

# Thomas Clamor in conversation with John Almeida & Lyman Brodie

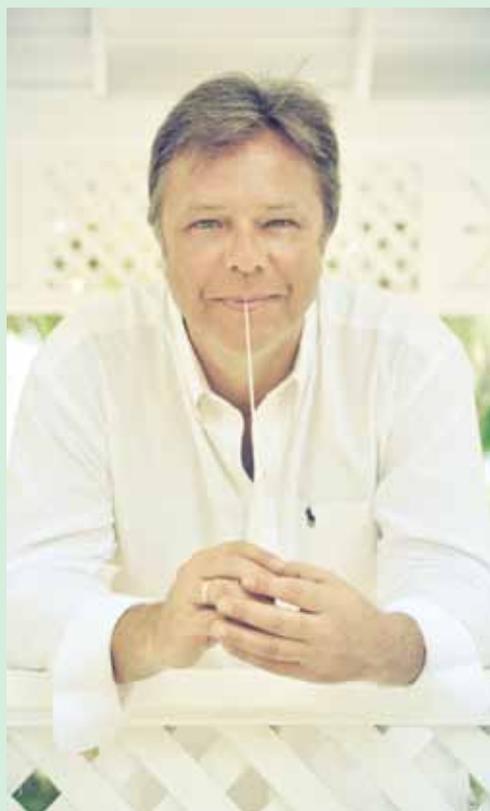
**M**usicians from around the world recognize Thomas Clamor's name as a performer and conductor. His ensembles showcase world-class performers and the repertoire they play is of the highest quality. Lyman Brodie and I were invited to perform as members of the European Brass Ensemble in July 2014. Our appearances in Austria and at the opening concert of the Schagerl Brass Festival in Melk, were highlights of our professional careers. Lyman and I found Thomas to be one of the most musically communicative conductors we've ever experienced. Music is alive within him and his ensembles are a reflection of his musical persona. The questions in this interview are from Lyman Brodie (LB) and myself (JA).

**JA** Please give the readers some information about the development of your career as a professional musician and conductor.

**TC** As a ten-year old I began to play the trumpet in the brass choir of our Protestant church. Church services in the musical framework of organ and trumpet filled a big part of my free time. I played in amateur orchestras and youth orchestras and established my first brass ensemble at the age of 16. That was probably the beginning of my second hobby, namely that as conductor.

After that I became a part-time student at the Northwestern German Music Academy and at the age of 18, I began my full time studies with the intention of becoming an orchestral musician. At 20, I got my first job in a small theatre and then I changed to opera in Frankfurt am Main. Soon thereafter, at the age of 22, I got a position with the Berlin Philharmonic, becoming, at that time, the youngest member of that orchestra. For 24 years I was an active member of the Berlin Philharmonic and had during

this time many opportunities to observe and to hear the best conductors at their work. In these years I never neglected my hobby as conductor and was allowed to undertake many varied projects. Because of a health problem I ended my position with the Philharmonic, and, as fate would have it, I received the offer to become the chief conductor of the Saxony Brass Philharmonic and the artistic director of the German Brass Academy. My activities as a conductor have increased in recent



Thomas Clamor.

years, for aside from activities with my German orchestra, I am also guest conducting on the international scene and leading master classes for orchestra and chamber music. I see it as a great gift in my life that twice I have been allowed to create a career out of a wonderful hobby.

**LB** Tell us about your journey from orchestral musician to conductor/music director.

**TC** My career as an orchestral musician began very early and I was allowed to carry out this wonderful profession for over 25 years. Conducting has always been a great hobby of mine, which I have engaged in



since I was 16 years old, at which time I founded my first brass ensemble. At that time as the youngest member of the Berlin Philharmonic I had for over twenty years the chance to work with the best conductors in the world and was allowed to learn a lot. Even until today I have never had any instruction in conducting and have tried to learn by teaching myself. Fate has also played a small decisive role in that I received the chance for the second time in my life to make a career out of my hobby. Even today I still regard my activity as conductor as a hobby. It's not work for me but rather a great pleasure and pure joy!

