

71 TMDTA x Chloé van Soeterstède

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pregnant, feel, orchestras, weeks, months, conductor, thinking, orchestra, baby, bit, talk, conduct, arrive, manager, music, instagram, year, big, prepared, pregnancy

SPEAKERS

Rebecca Toal, Hattie Butterworth, Chloé van Soeterstède

Chloé van Soeterstède 00:05

Hello and welcome to Things Musicians Don't Talk About with your hosts Hattie Butterworth

Rebecca Toal 00:10

And me Rebecca Toal.

Hattie Butterworth 00:12

Within our vibrant musical world, it can often feel that the struggles and humanity of musicians is lost and restricted.

Rebecca Toal 00:20

Having both suffered in silence with mental, physical and emotional issues, we are now looking for a way to voice musicians' stories, to discuss them further and to connect with the many others who suffer like we have.

Hattie Butterworth 00:31

No topic will be out of bounds as we're committed to raising awareness for all varieties of struggle.

Rebecca Toal 00:37

So join me Hattie, and guests as we attempt to bring an end to stigma by uncovering the things musicians don't talk about. Things Musicians Don't Talk About is supported by the Royal Society of Musicians. Since 1738, they have been providing vital financial assistance advice and guidance to music professionals unable to work due to accident illness, stress or anxiety. Whether you're working as a performer, administrator, technician or teacher and everything in between, they're there to help. If you know someone in need, you can contact them in confidence by visiting their website which is www.rsmgb.org or you can contact them by ringing 02076296137. Support their work by becoming a member or donating today. And one last thing before we start the episode: just want to congratulate Chloe on her very recent appointment to Principal Guest Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony

Orchestra. She said when we were recording the episode that she had some exciting news that she couldn't quite share with me yet and it was this! So congrats, Chloe! So hi, Chloe. It's nice to see you here in the Royal College of Music. How are you doing today?

Chloé van Soeterstède 02:13

I'm good thanks. Really nice to see you.

Rebecca Toal 02:15

Yeah, you too! So for listeners, this is Chloé van Soeterstède . And Hattie is not here to join us because she had a health emergency but she's okay. She just needs to go find some more insulin that works. I've known you for a couple of years, Chloé, I've played in Arch Sinfonia with you, which has been a joy to get to know you because I think I always heard about you at Academy... People being like, "oh, have you heard of Chloé?" Like, "she's amazing." But tell me what you're doing at the College at the moment. Why are we in this room right here today?

Chloé van Soeterstède 02:47

So first, it's very, very nice to talk to you, to see if I think it's more than two years actually for Arch Sinfonia. Maybe a bit more.

Rebecca Toal 02:53

Yeah, probably.

Chloé van Soeterstède 02:53

But anyway, it's quite recent. Well, yeah, more than two years because COVID etc.

Rebecca Toal 02:57

Oh my gosh yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 02:58

Anyway, so here I'm conducting the Royal College of Music Symphony Orchestra. Saint-Sanes Symphony, No. 3, The "Organ Symphony", and also a contemporary piece by one of their students here.

Rebecca Toal 03:11

Oh cool!

Chloé van Soeterstède 03:11

And yeah, it's, it's great fun, very good to work with the students on different thing with texture, colours and to actually make sure that their personality is really going inside their instruments. That's the most important thing I think for the music. It's not ... I told them like "think beyond the notes. The notes is only a support of the emotion. And then if you actually find the meaning behind the note, you would find the colour etc." Then it's an endless possibility of emotions.

Rebecca Toal 03:43

Wow. I wish I'd heard like conductors when I was doing stuff at music college talk about it like that. But yeah, so we wanted to talk to you because we kept seeing stuff on Instagram like slowly popping up about you just being really honest about life, pre- and post- having a baby and being a conductor and travelling and everything. And we just thought that your honesty and kind of candidness about the whole thing was really inspiring. I I wanted to go back a little bit. So tell us about your career in conducting and where it stemmed from. How have you landed up here today in a brief summary?

Chloé van Soeterstède 04:29

In a very brief ... cheeky. I started my Masters in 2015. So after spending 8 years on the violin and also four/five years on the viola - so I have quite a big experience of playing my instruments - and then, because for me it was important to step on the podium with an understanding of my instrument. After my masters I spent two years (my masters in Manchester), of course, I found my orchestra, Arch Sinfonia - you mentioned, in 2012. And then I signed with Intermusica.

Rebecca Toal 05:05

Yes.

Chloé van Soeterstède 05:05

So it's really enabled me to conduct some amazing professional orchestras. I think my debut as a as a conductor with was with the Royal Philharmonic. So it was like, "wow, this is just..."

Rebecca Toal 05:18

Pretty cool.

