

## Meeting Gianandrea Nosedà

by Federico Rampini - *Repubblica* April 22, 2012.

**He grew up in Sesto San Giovanni, Greater Milan, and divided his time between his vocational school training and the conservatory. When he was in his thirties, after the collapse of communism, he conducted at the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg. Subsequently, he was at the Teatro Regio Torino in post-industrial Turin. With his "working class" background, Maestro Nosedà, who is currently a regular guest at the Met, is one of the most respected people in the world of opera. "You either yield to the crisis" he says "or you take advantage of it, like Mahler and Beethoven did in their days". The results are increasingly encouraging. At some point the Teatro Regio Torino had more season ticket holders than Juventus Football Club.**

**New York.** "You either yield to the crisis or you take advantage of it". It is unusual to talk about economics whilst eating pizza margherita at Fiorello's on Broadway, between 63<sup>rd</sup> and 64<sup>th</sup> St., just minutes after a triumphal round of applause greeted the lowering of the curtain on the last performance of Verdi's Macbeth. Besides, Maestro Gianandrea Nosedà has just returned from another challenge, almost as difficult as his conducting at the Metropolitan Opera. He was interviewed by Maria Bartiromo, the most famous economics and finance anchor-woman at CNBC, a television network that broadcasts live from Wall Street on global markets. Ms Bartiromo is used to interview heads of state and finance ministers, IMF technocrats and bankers. Nosedà is the first conductor "launched" by CNBC. The interview centred on austerity and opera. Was it more difficult than conducting Macbeth? "Of course I was tense and not totally at ease because of the anguish of having to summarize an entire national situation in four minutes, and not in my own language".

Not only did he fare well, but it is appropriate that the situation of our opera is on the CNBC financial news: certainly, here in New York opera is one of the export products which still represent some of the best images of Italy. However, if Verdi's language is universal, it is harder to translate the profound diversity of our cultural institutions to the American public.

“The Met relies on private funds for 98% of its budget” says Nosedà “Here, tax-deductible donations are a recipe that works very well, but it is not realistically exportable to Europe. We must find a mixed system, a new balance between public and private resources, if private individuals actually believe in the values of our history and culture”.

Nosedà, who will make his opera debut at La Scala conducting *Luisa Miller* on June 6, has not been “crushed” by the overwhelming economic power of the Met and is somehow optimistic about Italy. He talks about the experiment he is carrying out at the Teatro Regio in Turin, where he is music director. “We have increased the number of performances, invested on international tours and started working together with the Deutsche Grammophon label. The results are encouraging; at some point of the season our ticket holders exceeded those of Juventus. There is no lack of audience even among young people. The fire of passion for opera is still there, glowing under the embers. We must find the right formula to reawaken passion. The American model is unreachable. The Met has the resources to stage three different operas every week, all year round. However, we can take some steps in their direction. As to the cuts to public funds? We should not only expect change from above, we must work with what we’ve got. Having said that, Mario Monti loves opera; this makes me hopeful, the previous government did not show any interest”.

Our chat slips into the image of Italy in the United States. (“It hasn’t been a long time since the change of government, but here in New York I already feel a very different attitude towards us”). Here Nosedà refers to the Turin experiment. “For somebody who was born and bred in Lombardy like me, Turin is an adoptive city. It was actually great to end up in Turin, a city reborn through high culture, where the city’s history and my life met. It is a serious city, having overcome with great maturity its post-industrial transition and Fiat’s crisis. Turin worked to win and build new horizons. It had a positive attitude even in the darkest moments of its crisis. In my field the crisis has even helped us. You realize that you have to help fight and reduce waste and be competitive in a music industry that has definitely become global. After all, during the course of history, the arts have always flourished during the most difficult times: Beethoven gave his best while Europe was living the trauma of the Congress of Vienna, Mahler’s music flourished in a tragic period which paved the way to WWI. Crises are terrible but they also represent very productive phases for the arts. Verdi and Shostakovich are two other composers whose creativity was inspired by tragedies and in doing so they contributed to change the society they lived in”.