**JA** You've known Karl Schagerl for many years how did your friendship begin?

**TC** Karl Schagerl is a friend of many years and is one of the instrument builders of trumpets for the Berlin Philharmonic. For many years he has supported the Venezuelan Brass Ensemble and thereby my work in Venezuela with the ensemble. We met many years ago in Berlin.

**JA** When and how did the idea of the European Brass Ensemble (EBE) begin? Where did the brass and percussion players come from initially and how were they chosen to play in the ensemble?

**TC** Through my work in Venezuela and the founding of the Venezuelan Brass Ensemble I have asked myself many times why we could not have such an ensemble - something unique in Europe. The idea for forming such an ensemble arose at the first Schagerl Brass Festival. There was an ensemble from Lower Austria with the name Brass.Me and Karl Schagerl made the first contact with the Melk Monastery as a venue for the Schagerl Brass Festival. First small projects ensued. Then we came to the decision to found the European Brass Ensemble according to the Venezuelan model. Karl Schagerl and many professors of European music colleges aided us in finding and recommending superb musicians. Even today most of the founding members are still in the ensemble.

**JA** I had the opportunity to hear the EBE perform at the 2011 Schagerl Brass



Thomas Clamor and James Morrison.

*Festival and was so impressed by the musicality, virtuosity and the versatility of the group. Do you look for these and other qualities in the individuals who are invited to perform in it?*

**TC** Naturally the Schagerl Brass Festival is a very special and unique festival, which naturally also helps to inspire possible new members and to introduce the quality of this ensemble to an international audience. Thus, I also got to know you and Lyman, and you were able to perform music together this year at the festival. How great that was! And so it must continue. Also renowned soloists like Hans Gansch and James Morrison have already played concerts with the ensemble.

**JA** *At this summer's 2014 Schagerl Brass Festival the EBE boasted a membership of over 40 players from 17 countries from around the world. Are you aware of any other brass ensembles like this anywhere else in the world?*

**TC** I believe there were a total of 50 musicians from 18 nations. Aside from the Venezuelan Brass Ensemble I know of no other "classical" brass ensemble of this size. Here I must add what I understand by a classical brass ensemble. They are exclusively classically trained musicians, students or professional musicians, who have mostly chosen the education path of an orchestral musician at a music college or conservatory.

**JA** *Would you tell the readers about the repertoire that you chose for the EBE this summer in Austria and at the Schagerl Festival? How do you go about selecting new pieces each year?*

**TC** First of all, they are compositions and arrangements for a full orchestra since you are not often in the situation to get together these large orchestras with such a high artistic level. Here the four and five voiced canzoni by Gabrieli or the original compositions by Richard Strauss might be mentioned as



**Thomas Clamor.**

examples. To experience Gabrieli with an ensemble of this size in the courtyard of the Melk Monastery or in the balconies in the Monastery Church is certainly something that does not happen every day. The acoustic conditions allow for a large sound potential, which can be played out fully and thereby can become a great experience. Naturally I am always grateful for suggestions and ideas in regard to the repertoire. This is a good opportunity to thank you, John, for recommending *The Pines of the Appian Way* of Ottorino Respighi, transcribed by Joseph Kreines. I didn't know this interpretation, a great success with the audience at this year's festival, and it has become a permanent part of our repertoire.

A further criterion in the selection of the programme is also a high artistic demand on the members of the ensemble where they can test themselves and perhaps sometimes even reach their limits. All of these are invaluable experiences on the way to becoming a professional musician. The larger the ensemble or orchestra, the more disciplined you have to be in your contribution and behaviour, or more precisely you have to bear a great responsibility and conduct yourself collegially. Furthermore, these are

experiences that you really cannot study, but rather have to experience in practice.

