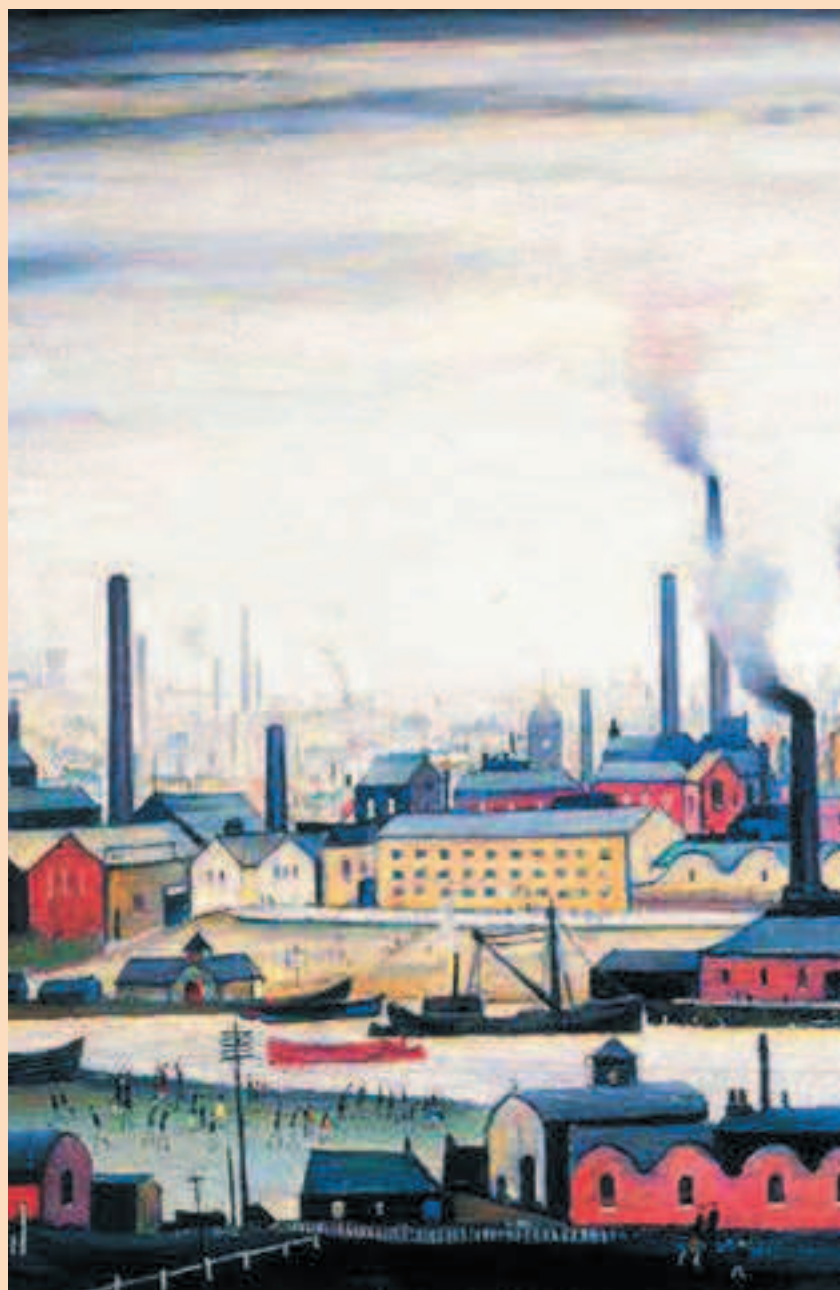
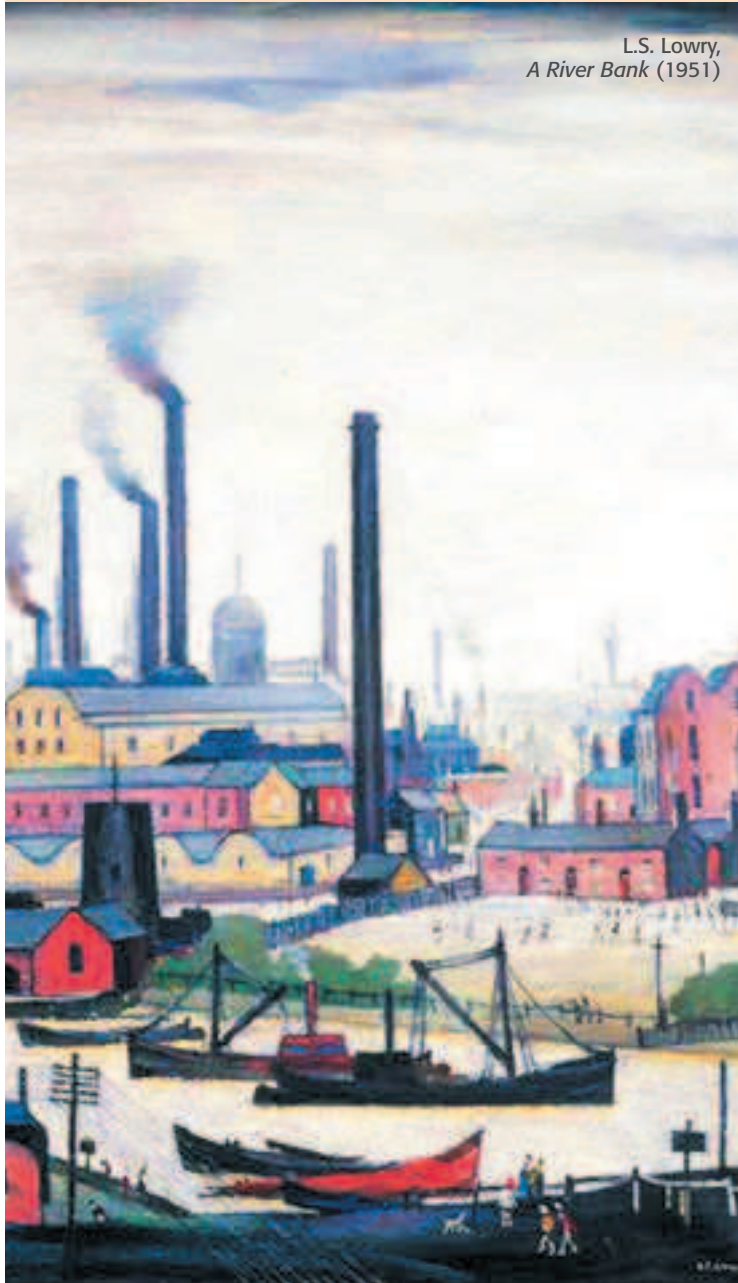


