioni's recent debut in the renowned [Giuseppe Verdi](#) [5] Opera, [Aida](#) [6], at New York City's [Metropolitan Opera](#) [7]. They also touched on his journey to success, inspirations, aspirations, and much more. Plotkin began with the phrase *largo ai giovani* or "make way for the young ones," a fitting start for such a budding talent.

Rustioni's first musical experience, other than listening to his mother sing, was voice choir at the age of eight at [La Scala](#) [8] in Milan, where he fulfilled his instrument requirement with the [cello](#) [9]—the instrument he feels most closely resembles the human singing voice. He explains that one must complete a one decade composition course before beginning conducting courses; luckily Rustioni



started at the age of eleven. Describing himself as "old school," Rustioni feels that taking up piano, cello, and singing has aided his success today. When he receives a new score, he will play through it himself and sing the words before approaching the orchestra.

His first experience conducting was at the age of 21 in [Abruzzo](#) [10] at the [Pescara Academy](#) [11], where he was the maestro for a mixed orchestra of retired and current professionals and students. Though he struggled with self-doubt in the beginning, and realized how truly difficult it was to produce—and audibly portray—what he had in mind through the orchestra, his fascination for conducting became a passion, and he knew he was following his calling.

Delving into the technique of being a maestro, he states, "You are constantly learning at the podium; the orchestra is your best teacher." He elaborates by referring to something he calls the "maestro's aura," or the energy passed from the conductor to the orchestra that truly connects the orchestra to the desired sound. This aura is passed not only through the waving of the conductors arms, keeping time, and giving cues, but also through his eyes, his movements, and of course, lots of practice and communication.

"A conductor changes the sound of an orchestra," explains Rustioni, saying that conductors should not even have to speak the same language as the people in the orchestra, commenting on the time he spent conducting in [Sankt-Peterburg, Russia](#) [12]. It is the maestro's job to connect the stage to the orchestra; that is his main duty, and an extremely difficult one. In the end, what is produced by the orchestra is the vision of the maestro. "Music is a way of transmitting our feelings," Rustioni stated, "They can simply use opera terminology along with unspoken communication to transmit a successful sound."

The suspense finally broke when Fred Plotkin inquired about Daniele Rustioni's experience with the impressive cast members of *Aida*, a Verdi Opera that takes place in Egypt. Rustioni comments on how he must work as a conductor with the cast and the orchestra—both separately and together. For example, the character *Aida* is played by [Krassimira Stoyanova](#) [13], who as Rustioni describes, has a very different Italianità. Plotkin agrees, and further adds that Stoyanova had him "on the edge of his seat" because her style was both unique and wonderful.

Rustioni explained that there is an adjusting process that occurs during rehearsal and a connection that needs to be constructed between the conductor and the performers. "She is a singer and an artist," Rustioni said as he described the way Stoyanova reads a score and sings it without listening to recordings; this is her own method of envisioning the pieces and perfecting them. "When you find an artist like this, you want them to be who they are," adds Rustioni. It is the maestro's job to match the orchestra to the stage, not vice versa.

He speaks highly of the other main members as well. [James Morris](#) [14] has performed at the Metropolitan Opera many times and [Riccardo Massi](#) [15] is a fabulous tenor. He has worked with [Violeta Urmana](#) [16] twice before; her style greatly differs from Stoyanova, but they compliment one another quite beautifully.

"You are managing many different types of artists and a large orchestra. Even though you are young in your career, you are very able to do this. How do you make the whole thing work when the variables are so difficult?" asks Plotkin when discussing the variety of talents on the stage, to which the maestro answers with one simple word: "rehearsal." He goes on to explain that even though he and Violeta worked together before, they have to adapt to each other each time. As a conductor, one needs to know also how much the orchestra is able to listen and relate, keeping in mind that every orchestra is different.

Largo ai giovani is true in this case; Daniele Rustioni's budding career is truly impressive, but he credits the pioneers of opera such as Rossini, Verdi, Comencini and more for his success. As he boasted about Italian culture and how it radiates through the operatic scene around the world, Daniele Rustioni exclaimed, "Italy has the trademark to Opera; it was created here."



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