Chloé van Soeterstède 05:18

... really pretty cool." And I learned, yeah, I learned a lot. I just feel I'm learning all the time. And I know I will be learning when I will be 80 years old, in any case. It's a different way, of course, of learning. And since, three years I think, I'm here at the College once a year. So I'm taking this opportunity to work with the students and to learn repertoire.

Rebecca Toal 05:19

Wow.

Chloé van Soeterstède 05:24

So I never arrive with a piece I know very well, because I think it's important to use these opportunities to either youth orchestras or college orchestras. Because then I bring the Saint-Saens symphony to the US next month

Rebecca Toal 06:05

Oh wow,

Chloé van Soeterstède 06:06

And then when I'm coming back in Autumn here, I do Sibelius five, and I've got my debut with Ulster, so I always take this little, yeah, opportunities for for learning big, big pieces.

Rebecca Toal 06:18

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 06:18

And I always think a conductor should arrive 120% ready.

Rebecca Toal 06:25

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 06:26

And it was - and we can talk about it - a bit of a challenge at the very start of when my daughter arrived.

Rebecca Toal 06:33

Yeah, so let's talk about that. Like, I think, first of all, I'd like to talk about why you feel it's important to talk about the realities of this and then we can go into what the realities are.

Chloé van Soeterstède 06:48

I just feel like social media is ... very often I'm thinking, "Oh, should I stay on Facebook? Or should I stay on Instagram?" Very often I'm thinking "oh it's so superficial." And because you see some artists that's yeah, that are actually putting, "yeah, my life is pink and I'm all happy and my makeup is always nice, and my cheeks are great." I'm like, I mean, this is not reality. And sometimes... And even sometimes when I was posting some, some photos with me and my daughter, I was like, "Yeah, this moment, I'm really happy. But actually, if I was thinking maybe an hour ago, she was maybe just not wanting to nap." And I could have actually do a video of me like, "oh my god, I'm like, at the bottom of my life. She doesn't want to nap. And..." So yeah, it's sometimes I have some posts that I'm happy with and I want to share but some other times, like I think I did a post recently about pollution and my daughter's breathing this bad air and stuff - I mean it's nothing to do with pregnancy but actually I think that "okay, now I've got a kid and it makes me think of maybe the more globally about the planet," and without... I think as soon as you have a kid you think more on an omniscient on a global level.

Rebecca Toal 08:06

Yeah, I mean, it's so true that like social media is it's just such a mixed bag. Whether it's like yeah, all these people as you say you know, makeup is perfect and they just ... especially in like music and classical music, they just go on stage they do their thing it's like "Oh, I thought I thought you were ... just had like a child or like you had a big thing in your life recently. Like are you okay? Like what...Your life is still perfect. What's going on?"

Chloé van Soeterstède 08:33

Exactly. I think it's so.... It can be so draining. Yesterday I had a bad kind of yeah moment looking at ... and my partner was like, "but why are you looking at this? Just if you want to post something, just post it and, don't scroll because ..." so it's tricky to find the right balance.

Rebecca Toal 08:51

Definitely because you like you need to scroll to find the stuff that's inspiring and honest, but at the same time if you do scroll you're gonna find stuff that makes you feel bad as well.

Chloé van Soeterstède 08:59

Yeah, you know often I'm thinking "ah I should just recreate an Instagram with only you know..." Maybe one Instagram for all the yoga and the fitness, one Instagram for you know, all the things like this you want to follow. Maybe this person because you're inspired or you know, or this orchestra, but that's it you know. Not all the shit around.

Rebecca Toal 09:17

Yes, Chloé! So tell me about ... because I think about this a lot - was there a point, if this is not too personal, like when you were thinking about starting a family... Was there a worry that it wouldn't be the right time or your were like waiting for a specific point in your career to do that?

Chloé van Soeterstède 09:37

I think not about a specific time in my career because now I conduct orchestras that I'm very happy to conduct .I'm, you know, I just had my debut with the Philharmonia and you know, it's this kind of like, orchestras that I'm working with and I'm super, super grateful and happy. I think if I was less experienced, I would wait a bit. So this was a good time because of my age, because of the relationship I have with my husband-to-be because we're engaged but not yet married. ...because we haven't had time yet for...

Rebecca Toal 10:09

Oh my gosh.

Chloé van Soeterstède 10:09

...to think about that. So the timing in terms of ready or not, we knew we wanted, but the timing in terms of season, yes. Because I emailed my manager saying, "Look, we want a kids. But I want to do this gig, I want to do this gig...."

Rebecca Toal 10:09

Congratulaions! It's a win-win but still painful nonetheless.

