

Observations: Nikolaj Znaider adds another string to his bow

By Jessica Duchen

Friday, 22 May 2009

The London Symphony Orchestra's Artist Focus series couldn't have picked a better guest star than Nikolaj Znaider. Currently in the swing of the intensive residency, the Danish-born musician, 33, is the violinist of the moment. Tall, imposing, classically handsome, he cuts a tremendous dash on the concert platform, playing the 1741 Guarneri del Gesù violin that once belonged to the great Fritz Kreisler. But for this James Bond of the violin, the world is not enough.

Increasingly, like many soloists before him, he is showing an almost alarming propensity for conducting. The violinist Maxim Vengerov has for the past year been taking a break from the violin in favour of the baton. Znaider won't do the same, will he?

"I've been very fortunate to have been working on this with Daniel Barenboim for 10 years, as well as with Valery Gergiev and Sir Colin Davis, who is a very remarkable and wonderful mentor," he says. If these individuals, some of the world's greatest conductors, are grooming Znaider as their potential successor, fans had better hurry along to hear him before he's in too much demand in his new role.

Luckily, there's ample opportunity at the Barbican via the LSO this month. He's playing the Brahms concerto on Sunday, as well as the composer's string sextet alongside Schoenberg's early masterpiece *Verklärte Nacht*.

Znaider insists he has no intention of putting down the violin. "I would miss being the one who physically produces the sound," he declares. I hope he means it.

Nikolaj Znaider performs Brahms (24 May) and chamber music (31 May) in the LSO's Artist Focus programme at the Barbican, London (020-7638 8891; www.barbican.org.uk)