

## Testata: Financial Times (Gran Bretagna) Martedì 2/9/08

FT.com  
Lunedì 1/9/08

The most arresting sight on approach in the Italian village of Stresa by train, apart from the sheer beauty of Lake Maggiore and the mountains beyond, is that of the small islands whose separation from the mainland did not prevent development. It looks as if they could sink from the weight of their buildings, but those buildings have been there for centuries, a legacy of the Borromeo family of Milan, which gained control of Stresa centuries ago and is still around today.

One way to get a close-up look at them is to visit the Stresa Festival, which numbers among its performing venues Borromeo villas on two of the islands. With its old-world lakeside hotels ... Stresa proved an ideal spot for a summer festival in the early 1960s and attracted a socially prominent audience. The festival ... has been rejuvenated by the conductor Gianandrea Noseda, now in his eighth season as artistic director.

Since coming to Stresa, Noseda has become chief conductor of the BBC Philharmonic and music director of the Teatro Regio in Turin, and has ample opportunity to invite world-class musicians to his festival, which offers a concert every evening for two weeks.

My first involved a boat trip to Isola Madre, where an arresting programme by the Zehetmair Quartet was scheduled outside a Borromeo villa. Alas, the cellist was ill, but the revised programme included a solo violin sonata by Grazyna Bacewicz, a winning mix of modern sonorities and old-style virtuosity brilliantly played by Kuba Jacowicz...

A concert in a 13th-century church by the choir of King's College, Cambridge, conducted by Stephen Cleobury, found the esteemed men and boys in especially fine form in music by 16th-century masters such as Thomas Weelkes and Orlando Gibbons. With an organ supporting the vocal lines in accordance with current musicological thinking, Cleobury ensured that moments of red-blooded passion emerged.

Visiting orchestras, this year including the Philharmonia of La Scala and the Royal Philharmonic, are part of the Stresa experience but Noseda ... has formed his own hand-picked orchestra, drawn mainly from Italy, which he has led in semi-staged versions of Mozart operas. This year the 65 players took on Mahler's Symphony No.4, their largest-scale work yet, and if the numbers - 10 first violins, four double basses - are smaller than usual, they beautifully captured the symphony's Haydnesque attributes and, given the fire Noseda can impart to a performance, never short-changed the symphony's more eruptive moments. Noseda beautifully caught the Viennese ebb and flow of tempo in the first movement, and the last movement, a setting of a poem from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, benefited mightily from the soprano Sally Matthews's textually oriented, lustrously voiced singing.

In a seething account of the Stravinsky Violin Concerto in which soloist Thomas Zehetmair

pierced the work's neoclassical trappings to emphasise its kinship to the diabolical *L'histoire du soldat* . It was

an ideal prelude to the semi-staged performance of the

*The Rake's Progress*

, with Matthews and Andrew Kennedy, scheduled the following evening, which unfortunately I had to miss.

Despite his activity elsewhere, Nosedà seems committed to Stresa... He has instituted a biennial composition competition, and there is talk of redoing the prosaic Palazzo dei Congressi or building a completely new hall. Stresa looks in good shape as it approaches its 50th festival in 2011.

*George Loomis*