Chloé van Soeterstède 10:32

"So how do I, you know...?" She was amazing. She has two kids herself, and who are in at uni, so really... but I knew I had her support. And we talked super openly together. And she said, "look, there is no good timing. That's it. I cannot....So just do it. And we'll see." So we we, yeah, I think we kind of timed it a little bit. I mean, thinking "okay, let's see if it happens straightaway or not." Luckily, I was very lucky that it happened very quickly and as Tris, my partner, was saying, maybe too quickly because wanted to maybe take care of himself before as well, like maybe do some travels and... you know, but of course, we were super happy. So this was my worry about, "okay, if I'm pregnant, and I want to..." and I had to cancel Montreal with Nézet-Séguin's orchestra, I had to cancel some beautiful Canada and US tour. And this really crunched my heart, but in a way you're pregnant and you're super happy. Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 10:32

Wow.

Chloé van Soeterstède 11:40

Still painful because it was-post COVID and I think this was during COVID I had to already reschedule. And then "argh! She's pregnant." So I'm still waiting for the invitation.

Rebecca Toal 11:49

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 11:50

So ... but you're just so happy so you kind of forget. So my ... I've got some friends conductor who's saying like, "hey, we want to get pregnant... I mean, I want to get pregnant. Did you plan?" I was like, "well, actually, just the bottom line is like, you just don't you know."

Rebecca Toal 12:06

There is no good time.

Chloé van Soeterstède 12:07

There is no good time.

Rebecca Toal 12:08

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 12:08

Because you can also have some miscarriage, we never know. So just do it, and your life will organise itself.

Rebecca Toal 12:16

Yeah, that's such a good way of looking at. And I really appreciate what you said about your manager. When you first started saying that you emailed your manager, I was like "that's crazy that you kind of have to get your manager involved in the planning of your life." But...

Chloé van Soeterstède 12:28

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 12:28

...the fact that she was so supportive, and also, I imagine a comforting voice being like, "just do it. Like you just never know."

Chloé van Soeterstède 12:36

Yeah, exactly. And when - the funny thing is, my parents don't know this. so I mean, this is going out...

Rebecca Toal 12:42

Hello Chloé's parents!

Chloé van Soeterstède 12:44

My parents ... So my, when we did the pregnancy test and it was positive, I just called my manager just straightaway saying, "Hey, I'm pregnant! So..." And of course, she was like, "wonderful. That's great. Okay, if you know if anything happens during the pregnancy, and you know, there is a miscarriage or something, I'll be here to support you." And she was really great for this. I waited ... we, I think, we waited though to do a first little test. But we didn't wait the three months because I needed to be reassured.

Rebecca Toal 13:14

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 13:15

So we did that two months, - eight weeks or something?

Rebecca Toal 13:17

Wow.

Chloé van Soeterstède 13:18

Yeah, the baby was there. And I think then I said to my parents, I called them and I was like, "Look, this is..." but at two months, you don't see much.

Rebecca Toal 13:28

You could have waited a bit longer to have to tell people.

Chloé van Soeterstède 13:30

Yeah, exactly. But I was so excited.

Rebecca Toal 13:33

Yeah. Do you think that like when you started planning your work and cancelling work, was there a point at which you thought "okay, well, I'll just wait a little bit longer to see? Or was there like a hesitancy in that?

13:47

Yeah, so ... my strategy that was reinforced by the my manager. I said to her, okay, so we are - I got pregnant in May 2022, I guess. Yeah. And the summer was arriving. So then the new season was going to get announced.

Rebecca Toal 14:08

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 14:09

So as I said to her, "can we contact the orchestras around February, when should we be born, to say okay Chloe's pregnant, she will..." but until maybe until I had the first scan that was 100% positive, so the baby was viable, and she was growing etcetera. So I think the, what they did is we - before the orchestra announced their season, they didn't include me in their season.

Rebecca Toal 14:39

Sure.

Chloé van Soeterstède 14:40

So this was important for me to think like this. Because then it's like "cancellation. She's pregnant." And then it's true that that's my manager saying that when an orchestra knows that an artist is pregnant, and they invited her, people are gossiping a bit. You know, let's say Canada is a... I mean, it's a big country but it's a small musical scene. It's not like in France or in the UK, I mean. So let's say that in Canada, Montreal knows that I'm pregnant, and Toronto, or Ottawa, I mean, they want to ... or Vancouver, they want to invite me. They say "Oh, she's pregnant. So, we should wait for another season." So people talk. So that's basically why I thought, "okay, let's just be as discreet. We'll just take everything out of my diary and everything as..."

Rebecca Toal 15:29

Yeah, it was more of like a, "you didn't want things to be out of your control as much as you could..."

Chloé van Soeterstède 15:35

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 15:35

...the gossip would kind of spiral and make it unfair on you.

