

# Annemarie Federle

Students are often given sage advice by their teachers. Work hard and opportunities will come, is one such nugget of wisdom. But how many students truly make the best of those opportunities when they arise? One such student has not only firmly grasped those opportunities with both hands but has left two orchestras with no choice but to appoint her as their horn section leader. Annemarie Federle's meteoric rise has taken London and the UK by storm. She is now Principal Horn of the **Aurora Orchestra** and the **London Philharmonic Orchestra**; not bad for a 20-year-old in her 3<sup>rd</sup> year at the Royal Academy of Music. *The Horn Player* Editor, **Richard Steggall** caught up with Annemarie to find out where it all went right.

Last time I talked to you was in April 2021, less than two years ago.

Yes, feels like a while ago now. A lot has changed but it's been fun.

It was mostly about competitions back then. You had just performed the Ruth Gipps *Horn Concerto* in the final of BBC Young Musician, and you were about to try your luck in Europe.

That's right. I applied for the ARD International Music Competition in Munich in March 2021. I got through the preliminary pre-recorded round, then, because of COVID, the first round



was online. I had to do a recording (in one take) playing the Knussen *Horn Concerto* and the Cherubini *Sonata No. 2*.

**We'll come back to the Knussen in a bit...**

Ha, yes! Around July, I found out that I was through to the second round which was the first in-person round – only twelve people got through.

**I seem to remember “Annemarie surprise mode” from our previous interview: you just apply for things and are surprised when something good happens. Was that the case this time?**

Yes, definitely. It seems to be my default setting!



Annemarie performing in the semi-final of the ADR competition

Being involved for about a week in Munich was very exciting. The second round was just in front of a panel and it was a slightly freer-choice programme. Everyone had to do Schumann *Adagio and Allegro*, then there was a choice of sonata and a choice of unaccompanied solo piece. The solo piece I chose was Messiaen's "Interstellar Call" and then the sonata – well, I had a bit of a nightmare situation actually. I thought I was going to be playing the Hindemith *Sonata in F*; I remember it saying on the list just "Hindemith *Sonata for horn*" and I didn't read any further than that. It turns out it was actually the Hindemith *Sonata in E♭* (that we know in the UK as the "alto-horn sonata"). I arrived at my rehearsal with the pianist they had provided (less than 48 hours before the competition) and she asked if I was doing the text in the Hindemith. I said I was confused as there's no text in the Hindemith, that's the other sonata. She said, "Yes, the one that's on the list", and I said, "No, the other one's on the list". Anyway, it turns out she was right! So I had to change to the York Bowen *Sonata* which I had luckily somewhat prepared for a different competition I was doing straight after in Switzerland. A bit of a stressful situation but it ended up going quite well.

**Again, I can sense a theme: this time it's last-minute preparation.**

Ha, yes, and it was good preparation for the next competition as well. Anyway, I got through to the semi-final which was Mozart *Horn Concerto No. 4* accompanied by the Munich Chamber Orchestra, along with a commissioned unaccompanied piece. That was all live-streamed as well, which adds to the excitement!

And that was as far as I got, which actually worked out quite nicely because had I got through to the final of the ARD then I wouldn't have been able to do the Gianni Bergamo competition that was straight after in Lugano, Switzerland, which I also turned into a bit of a holiday, which was really nice. My dad came along and I ended up getting joint 1<sup>st</sup> place in that – so it all worked out well.

**That had a decent cash prize as well from what I remember; I guess readers can Google that!**

**Those competitions took you through the summer and then you returned to start your 2<sup>nd</sup> year at RAM. Were you now starting to pick up orchestral work?**

Yes, I was performing a few recitals on the back of the BBC Young Musician competition but my first professional orchestral gig was with the Aurora Orchestra, playing principal in Beethoven *Symphony No. 7* – from memory! That was an interesting first professional date, but it was good to get thrown in at the deep end.

**How did you find the memorising? For many players that's very scary.**

I quite enjoyed it – I liked the challenge. As I've done quite a lot of solo work, I've done a lot of playing from memory, so I found it fine – not too tricky.

**Sounds like you're a good fit for the Aurora Orchestra?**

Well, a couple of months later they asked if I wanted to be considered for a trial for the job. On my birthday, in August 2022, we did a memorised Beethoven *Symphony No. 5* at the Proms before going on tour playing eight concerts of Berlioz *Symphonie Fantastique* – again, from memory. Four of those concerts also had Ravel *Piano Concerto in G*. They then offered me the job in October.