**LB** *You have been the catalyst for the formation of several outstanding ensembles including the Venezuelan Brass Ensemble and the Saxon Wind Philharmonic, as well as the European Brass Ensemble. How do you decide the programmes for these uniquely talented groups? What are your plans to develop similar groups?*

**TC** I hope that there will also be further chances to form new ensembles and to find new ideas again and again. For me the programmes depend on the strength of the sections, the level of playing ability, the reason for the

concert and the venue of the performance in respect to its acoustic conditions. Then I like to try to cover a large spectrum in order to present the versatility of an ensemble. In the meantime the Venezuelan Brass Ensemble has had more than ten "babies" in the form of large ensembles in Venezuela, which play our repertoire and are instructed by us.

**LB** *Each of these ensembles produces a great range of tone colours at all dynamic levels. How did you come to your concept of sound for your groups?*

**TC** In Germany there is an old expression: "The sound makes the music". Sound is for me one of the central points of my work. To present the differences of sounds, to experiment with tone colours and thereby try to interpret the music is always for me one of the most important points. To present the variety of sounds with the greatest variety within each of the sections should actually be a very important point of his work for every conductor. As a young orchestral musician the work with Herbert von Karajan influenced me extremely. For me this artist was an absolute sound magician....

**JA** *In rehearsals and concerts, your conducting is so expressive and easy for the instrumentalists to follow. Are you*



**Thomas Clamor with the Saxon Wind Orchestra.**

*drawing upon your years of experience as a professional musician to bring these qualities to the members of the EBE and if so, how?*

**TC** Perhaps that is simply my way of conveying music - I love to experience music and that happens at the beginning of the first rehearsal with the first sounds. I like to convey my enthusiasm and for my musical ideas to reach the musicians. Only then do I believe that you can attempt to attain an audible symbiosis between the conductor and the instrumentalist. Music must be alive and should reach the people who are listening to us. That is one of the most important tasks and responsibility which we have in common as musicians. Perhaps it is not a disadvantage when you as a conductor also know the other side - the side of the instrumentalist...?

**JA** *The Schagerl Brass Festival is truly a one of a kind international event. It must be very exciting for you to be a part of such a programme. What do you look forward to the most as you prepare for it?*

**TC** I don't think I can tell you everything in this interview that I look forward to in the area of organization with all the details. It would burst the seams. But it is a whole lot.... I can tell you that. I would like to mention a few points:



Thomas Clamor with James Morrison, Lyman Brodie and John Almeida.

- The selection of the programme and the choreography of the concert programme.
- Creating the rehearsal strategy and the rehearsal plans.
- The musical work and the refining of the compositions through modifications of the strength of sections. It is always very demanding on me to constitute such an ensemble with only a few days' time for rehearsal and then to rehearse difficult concert programmes in this brief time. Through all the years of the project, the musicians have completely and unbelievably mastered this with great engagement and with my total admiration. It is this idealism that must never be lost by the musicians. This is a good moment to thank from the bottom of my heart all the musicians for these wonderful years with the many artistic

high points and the wonderful human encounters.

**JA** *Playing with the EBE at the 2014 Schagerl Brass Festival I experienced great musical excitement and inspiration while performing with the other members. What is it like for you to stand in front of this marvellous group as the conductor?*

**TC** I am both fortunate and thankful to be able to experience and to hear this. Furthermore it is also a great privilege to create inspiration amongst the players.

**JA** *Could you speak about future plans for the European Brass Ensemble? Are there plans for recordings and future tours?*

**TC** We will continue to work together and I hope many more talented young musicians will come to us. A CD is planned - we should have such a calling card. We are looking for concert agents and more sponsors, and we want to increase the number of concerts we undertake. Concert tours to many European countries are a large and important goal and in 2015 there will be two phases, with concerts in Austria, Germany and Holland. A big personal dream of mine would be concerts with the Venezuelan Brass Ensemble and the European Brass Ensemble in Venezuela and in Europe. As long as the ideas and the optimism don't get lost, many things will be possible.

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