

A family that plays together stays together

Dmitri Jurowski, who is set to make his Royal Opera House debut next month, is another member of the world's premier conducting clan, says Jessica Duchon

When the curtain rises on the Bolshoi Opera's Eugene Onegin, at the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden on 11 August, the man wielding the baton will be a Jurowski. However, it will not be Vladimir Jurowski, whom British audiences know and love for his music directorships at the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Glyndebourne. No, this will be his younger brother, Dmitri, and he will be making his first London appearance at the same time as he makes his Bolshoi debut. All eyes, therefore, will be on the latest addition to the Jurowski dynasty. Can the 30-year-old live up to the enviable reputations of Vladimir, their conductor father Mikhail and their composer grandfather, also named Vladimir?

Big brother, who is eight years Dmitri's senior, will be watching. But little brother is no simple rerun of the ascetic, steely and intellectual Vladimir. "Vlad the Impaler", as musicians have nicknamed him, has cultivated an intense, pared-down style of conducting. Dmitri is softer in outline, more fulsome in motion. "We are both emotional people," Dmitri says, "but I have the feeling that Vladimir is able to project more the emotions inside, while I would be the more extrovert person. But it all depends on the music we're performing."

Speaking from Berlin, where the Jurowski family settled after leaving Russia in 1990, Dmitri offers reflections on life as the youngest of such a clan.

"I feel honoured to have been raised in that kind of family," he says. "It has been an advantage. When you're always surrounded by music and such high-level professional musicians, it's very helpful. But also it's a huge responsibility. I realise the quality of music-making that this family has had for so many years needs to be continued."

Is there no sense of envy or anxiety? Don't the Jurowskis fight? You might think that a dose of sibling rivalry would be natural. Dmitri says that is not the case. "There's no competition at all. We have very, very good relationships with each other," he says. "All three of us [sister Maria is a pianist and vocal coach] trust each others' musical opinions. It doesn't matter how successful you are, you always need the chance to learn and to improve and for that you need objective, high-quality, professional feedback. For all of us it's an advantage always to have that possibility. We're all different; we have a lot in common but everyone always kept their own individuality."

If there is a problem it is that the Jurowskis are constantly on the move and so do not see enough of each other. "On the rare occasions when we can get together," says Dmitri, "we have to try not to talk only about music."

There is a twist in Dmitri's tale. Unlike his father and brother, he did

not intend to become a full-time conductor. He trained as a cellist, studying conducting on the side and playing in a number of orchestras before disaster struck.

"I had thought, 'Well, we have two very good, very successful conductors in the family, so why should I do that too?' I was happy being a cellist. But then I developed some pain in my hands. I went to the doctor, he made a scan and he said, 'Young man, you have to change your life.'"

At 22, Jurowski had arthritis. "It was a strange situation because I had to face the reality that I couldn't continue with everything I had done before. When you have spent 18 years with an instrument it's your life and it's hard to leave. But I had great support from my family and I have a practical mind that said to me, 'Wait, you've got this talent, this gift from God and from your parents. It can't be true that it was for nothing and you're still young - maybe someone is giving you a huge opportunity.' I wasn't sure if this was true but I started by following this instinct. Now I see it as one of the best things that happened to me."

Sure enough, Dmitri's work as a conductor has brought him the chance to work with the Bolshoi Opera. "For me, for any Russian musician, the Bolshoi is the ideal, the maximum that you can reach," he says. He was only 10 when his family moved to Germany, but among his most treasured childhood memories is his first experience of Eugene Onegin.

"My father was conducting it in the Stanislavsky Theatre and I was about two when my parents brought me the first time to the theatre. The first moments of the opera I remember very well. So for me to conduct Onegin is a somewhat emotional experience.

"Onegin is not a real opera. It's not a coincidence that Tchaikovsky called it 'lyrical scenes'. It's all about atmospheres and it's important not to make a huge opera cliché out of it, so you have to work with sensitive, fine details on stage and in the music. The director Dmitri Tcherniakov's production is extremely minimalistic - the way he has worked with the singers and the lighting is unusual for opera and it's something very special. It is one of the rare productions I've seen that made me feel I'm a child again."

Though he conducts symphonic repertoire just as much, opera seems to be keeping Dmitri busy. In January he will take up the music directorship at the Royal Flemish Opera in Antwerp, his first appointment to such a post. This summer the Bolshoi's tour will give him debuts in Madrid and at the Lucerne Festival; next season he will conduct at the Opéra Bastille in Paris. An ardent traveller - always an advantage for a musician - he manages to juggle his musical commitments with those to his family. He lives in Berlin with his second wife and has two daughters from his first marriage.

In the future he would like to champion the music of his grandfather, the first Vladimir Jurowski, whose symphonies, ballet music and scores for animated films are well known in Russia. All in good time, however. Dmitri Jurowski is not a young man in a hurry - rather, he is one still rather surprised to find himself ascending the podium at the Royal Opera House. But he could not be happier to be there.

Bolshoi Opera: 'Eugene Onegin', Royal Opera House, London WC2 (020 7304 4000; Roh.org.uk)
11 to 14 August

Four Musical Dynasties

Dvorak and family

The composer Antonín Dvořák's daughter Otilka married Josef Suk, one of her father's finest pupils, now best known for the powerful 'Asrael Symphony'. His son, also named Josef Suk, became a

famous violinist and has released definitive recordings of music by his father and grandfather. Now 80, he lives in Prague.

The Wallfisches

The pianist Peter Wallfisch and cellist Anita Lasker Wallfisch, author of a powerful memoir of Auschwitz, were the parents of the celebrated cellist Raphael Wallfisch. He and his wife Elizabeth, an Australian-born violinist, are the parents of the gifted composer Benjamin, classical baritone Simon, and Jo, whose singing has taken her into jazz.

The Jarvis

The Estonian conductor Neeme Järvi is the longest-serving music director of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra. His children have followed him. Paavo will become music director of the Orchestre de Paris next season; the award-winning conductor Kristjan has commissioned works from Arvo Pärt, HK Gruber and Erkki-Sven Tüür; Maarika is a successful flautist.

The Menuhins

The great violinist Yehudi Menuhin was part of a family that included his two sisters, the pianist and human rights campaigner Hephzibah Menuhin and the pianist and artist Yaltah Menuhin. His son, Jeremy (pictured above, with his aunts and his father) is a well-known pianist.