

MAESTRO EXTROORDINAIRE

How does an Engineer-Technologist-Business Consultant become a philanthropist Maestro Conductor? RBSC Magazine met up with Chulayuth Lochotinan one sunny afternoon at his stylish condominium home in bustling Chidlom and discovered a ‘Renaissance Man’ man of many parts.

By Tuptim Malakul Lane

A staggeringly busy young man, Chulayuth has amassed the sort of credentials that one can only dream of. Educated at Harrow School, one of the most prestigious schools in Great Britain, he was a music scholar who trained under Colin Stone for piano and Dimitar Burov for violin. Although he graduated from Oxford University with a Masters degree in Engineering, an enthusiasm for music that had developed since the tender age of 4 meant that Chulayuth’s considerable artistic talents were always going to compete with his practical side. To be highly competent in both spheres requires a mindset that is focused, structured and logical, and the capacity to switch from using the scientific mind to the creative brain in an instant.

A serious and dedicated man then, yet Chulayuth possesses a great sense of humor, a trait shines through most obviously when he is at his happiest – and that is when he is devoting himself to music. How does he see himself though... engineer, financier or maestro? The Senior Manager at Thomson Reuters, a company that provides financial information for worldwide markets, says, “Music for me is a hobby, but one I derive a great

deal of pleasure from and so it occupies a large part of my life.”

And Chulayuth takes his hobby seriously, to the point where he combined his talent for finance with a passion for helping others by founding the Bangkok Charity Orchestra (BCO) in 2010. The BCO plays concerts throughout the year to raise funds for Thai charities and this philanthropic side to Chulayuth has been nurtured since his young days at Harrow and later at Trinity College, Oxford. “Throughout my upbringing and schooling I was always encouraged to do the right thing,” says the highly privileged scholar, “and the desire to give back to society continues to this day. I take charity very seriously. Its not just about donating the money, it’s also about ensuring that funds are being spent most effectively so that there are tangible benefits and concrete results.”

To be a competent orchestral conductor requires good understanding of music and an ability to play at least an instrument to a high standard. The necessity of knowing musical scores by heart is also essential in order to handle the trust of an orchestra of 80 or more musicians. Most of what a conductor does is not performed in front of the



general public. By the time an actual concert performance roll around, the conductor has worked out pretty much what he wants to do during hours of rehearsal in the build up. “The performance itself is more a matter of getting the group of musicians to think like one person,” says Chulayuth.

But musical accomplishment is certainly a joy and for Chulayuth it comes with a touching degree of humility. He says, “The ability to interpret or express music, especially that from the romantic period, requires you to have some experience of life, to have lived a little, so that you can understand and deliver what the composer wants.

Suffice to say that a young protégé can play a Beethoven sonata at the age of 12 but the interpretation will be different when he comes back to it at age 40.” Part artist and part scientist, orchestral conductors transform music from the page into a performance by combining timing, volume and technique and Chulayuth more than adequately encompasses these traits.

To date he has conducted for internationally renowned musicians such as pianist Gustavo Romero and violinist So-Ock Kim. Romero, a pianist known for his technical performance and the interpretive depth of his playing, illustrates how Chulayuth likes to collaborate with his

principle musicians. “He was very easy to work with and he was very patient with my orchestra too. When we have an accomplished soloist, we must have mutual respect”. Even if a huge ego gets in the way? “I tend to spoil my soloist,” he smiles, “because I want them to be able to express the things that they want. For a concerto – it’s their show; for the symphony – it’s my show. If there’s a disagreement, over tempo say, we tend to flush it out without the orchestra, although we also have numerous private discussion about musical arrangements etc before the orchestra is even introduced. Romero is a very talented man, a great person to work with.”

Chulayuth’s passion for conducting comes from within but he also teaches piano, violin and music theory at Robinson School of Music, and is currently instructing an 11 year old protégé on both instruments. “She has completed Grade 8 on piano and is about to take Grade 8 on violin. She has already accomplished a lot at such a young age and I have high hopes for her,” he says enthusiastically.

He goes on to explain that music is meant to communicate, that good music tugs at the listener’s emotions, and that as a conductor it is his job to interpret the music in real-time and communication those

interpretations to musicians via arm gestures. These arm gestures have been developed through Chulayuth's own style and approach over time and they are important, as he explains. "A conductor leads the orchestra and during the rehearsal process he or she has to physically demonstrate playing instructions to the ensemble. This can also be done verbally during rehearsals but in an actual performance in front of a paying audience, when it really counts, a conductor is silent. So, it is important that the gestures he uses are very clear in order to maintain tempo and get specific sounds."

Since its inception three years ago, over 350 musicians have contributed to the BCO's concert performances. These concerts are strictly charity events and Chulayuth muses that it could be construed that he is using charity as a vehicle, but in reality he is using music to contribute to society in the best way he knows how.

At these functions, the BCO invites someone from the charity or foundation being supported to give a short speech so the audience understands just what they are contributing to and to build awareness for that particular charity. Chulayuth is also quick to point out, "I don't necessarily pick well-known causes either, but rather smaller recognised charities where I know the support is truly needed and can trust that the money will be used wisely."



The musical repertoire chosen for BCO concerts is something of a balancing act. "We tend to go for pieces that are not too difficult for people to listen to but also not so over-played that music lovers will be bored by them; for pieces that are not too hard for the musicians but also not so easy that the more accomplished players find performing them tedious. And lastly, they have to be pieces I like performing," he laughs.

Part of the BCO's success is down to the truly generous sponsors, a point Chulayuth is happy to acknowledge. "Because we are committed to donating a hundred percent of what we raise, our sponsors are chosen for their commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility. They are dedicated to doing good and to seeing that the funds we raise together are properly utilized." With his high powered job and teaching commitments, Chulayuth often has little time left over for rehearsals and managing the business of the BCO. However, he credits the orchestra's very accomplished committee for ensuring all runs smoothly.

As we part I have a final query on conducting, a practical question – I have often wondered how encumbered conductors feel trying to wave their arms about while shrouded in formal white tie tailcoat. Do they ever suffer any tears to muscles or clothing, particularly during 'busy' pieces requiring frenetic movement? Chuckling, Chulayuth admits that he has experienced ripped jackets and a few broken batons but reveals that well tailored tailcoat is quite practical as buttons are worn undone and the arm is free to signal to the musicians. "It would be an embarrassing wardrobe malfunction moment if my suit buttons decided to give way during the climax of a symphony. I tend to mitigate this scenario by regularly exercising at the RBSC," he laughs.

You can enjoy Chulayuth and the BCO in action at their next charity concert on 28th March 2013 at the Grand Hyatt Erawan Hotel. The concert, titled 'A Night at the Movies', will raise funds in support of various Rotary Club of Bangkok charity initiatives. Alternatively, visit Chulayuth's and the DCO's websites at www.chulayuth.com and www.charityorchestra.org for more information.