Where poets and artisans meet

by Jonathan Webb

Il direttore musicale della Camerata Strumentale Città di Prato ripercorre il suo rapporto con l'orchestra e, più in generale, con la città. Sono dieci anni che frequenta Prato per dirigere l'orchestra, ma è soltanto dall'ottobre del 2014 che - diventato direttore stabile - vive la città non più soltanto da viaggiatore casuale e distratto. Nelle passeggiate che si concede lungo il Bisenzio apprezza l'antico e il moderno, l'arte e l'industria, ricordandosi di analoghi paesaggi inglesi, come sono stati tramandati nei dipinti di L. S. Lowry. E un altro inglese guida le scelte musicali del maestro Webb, il grande Benjamin Britten, ancora troppo poco conosciuto in Italia.





L.S. Lowry,
A River Bank (1951)

For more than a decade, I visited the city of Prato as a guest of its orchestra: the *Camerata Strumentale Città di Prato*. The life of an itinerant conductor is not one that, despite global travel, brings one always to a true understanding of the life of the city. Often one has time only to find one's way from hotel to concert hall or airport to opera house before departing for a new city, or perhaps for a new country. My relationship with the city of Prato and with its orchestra changed in October 2014 when I accepted the role of Music Director. This brings me the opportunity to discover the city and its people in a new way; indeed it is my duty to do so. I've often enjoyed long walks along the *Bisenzio* where the rumble of trains (a particular passion of mine) accompanies the inevitable thoughts inspired by Nature. Perhaps that is for me the starting point when trying to understand my personal connection to the city: the connection between nature (music) and machinery (industry), of past and present, and how to find the common thread. Looking at the industrial skyline I am reminded of the paintings of my compatriot, L. S. Lowry. In his paintings he found touching beauty, both human and mechanical, in the industrial landscape and I very much share these feelings. Not all that is

L.S. Lowry,
Christ (1933)



functional is prosaic, just as not all that is poetic is aesthetic. These ambiguities are inspiring and create a richness that is hidden unless we look beneath the surface. The community of Prato is changing. When I look at the 1000 young faces that make up the audiences at each of our orchestra's general rehearsals, I see the faces of a global community. This is inspiring for a musician since the language we share is a means of communication with no linguistic or ethnic borders. As Music Director it is my intention to work closely alongside the young people of Prato, to encourage that which music alone can teach us: the culture of listening. L.S. Lowry died in 1976, the same year as another of England's great artistic pioneers: the composer Benjamin Britten. More and more I am drawn to the music of this extraordinary man and to his profoundly humane philosophy

of music. I have found in him a kind of spiritual Godfather who guides my instincts and articulates my thoughts in a way that I might never achieve. Britten's genius was to be able to write great music for any occasion. His community or "venue" inspired pieces are revolutionary and touch the hearts of all men. Music is not restricted to those who are technically gifted and certainly not to those who think they "know" how. It is for everyone and it is for everyone together. In the seasons to come I will follow this idea with the orchestra, exploring some of the music of Britten and much more of his philosophy. Despite his enormous fame and global success, Britten was happiest at home, working in the landscape where he grew up and alongside the local people whom he cherished and for whose life he contributed countless riches. We will combine the new and the old; Music

that may never have been heard live in Prato alongside works that demand to be played again and listened to anew. This year Bach will be played alongside Stavinsky, Brahms alongside Ives. Our musical horizons will be furthered and enriched and on the way we will meet new friends who will be destined to become companions for life.

