

## **CHARLES HAZLEWOOD**

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Charles Matthew Egerton Hazlewood was born on 14 November 1966 and is a British conductor and is, or was the blue-eyed boy of the BBC.

He attended Christ's Hospital in West Sussex gaining an organ scholarship to Keble College, Oxford and graduating in 1989.

The BBC nominated him as the UK representative in the European Broadcasting Union's conducting competition which he won.

He is a controversial figure and has formed a contemporary ensemble called Excellent Device and, also, a period instrument orchestra called Army of Generals. Such titles are not even musical.

He has conducted Kurt Weill's *The Silver Lake* in a new version by Rory Bremner! In December 2009 he appeared in Sandi Toksvig's *Christmas Cracker* along with Ronnie Corbett. He has also appeared in shows with *Super Fluffy Animals*, *Scritti Politti* (who?) and the *Guillemots*.

He conducted the BBC Concert Orchestra between 2005 -2009 having already conducted the Orchestra of St. Luke's in Carnegie Hall in 2003 and he has also conducted the Royal Concertbouw in Amsterdam.

He has also been a judge on talent shows for young musicians and most of his comments were ludicrous. Many of my correspondents said that they could not watch these shows because Hazlewood was so infuriating!

In other programmes, he has made stupid statements which has demeaned composers and performers and I have all these comments recorded on cassette or video tape.

He said, Handel was a great composer because he had balls.

What would he say about a female composer?

He said, You can't understand Bach unless you understand rock 'n roll.

He said, A lute in early music is the same as a guitar in pop music today.

After a performance of Richard Strauss's *Festival Prelude* at a Promenade Concert, he said, Didn't your trousers flap at that performance?

At a Promenade Concert, which included Rachmaninov's glorious Piano Concerto no 4, he said that the piano part was jamming. Jamming is a slang expression used by jazz musicians and pop stars which means improvisation There is no improvisation in this concerto. Hazlewood also said that this concerto was influenced by Gershwin. Utter nonsense. Rachmaninov began drafting this work in 1914.

Gershwin's first item was a song, *When you want 'em you can't get 'em* of 1916. The next year he wrote *Rialto Ripples* and his first hit was *Swanee* of 1919 but his first major work was the jazz opera *Blue Monday* of the early 1920s. His show, *O Kay*, dates from 1926 which is the date of publication of the Rachmaninov concerto in its second version. In 1924 Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* appeared. It is true that Rachmaninov liked this work and, even more so, Paul Whiteman's band.

Hazlewood said that this concerto was influenced by jazz and its rhythms. Again this is utter nonsense. Rachmaninov said that music is melody and this concerto concentrates on melody not rhythm. It is the concerto which is most intense of Rachmaninov's with harsher harmonies and darker colours in which heroism gives way to brooding and melancholy and certainly not jazz.

To make matters worse, Hazlewood said that Rachmaninov loved America. Completely untrue. He emigrated



there in 1918 to avoid the political upheavals in Russia and hoping he would make some income from his playing and composition. America was cold towards him. His wonderful Piano Concerto no. 3 was given a freezing cold reception and the Americans were only interested in money. Rachmaninov preferred Paris and Switzerland and longed for his homeland. If Hazlewood had read Rachmaninov's letters he would have known this.

When discussing Tchaikovsky Hazlewood said, To understand this music we have to dig deep into every muscle of this composer and study his DNA. How utterly absurd. He referred to Haydn as a business man who took Europe by storm. So here is Haydn in a pin strip suit, bowler hat and broolly blowing fiercely and creating a tornado which covers Europe

Hazlewood is a maverick, a loose canon and his unwelcome trendiness is debasing good music.

He has had a Radio 2 show called the Charles Hazlewood Show. He launched the Charles Hazlewood All Stars at the Glastonbury Festival in 2008 and, note, his name appears in the titles. He obviously thinks highly of himself. In 2010 he is to open a new opera company in South Africa

He is not the only one to make ridiculous and senseless comments. Lewis Foreman is not truthful about William Glock (see my articles on Glock) and said that Alun Hoddinott was a gentle giant. He was not. As the Americans would say, he was a tough cookie. Foreman also said that Hoddinott's Clarinet Concerto, Op 3, was jazzy. A letter from Alun to me refutes that.

An editor of a music journal states that Liszt was not a good composer and did not understand the piano. This same lunatic said that some of Dvorak's work was influenced by Benjamin Britten but, wait for it, he said that Holbrooke's Piano Concerto no. 1 was the greatest piano concerto ever written... unbelievable nonsense.

But to return to Hazlewood, he lives in North Somerset and has a musical festival called Play the Field. He encourages improvisation in the orchestra obviously making jam sessions. Pass the raspberry, please.

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