Chloé van Soeterstède 15:38

Yeah, maybe.

Rebecca Toal 15:39

Something like.

Chloé van Soeterstède 15:40

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 15:41

And then do you find, or did you find that when people did know, that you were treated differently at work? Obviously, you don't have to...

Chloé van Soeterstède 15:49

You mean me on the podium?

Rebecca Toal 15:50

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 15:51

No, I got a lot of "congratulations. It's wonderful to see you on the podium!" Like I was at the Finnish radio and to be honest, I was what? Four months? Showing a little bit but... or maybe five months? Four months and a half. A little bit but not too much. And I put a shirt that was not ... a bit loose.

Rebecca Toal 16:14

Flowy, yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 16:15

And a female tromboen player came to see me and she say "yeah, congratulation. It's so so good to see a pregnant woman on the podium." And I was like, "oh, did you notice?" "Yes, yes, I noticed." But no men told me this. And I'm wondering if there is ... just now I'm thinking out loud. If there is something that we notice more than the men? I have no idea, but I did it on pur-...I mean, I didn't want it to be like "I'm pregnant." Like a statement.

Rebecca Toal 16:39

Yes.

Chloé van Soeterstède 16:39

But later ... it's funny because at the start, I was thinking, "Okay, I'm I'm a bit ... loose in my clothes is fine." Nut later when I conducted RPO in ... when I was seven months...

Rebecca Toal 16:52

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 16:53

...there are some shirts that are still ... but I mean, I'm very thin. And I thought "it's so beautiful..."

Rebecca Toal 16:59

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 17:00

"the body of a pregnant woman is so beautiful." And I loved my body. So I was like, "I'm putting a very tight shirt on."

Rebecca Toal 17:07

Yeah!

Chloé van Soeterstède 17:08

And I loved it. And I loved it.

Rebecca Toal 17:10

What was it about...You said it was kind of a statement like having the... what is it?

Chloé van Soeterstède 17:13

Yeah, it's like "I can do it!"

Rebecca Toal 17:14

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 17:15

Like, it's not because I'm pregnant that ... I think at the start when you have a first kid, you're a bit like "Okay, I don't want it to be too a big deal. Music is first. I'm on the podium." And then it's like, "fuck it! I like my body."

Rebecca Toal 17:28

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 17:29

"I'm still the same conductor. I'm not less good. I'm as much prepared." Yeah, you sleep a bit less, it's more uncomfortable, it's heavy and stuff, but I was just ready. And I think on the moment where you step on a podium, you just have to be ready in any circumstances: if you have a death in your family... And then if you're not ready, and I that I said to my manager, "if I'm not ready, I'm not going on the podium. And I'll tell you." But I'm someone who wants to honour the invitation.

Rebecca Toal 18:03

It's quite a strong move.

Chloé van Soeterstède 18:06

To...?

Rebecca Toal 18:07

To be like, "No, I'm going to ... I want to do it. I'm going to show that a pregnant woman can do it, that I'm as prepared..."

18:14

Yeah! Because that's... I think, I mean, when I see some of my colleagues who ... well I don't really see a lot of female conductors who are pregnant, but a lot of them or even a lot of conductors, in general put loose t-shirts. So that's their style, maybe I don't know. But I mean, today, I've got a t shirt that is ... I mean, I've always have a t-shirt that ... I think it's just a question of style or something. But ...

Rebecca Toal 18:37

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 18:37

I like not hiding anything that you ... if you want to show something, you show something. I mean, it's part of my personality, maybe I don't know.

Rebecca Toal 18:47

I guess also showing something as a conductor, right? Like it's your whole body.

Chloé van Soeterstède 18:50

Yeah, exactly. Then there is also showing something - for instance, I like being feminine, etc. But I would never wear some really big earrings or big ...

Rebecca Toal 19:03

Rings?

Chloé van Soeterstède 19:04

Ring. You know, I think, as I said "music is music" but this you can't... you can't hide the baby inside. You can't hide. At some point, it will have to pop. And I liked my body like this, so I totally take ... Yeah, I was happy and people were really supportive.

Rebecca Toal 19:22

Yeah. And then tell me about this moment where it did pop and like you went off on, you know, maternity leave and what were the feelings around, you know, stopping working and how long did you work up until...?

19:33

Yeah, so I worked until ... this was also quite a well-timed break. So basically, in my life, I need usually two periods during the year when I need a big break to prepare my scores. And, so it's usually in December because December is lots of brass....