The children of Prato will be given opportunities not only to listen but to actively take part. For me, it is important that young people take an active part in the musical life of the city. Creativity is a not just a means of enlightenment, it is an opportunity to meet, to challenge and to achieve together. Britten never

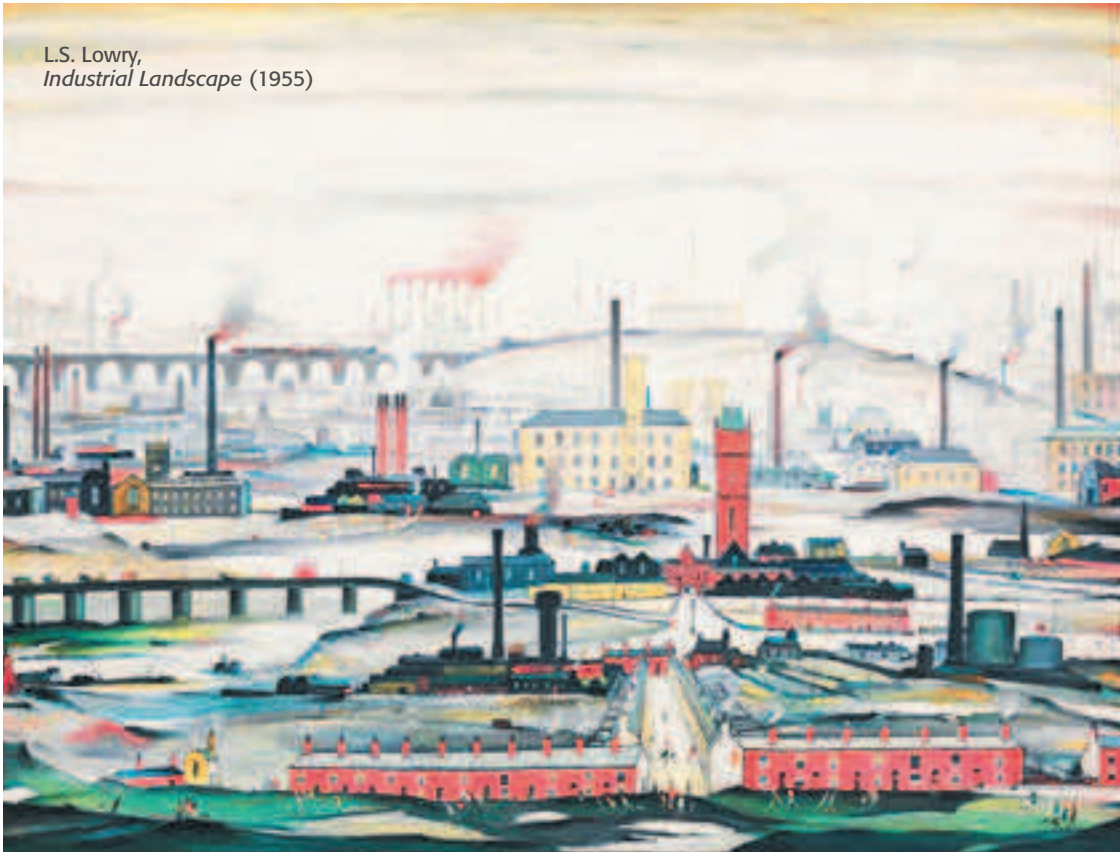
underestimated the potential of the young people for whom he wrote. He wrote music for children, not children's music. This is an important distinction which we can apply beyond the field of music. In Prato it is my intention to move towards a new model of orchestra and its relation to the community. It is not my orchestra, after all. It belongs to the city and to its people.

I will continue greedily to enjoy the traditional dishes of Prato and of Toscana, a cuisine which I find rich in its lack of pretension. Local identity and traditions are the lifeblood of the city. The air exhaled by the damp stones of buildings that have stood longer and beyond any generation that we



L.S. Lowry,
The football Match (1949)

L.S. Lowry,
Industrial Landscape (1955)



can recall invite us to breathe the spirit of a shared patrimony. However, I will embrace the new, finding new ways to communicate and to involve the whole city. This is the future of the city's orchestra: a continuing and deep-felt relationship with the public that has been an indispensable part of the orchestra's growth, and the building of new connections with

people who may never have been to a concert but for whom the experience is waiting. Everyone needs music, but not everyone knows that they need it. Music and the community serve each other in equal measure. Let's bring poetry to our industry, and industry to our poetry.