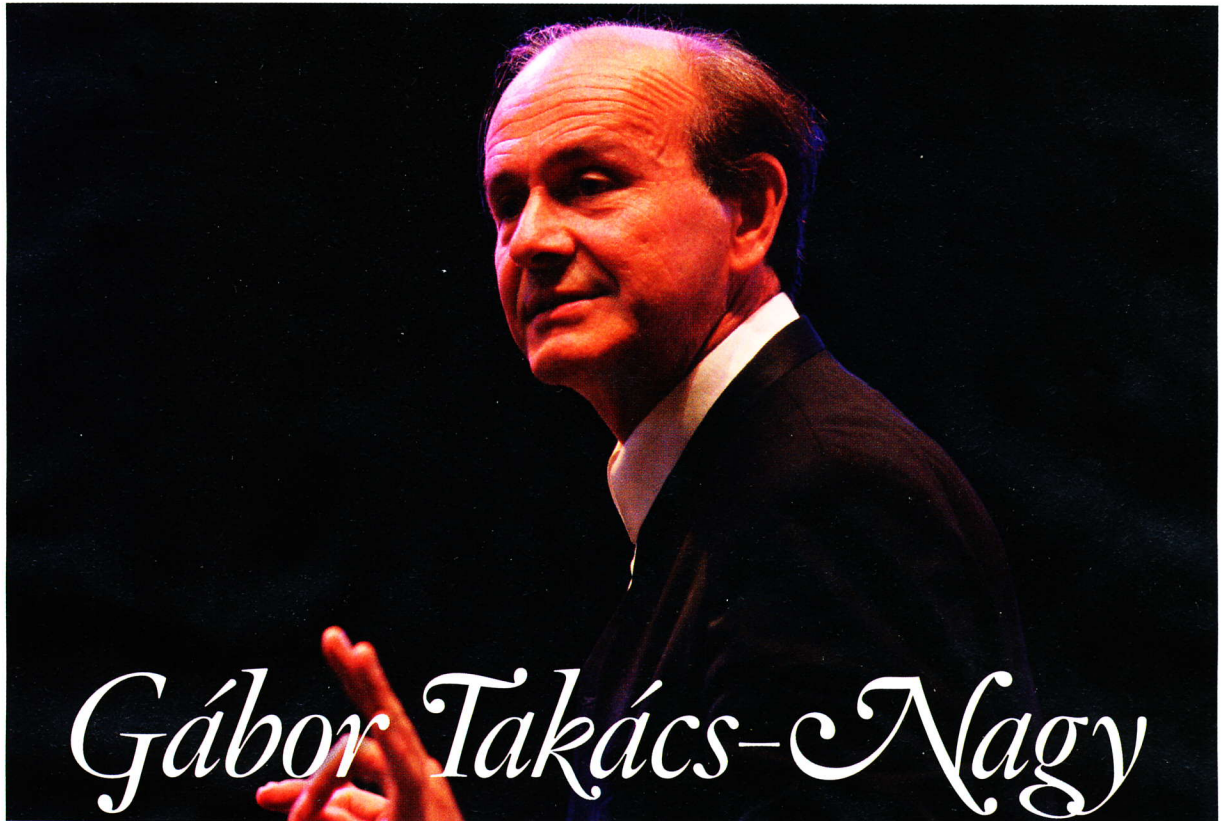


A CONVERSATION WITH...



Gábor Takács-Nagy

The eminent violinist-turned-conductor is on a mission in Manchester. And, he tells **Rachel Pugh**, the city's sporting history is entirely apt

Gábor Takács-Nagy is a man on fire as he paces the borrowed office, making imaginary passes with his feet and sweeps with his arms to illustrate his belief that music and football are part of the same beautiful game. This is, after all, Manchester. The lithe Hungarian musician, famed as former leader of the illustrious Takács Quartet, is talking of his excitement at taking up this autumn his appointment as principal conductor and music director of Manchester Camerata. But he is also a football fan.

"Music and football are so similar," says the Manchester United supporter. "It is down to who has the ball – or the tune – and the others have to listen to know who that is and anticipate the action. With the best football teams and the best chamber musicians, the individuals in the group make the others around them into better players collectively. This is my dream for Manchester Camerata."

Taking over as conductor, hard on the heels of Douglas Boyd (a Crystal Palace supporter), Takács-Nagy's first recording with the chamber orchestra comes out online on August 30. It features Prokofiev's *Classical* Symphony and Tchaikovsky's *Rococo* Variations. Manchester Camerata has plans to issue it with additional material as a full CD, but in order to give Takács-Nagy some time to get used to the orchestra, Boyd's recordings of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* and the remaining symphonies of his Beethoven Cycle will be released first on Avie.

Meanwhile, Geneva-based Takács-Nagy is weaving himself into Manchester's musical life with a parallel appointment as international chair of chamber music at the RNCM. He is also chief conductor and artistic director of the MAV Symphony Orchestra in Budapest and principal guest conductor of the Budapest Festival Orchestra. He

acknowledges the debt his musical career owes to the beautiful game. His parents would encourage the eight-year-old admirer of George Best to practise his violin for several hours a day, with the threat that, otherwise, they would not allow him to watch the Hungarian league's Sunday game. The Takács Quartet itself came about through a meeting between Takács-Nagy and another violinist at a football game organised by one of his professors at the Franz Liszt Academy.

His wife, Lesley, was born in Burnley, which gives him an immediate emotional passport to the North of England, but the Hungarian is clearly establishing his own musical roots in the UK's second city with the Camerata. "The orchestra understands me," he smiles. "I feel a special emotional and spiritual bond."

'Music and football are so similar. It is down to who has the ball – or the tune'

He is inspired, he says, by recordings of his four conducting heroes – Wilhelm Furtwängler, Carlos Kleiber, Ferenc Fricsay and Georg Solti. The last was rehearsing Mozart with the Takács members when he leant over and said, "Gabor, you would make a good conductor – you have a clear and natural body language." Those words set Takács-Nagy thinking.

Now he is in full flow and the Camerata is poised for a culture shift – from Boyd's Harnoncourt-influenced style to the new era of a Hungarian master chamber musician. Yet the relationship did not instantly gel. At their first concert in 2010, some players found the change too extreme, but by the next day they had found the magic common ground.

"I feel an orchestra has to be approached in the same way as a string quartet," says Takács-Nagy. "You have to know your role. The biggest challenge is to make the orchestra listen." ●

Avie releases the Prokofiev and Tchaikovsky recordings exclusively on iTunes on August 30; from September 13, they will be available on other websites