Rebecca Toal 19:53

Oh yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 19:54

...you know, Handel, Monteverdi etc. but I mean, it's music that I will conduct one day probably but at the moment, I don't feel like I'm ... my heart is in them. So usually December is off. So... ... the whole month usually, or mid-December to mid-January, you know, a month. And the summer is usually festivals... I'm not yet music director in any orchestras, so I've got usually the whole summer free with a few gigs here and there, but not not like big weeks, you know? So December was the month before... Well, two months before she arrives, but therefore, with my manager, we said, "okay, December is off. And we'll put maternity leave on January", because she was due on the ninth of February very early. Yeah, this was it. So two months before. So I stopped at month seven and a half or something like this. It was heavy by then.

Rebecca Toal 20:06

Nice. Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 20:53

And yeah, sometimes it was a bit uncomfortable. I conducted without any stools.

Rebecca Toal 21:00

Wow.

Chloé van Soeterstède 21:00

Or chair. So sometimes in rehearsals, yes. But during the concert, obviously not. Although I knew that some of my colleagues had.... It depends until how far you go in the pregnancy.

Rebecca Toal 21:13

Yeah, of course.

Chloé van Soeterstède 21:13

But I think this question is, like, everyone will know. Everyone will know. But anyway, in terms of cancellation, it was great to only having to cancel January. So she arrived a little early, three weeks early.

Rebecca Toal 21:29

Three weeks!

Chloé van Soeterstède 21:30

Three weeks early, yeah.

Rebecca Toal 21:30

Elsa! Cheeky!

Chloé van Soeterstède 21:32

So um, I was talking ... the whole pregnancy I was talking to her and I was ... I didn't want her to arrive before week 37, I think. It's week 37. Because until then there is risk of premature etc. And it might be a bit more complicated. And she arrived on week 37 plus one day, and I don't know ... I feel like when you talk to your baby, I mean, maybe this is my ... I had a very strong connection somehow with her when I was going to the swimming pool or in the in the shower, I knew she was hearing some different noise. And I always explained to her "okay, now don't be too afraid. I'm going to a party with..." I mean, at the start of the pregnancy. "A party with uh... quite a little bit of some loud music," or "I'm going to the swimming pool. You'll see the..." I don't know I just was talking to her and the fact I was like, "please, please keep inside." Because I had a bit of a condition at the end of my pregnancy. I had too much bile acids in my blood I think. It's called cholestasis something. Anyway, I was going to get a ...

Rebecca Toal 21:54

A blood test?

Chloé van Soeterstède 22:46

No, no, no like, when the when they give birth for you.

Rebecca Toal 22:53

Oh cesarean?

Chloé van Soeterstède 22:53

No, no.

Rebecca Toal 22:54

No! Epidural?

Chloé van Soeterstède 22:55

No, when when they actually said "okay, now your baby needs to come. So we are...?"

Rebecca Toal 23:00

Oh, inducing!

Chloé van Soeterstède 23:01

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 23:03

We got there.

Chloé van Soeterstède 23:04

I was supposed to be induced when she was three weeks early. We got there.

Rebecca Toal 23:10

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 23:11

Before she was supposed to arrive and then she arrived on her own. So my water brok and ... anyway, so I gave birth. It was natural birth without any drugs which actually ... it's so funny. Yesterday I was in the train and I saw a woman with a badge 'baby on board' and I sat next to her and was like "congratulations!" And we talk, you know. And she said "oh no, no, no, I'm going to... I can't do with pain. I can't do with pain. I'm going to have an epidural." I was like "no, no, you can do with pain. It's just all in the head!"

Rebecca Toal 23:39

Wow.

Chloé van Soeterstède 23:39

It's all in the head and it's like, exactly as if you were preparing a competition or an orchestral ...

Rebecca Toal 23:48

Audition?

Chloé van Soeterstède 23:49

Audition! That's the one. So everything is in the in the mental and you feel so strong after ... and it's a subject I never could really talk about because I think... I have a feeling that when people say "no, but I didn't have an epidural. I had everything natural and everything is fine." No it's really hurting. But it's just the message that I want to deliver here is like you can do it if you're mentally prepared. And it takes time. It takes three, four months to prepare mentally. Everyday you need to think about how to manage the pain etc.

Rebecca Toal 24:22

Yeah, like how do you prepare that kind of thing?

Chloé van Soeterstède 24:24

I prepared with hypno-birthing, positive thoughts. It's like "every woman before you... some woman before you did it, they didn't die. There is no ... there is no risk." I mean much less risk than before.

Rebecca Toal 24:41

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 24:41

But that ... and opening ... everything is opening with some exercises. Meditation, positive affirmation. This is the one I had all the time, twice a day.

Rebecca Toal 24:54

Wow, so really quite a lot of...

Chloé van Soeterstède 24:55

And Post-its everywhere in my house, like "you can do it! You're strong." You know.