During periods of heightened uncertainty, or even anxiety, what better way of taking refuge is there than culture? After all, New York proved it. On average, Gianandrea and his wife Lucia spend two months a year here in Manhattan. They rent an apartment from Placido Domingo, in the same neighbourhood where I also live. This Upper West “village” is nestled between Central Park and Lincoln Center. Its heart are the city’s major cultural institutions like the Met, Avery Fisher Hall - the symphony hall - the Julliard school of ballet and theatre, and farther north, the Columbia University campus. Here, love for opera bears the marks of a story that is already old for a young nation like America: the Met began to attract, since the early twentieth century, the likes of Enrico Caruso, Arturo Toscanini and Gustav Mahler. One hundred years later, in 2008, when the demons of Wall Street plunged this city and the world in the most serious economic crisis for three generations, the city's economy was saved at least in part thanks to the resilience of its cultural industry. “We are hugely indebted to culture - says Noseda - how many errors could be avoided by drawing on the wisdom of the classics, including Shakespeare, for whom Verdi had a veneration. Macbeth, for example, with that terrible lesson on the demon of power, on its destructive effects on the human psyche.

Born in 1964, Noseda’s biography is rather remarkable. He’s somehow a maestro from a “working class” background for he grew up in the Milanese industrial suburb of Sesto San Giovanni, the Stalingrad of Italy, a stronghold of the Communist Party and Fiom, a far-left trade union. “In Sesto I attended a technical college. I trained to get a vocational diploma alongside the conservatory, in a world characterized by the working-class culture of Falck, the steel works, and the principles of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church. This was a social fabric where the centrality of work was a shared religion. What an extraordinary town, Sesto San Giovanni! Maybe it's not the prettiest, but it was a microcosm of the Italy of Peppone and Don Camillo...”.

After leaving Italy’s Stalingrad, Noseda continued his rise to success in real Russia where he had already begun to work in St Petersburg in the 1990s (he then became Principal Guest Conductor of the Mariinsky Theatre).

“I remember the extreme poverty in Russia's first post-communist transition -he says - and the sacrifices of fellow musicians who put me up: they gave up their food rations in the

canteen, just to give me some extra calories. But what an extraordinary world: I met some old Russian cloakroom attendants with a fantastic ability to read books. They knew their writers better than me”.

Now Nosedà is part of an exclusive jet-set of great conductors who live like global nomads. When we met for the last performance of Macbeth, he had recently arrived from Japan, and he’s soon going to leave for Toronto and Pittsburgh. “I’m quite used to the jet lag, but it’s much worse when you arrive in America from the Far East. I’m constantly struggling not to fall asleep during rehearsals”.

America fascinates him, “but not to the point of moving there for good. I’m attached to my homeland. Roots are important to me. After so much globetrotting I feel the need to return home to Meina, a town with three thousand people nestled on the shores of Lake Maggiore, a wonderful place Lucia and I discovered when I became the Artistic Director of Stresa Festival”.

We also talk about the importance of roots with Lidia Bastianich, the famous Italian-American chef who was also at the Met for the Macbeth and joined us for pizza at Fiorello’s (Ms Bastianich strikes more terror to the waiters than, say, Michelle Obama). In America, the Bastianich family created an haute cuisine empire thanks to her obsessive devotion to her “ancestors’ recipes”. Lidia Bastianich first met Nosedà in Turin in another temple of Italian quality, Eataly, at Lingotto. Culture and cuisine: it seems a stereotype, and yet here in the U.S. market these forces remain formidable for Italy’s image. After all, if Nosedà is here in New York as guest conductor, the Met is led by another Italian, Fabio Luisi. “I met Luisi - says Nosedà - when we went on tour to Japan together with the Met. It was the first major tour of a world class theatre in Japan after the tragedy of Fukushima. And who was to lead the Met from the U.S. to Japan? Two Italians. It must actually mean something”.

*(English translation by Gabriele Paleari)*