**Well, congratulations on that one! I suppose we'd better mention the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Am I right that you hadn't worked with the LPO before April 2022?**

That's correct. The first thing I got was a text from my teacher, Richard Watkins saying that I might get a call from the LPO because they want someone to play the Knussen *Horn Concerto*



LPO horn section (L-R): Gareth Mollison, Mark Vines, Annemarie Federle, Martin Hobbs, John Ryan

with the orchestra the following night because Ben Goldscheider had got COVID – that was about 1pm. I think they had asked the usual suspects: Martin Owen, David Pyatt, Richard Watkins etc., but none of them were free (or wanted) to do it and several of my teachers had suggested me. I then got an email from the LPO saying they were in contact with a couple of other players as well, but I was the only one in the UK. I replied saying I knew the piece but had never done it with an orchestra, so if they had someone else that knew it better, then they should use them, but I'd be happy to give it a go.

Anyway... a couple of hours later I turned up for a rehearsal at 6pm. I talked the piece through with Edward Gardner and then had a one-hour rehearsal with the orchestra. I went home, did a bit more practice, and did the rehearsal and concert the next day.

**It must be tricky for those last-minute dates as a soloist, getting the balance between practising and keeping your lip fresh for the concert? But I guess you've got experience at learning things at very short notice?**

Yep. The Knussen's quite a smash so I didn't want to overplay before the rehearsal and concert.

**I remember reading rave reviews. Did you manage to enjoy it?**

Yes, I did. I really like the piece; it made so much more sense with a full orchestral score rather than a piano reduction. I didn't have time to think about it, and it actually went really well. The audience knew I was a last-minute replacement so I'm sure if it hadn't gone so well, they would have been understanding.

**I guess next time you do a concerto with the LPO you might have a bit more notice, so you won't have that excuse!**

**And sitting in the orchestra on that day was a panel who had been looking for a new 1<sup>st</sup> horn player for the previous three years or so, since your current teacher, David Pyatt left for the Royal Opera House.**

Yes, at the pub after the concerto, there were a lot of the orchestra there. They were coming up to me saying "congratulations", and quite a few said, "you know we've got a job vacancy at the moment!"

**How did you take those comments?**

I took them with a real pinch of salt – there would have to be a much more formal process to get to that point. But then the orchestra asked if I wanted to do a short patch on 3<sup>rd</sup> horn and then two weeks as guest principal in October. There was a lot of great horn repertoire in there: Beethoven *Symphony No. 3*, Brahms *Piano Concerto No. 1* and Strauss *Rosenkavalier Suite*. There were lots of good opportunities for me to show what I could do, I guess, but I didn't think I was actually on trial; I thought they might ask if I wanted to be considered for a trial after that. But then a month later I got a phone call and they offered me the job.

**Well, congratulations again! What are you looking forward to playing this season?**

There's loads of excellent repertoire. We've got a Rachmaninov *Piano Concerto No. 2*, which I love. Then there's some Mahler *Symphony No. 5s*, the first one at Royal Festival Hall which is really exciting, and a Tchaikovsky *Symphony No. 5* in Brighton.

**Are you looking forward to the Glyndebourne opera season?  
Have you played an opera before?**

Yes I have – I did *The Magic Flute* when I was about 10 with Cambridge Youth Opera, but that's about it! At the moment the orchestra does a new programme about every three days, so it'll be nice to have a run of something, without constantly learning new material. I'm doing the first two operas at Glyndebourne: Donizetti *L'elisir d'amore* and Poulenc *Dialogues des Carmélites*.

I'm also carrying on with my solo work. I've got a couple of performances of the Ruth Gipps *Horn Concerto* and a recital in Lucerne coming up. I'm also playing the Glière *Horn Concerto* in May in Scarborough.

**How do you fit in your practice?**

It can be difficult trying to fit my solo practice around my orchestral stuff – trying to work after six hours of orchestra rehearsal can be quite tricky.

**Do you have a set warm-up routine?**

At college I had developed quite a long warm-up routine. My first tour with Aurora was quite hectic, though, and taught me that I had to get used to playing without much of a warm-up at all!

**It would be an understatement to say London has been fairly thin on female 1<sup>st</sup> horn players in its major orchestras. Do you see yourself as a role model for younger female players?**

I don't know. I guess so. I suppose because there aren't many female principals, you automatically become a role model. It's strange, as there are so many amazing girl horn players in my generation, so hopefully there will be more in the top jobs. I'm hoping that in the future it won't be unusual to be a female 1<sup>st</sup> horn – there'll be lots of us!

**I hope so too. In our previous interview I asked, "What are your ambitions?" Do you know what you replied?**

No, I can't remember.

**You said, "I'd definitely like to play in an orchestra at some point – that's a goal."**

Well, I guess I can put a tick next to that one!

**"Having a balance of solo, chamber and orchestral playing would be great – I'll just see what happens." Have you got time for any chamber music?**

I'm actually doing the Mozart *Horn Quintet* in Germany this weekend!

**Well ticks all round then! And from here on do you "just see what happens"?**

Yes indeed. But I'm just going to enjoy my jobs for the time being! **RS**

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