Rebecca Toal 24:59

That's a lot of preparation!

Chloé van Soeterstède 25:01

Yeah, it does... I took it ... I did it for three months, the last three months.

Rebecca Toal 25:05

Wow.

Chloé van Soeterstède 25:08

And you, you're here, you give birth, you deliver your baby without any drugs. And you feel the on the top of the world after. And you feel like "oh my god, I did it!" It's like, you're super proud. I mean, you're very proud. And you feel stronger after that. As a ... much stronger.

Rebecca Toal 25:27

I wondering if your like, background as a conductor, like it sounds very, like I imagine somebody preparing for a concert with like their Post-it notes and their affirmations and like, do you see any similarities between how you prepared.

Chloé van Soeterstède 25:38

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, yeah. I think I've always been quite determined in my life about what I wanted to do etc. And preparation and ... Yeah, for sure.

Rebecca Toal 25:50

And like self-motivation.

Chloé van Soeterstède 25:51

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 25:51

It's not ... it's just something you do.

Chloé van Soeterstède 25:53

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 25:53

Every day.

Chloé van Soeterstède 25:54

Yeah. Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 25:55

Wow. Yeah. Most days. Some days off.

25:57

Most days because of course, we can't always....We have to be transparent.

Rebecca Toal 26:01

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 26:01

But uhhh...

Rebecca Toal 26:03

And then like...

Chloé van Soeterstède 26:04

And then after?

Rebecca Toal 26:05

Yeah, after.

Chloé van Soeterstède 26:05

So she was born. And I said to my manager, once again, I think it's very...

Rebecca Toal 26:10

What a legend.

Chloé van Soeterstède 26:10

It's a relationship. It's really a relationship. I said to her, "What...When do you think? Because I don't know, you've been there before. But I don't know." And the thing is she's an employee. She's not a freelancer. I mean, she's not a performer. So she said, "Well, it depends. But I think just let's cancel the first months and just like come back to Earth, and just take time with family, etc. And then we'll see. If you don't want to... If you don't want to go to Sweden, if you don't want to go to Spain, you don't have to go to Sweden or Spain." It's money lost for me, money less for them as well, because of course they give a commission. But the most important thing that I had is their support. Not like "you have to ... you have to do it." Because when I talk to colleagues who actually had a baby, the pressure from the management has been hell.

Rebecca Toal 27:05

Oh really?

Chloé van Soeterstède 27:06

So I'm really lucky, but also I'm setting my boundaries with them. So I think it's not about ... and I often say to conductors, "having a management is like you... I hire them...."

Rebecca Toal 27:17

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 27:18

Actually.

Rebecca Toal 27:18

That's true.

Chloé van Soeterstède 27:18

They don't hire me. I hire them. In a way. I mean, I hire them... yeah.

Rebecca Toal 27:25

So that they can manage you.

Chloé van Soeterstède 27:27

Yeah, I mean, so my story is I gave birth, and then two months after ... so on the end of the two months, I was doing my first concert. In Sweden, it was minus 15... It was super cold. So it was like end of March, end of March, start of April. And it went super well. Because the first month you're totally in the stars. You can't sleep, I mean, you don't sleep much. It depends if you're breastfeeding - I was trying to breastfeed but she would not latch. So there is all this kind of like chapter that needs a proper probably podcast on it. But this maybe also another subject. And it's a rollercoaster of emotions, hormones, thing we never talk about, of course. And the management with the father, the weight loss of the kid, because at the start of the life, they can lose up to 10% of their birth weight. As I was a bit more than 10%...

Rebecca Toal 27:30

With the not latching...

Chloé van Soeterstède 27:50

Exactly not. And she was always asleep. And it was very ... the first week was very tricky. So I had to be readmitted at hospital. And sometimes I was like thinking I was crying for nothing.

Rebecca Toal 28:45

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 28:46

...so the hormones.

Rebecca Toal 28:47

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 28:47

And sometimes I was thinking like, "but if she can't eat, it's catastrophic. She's going to die," you know?

Rebecca Toal 28:56

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 28:56

So the hormones - totally up and down. But when I'm also talking to other friends who, either musician or not, some of them had no hormones.

Rebecca Toal 29:04

Oh really?!

Chloé van Soeterstède 29:05

So it's really depending on how we feel, or how we are.

Rebecca Toal 29:09

So personal!

Chloé van Soeterstède 29:12

So the first month was tricky. At the start of the second month, I thought "ahh nappies.. giving the milk all the time ... like I want to do something else. I want to come back to my scores."

Rebecca Toal 29:24

Really?!

Chloé van Soeterstède 29:24

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, a month on a week or something, just at the very start of the second month. And maybe you saw on Instagram, a few images where ... photos where I put her on my boob, trying to ... for her to eat, to drink my milk. And I was just like, working on scores or she was just sleeping on me.

Rebecca Toal 29:25

You were ready! Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 29:49

Working on my score. It was very nice actually. And I would just put the music very, very quiet on and she would ... Yeah, just be on mummy and sleeping.

Rebecca Toal 29:59

And then how Hhve you balanced, having, you know, a fairly young baby and working again? Like what's that been like?

Chloé van Soeterstède 30:07

So I'm super lucky to have my partner who is a civil servant. And he took one year off. So he's still on mat-... and paternity leave.

Rebecca Toal 30:15

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 30:15

And he's coming back in two weeks or something to work. So I think the figure is something like less than 3% of dads in the UK are taking paternity. Once again, yesterday in the in the train next to this lady, there was her husband as well. And he said, "Yeah, I'm taking two months," which is actually a lot. In France is three days, I think. Three or four days. It's nothing. So which is totally...

Rebecca Toal 30:41

That's like a weekend!

Chloé van Soeterstède 30:42

It's crazy. It's absolutely mad.

Rebecca Toal 30:44

What!

Chloé van Soeterstède 30:44

It's really small, and...

Rebecca Toal 30:46

And that's been like instrumental in you being able to work and balance everything ... like having...

Chloé van Soeterstède 30:51

Yeah, it's ...

Rebecca Toal 30:52

...paternity leave.

Chloé van Soeterstède 30:52

They need to do something about it.

Rebecca Toal 30:54

Yes.

Chloé van Soeterstède 30:56

And yeah, so he's taking ... he took a year out, and he came to all of my concerts with me, travelling with us. So the three of us, we're all the time together. So travelling - yeah, to... the first thing we needed to do is get a passport for her. This was.. ...the first thing. So you want to declare her and then up to the embassy or passport...

Rebecca Toal 31:13

Yeah. Oh my gosh, yeah!

Chloé van Soeterstède 31:14

Yeah. I can't remember exactly the but it's quite simple. But ... and tomorrow, I'm taking, I'm collecting her French passport. So she has bi-nationality.

Rebecca Toal 31:27

Cute.

Chloé van Soeterstède 31:29

Yeah, so we went to Sweden, minus 15 degrees and then to Spain something like 10 or 11 degrees. So the change of ...

Rebecca Toal 31:36

Yeah!

Chloé van Soeterstède 31:37

... it's an organisation ... it can be easy now that I reflect on it, but it's an organisation with the cot - the baby cots.

Rebecca Toal 31:44

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 31:45

In our situation, our flat in London was so small that she didn't have a bedroom and our bedroom was too small to have her, so she slept in her pram, which is totally fine until maybe when she was a bit too big - month four or something, and then we thought ... you have four months to kind of like...

Rebecca Toal 32:04

Figure it out.

Chloé van Soeterstède 32:04

Yeah, exactly. And so we always travelled with our small Yoyo prom. Easy to take in the plane. It was a collapsible, you know, but it can be stressful because it's like, "okay, you know, if I'm engorged which happened a lot to me, is really painful."

Rebecca Toal 32:22

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 32:22

So you want to pump your milk in between rehearsals. This was very tricky. I always had like, a sign on my door backstage, like, "Do Not Disturb. I'm pumping. or, or just "Do Not Disturb."

Rebecca Toal 32:34

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 32:34

You don't have to say ...

Rebecca Toal 32:35

Depending on how friendly you are with the orchestra.

Chloé van Soeterstède 32:37

Yeah, exactly! So this was a little bit challenging to find the right moment to pump. In Sweden, for instance, the rehearsals are quite ... they don't have the same planning as us, like a three hours rehearsal. It's usually like, I don't know, like 50 minutes and then a big, big half an hour. It's quite light schedule in Sweden, so I had to accommodate around. And when you pump you need to put it in the fridge, so I always, you know ... things like this and you need to think about...

Rebecca Toal 33:10

Think ahead. Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 33:12

I was on a tour with Scottish Chamber on three concerts. And at some point I had to pump, but it was in a cold church without any fridge. So they had to transport my milk to a fridge somewhere, you know?

Rebecca Toal 33:24

Yeah, logistics.

Chloé van Soeterstède 33:25

So it's also a lot of like, things to think about. It's not all about just the baby - it's also about the backstage of the baby.

Rebecca Toal 33:32

Yes. And how did you ... surely that's quite a lot to be thinking about and then have to prepare a score and work and be in the moment on stage. Did it feel anytime like distracting or like you were kind of like not in the moment anymore?

Chloé van Soeterstède 33:47

No. On stage, I was always on the moment, but there are two orchestras where I had... I said to them, "it's a new symphony"... it's a new symphony on both orchestras I was like, "I can't learn the symphony. Can we please go back to ..." It was Schumann first symphony that I needed to learn and I said to my manager like "I am on the eggs", like I can't. "I will be sightreading - this is not something I want to do. Can we ask them to do Schumann's second symphony that I know very well?" So yeah, we managed with two orchestras so they could change the schedule ... uhh the programme.

Rebecca Toal 34:20

Were they understanding about that?

Chloé van Soeterstède 34:21

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 34:21

They were?

Chloé van Soeterstède 34:22

Yeah, they were understanding.

Rebecca Toal 34:24

Did you feel able to be like it's because ... these are the reasons why like because of having a baby and...?

Chloé van Soeterstède 34:29

Yeah, I was super transparent - I mean, she was - my manager. Super transparent. Yeah, "Chloé ... Yeah, just had a baby. I'm sure you know, and it's ...yeah, she had very little time. So can we

please...?" No, no. Yeah. And even probably not even needing to go to the details. But like "she had a baby. Can we please accommodate or something?"

Rebecca Toal 34:52

And there was no problem.

Chloé van Soeterstède 34:53

No problem. So yeah.

Rebecca Toal 34:55

Amazing.

Chloé van Soeterstède 34:55

Yeah, that's good. But I think nowadays people are understanding more and more, I would say. Which is very encouraging and stress... less stress release, in a way.

Rebecca Toal 35:04

Yeah. So over ... it's been a year now - she's a year-ish old.

Chloé van Soeterstède 35:07

A year and two weeks.

Rebecca Toal 35:11

Yes. Something like that. And have you seen a big difference in terms of balancing the workload and Elsa and everything? Like what's been the biggest difference between a newborn and a one year old?

Chloé van Soeterstède 35:25

Yeah. Well, when she gets to nursery is delivering... it's a big day free for you.

Rebecca Toal 35:31

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 35:31

So she started nursery when she was 10 months. She started three days a week. She's still actually on three days a week. We might increase to four. And you go back home, and you're like, "Oh, my God, I've got until 4:30." And therefore you feel you're more focused, or even at the start on month two when I, you know, I wanted to come back to my scores - when she was actually sleeping, I was like, "Okay, I've got 20 minutes, or whatever ... maybe an hour if she's sleeping an hour. A hour to be super-focused on my scores. And I... talking to my colleagues who are also having kids - as conductors, we all feel the same. It's really funny that yeah, there is a focus there. It's like, "this is precious, the minutes are precious." Even one day, I remember she would not sleep at home. So I thought, "Okay, I'll just bring her to the park." And then she fell asleep in the park and I had the score underneath in the pram.

Rebecca Toal 36:32

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 36:33

Schumann first symphony that I didn't conduct because it was too stressful. But it was like, "okay, she's asleep." Bam. And I had to just to focus. You have this focus and your Instagram, Facebook or whatever is just ...

Rebecca Toal 36:47

It goes away.

Chloé van Soeterstède 36:47

...not even there.

Rebecca Toal 36:47

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 36:48

You have not much energy to be honest. I mean...

Rebecca Toal 36:51

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 36:52

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 36:53

Do you envisage with travelling and conducting, but that will change having, like, when she goes to school, or how will they like travelling impact that?

Chloé van Soeterstède 37:03

Well, you know, at the start of December, in December, I was 10 days in Manchester with the Halle. I was then a week away, and she started nursery and it was quite, for me, not for her, probably not for her. But for me, it was such a big shock because we spent seven weeks in Australia and New Zealand...

Rebecca Toal 37:24

Wow.

Chloé van Soeterstède 37:25

...with the whole ... with the three of us for work and also for holiday. And then bam, Mummy is gone for 10 days. A baby who, who is loved and cared and stuff doesn't... I think and I'm reading a lot about that - doesn't feel yet the attachment. I think the the feeling of attachment comes later from you one year plus.

Rebecca Toal 37:50

Okay.

Chloé van Soeterstède 37:51

But me, I was like ... really it was so difficult, but I knew she was loved. And I knew she was, you know, in good hands. I think that from when you put her in nursery, first, it costs a lot of money.

Rebecca Toal 38:05

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 38:06

So you you, you can't always say "oh, yeah, I'm off then. So I'm taking her..." I mean, otherwise, what's the point to pay for nursery? And also nursery is great to develop her skills. There are lots of toys that we don't have, you know, like the thing to climb, we can't have that in our house, or bubble bath or whatever...

Rebecca Toal 38:25

And other children presumably!

Chloé van Soeterstède 38:27

And other children exactly, there's such something I really was eager when she was four/ five months or six months for her to have contact with other kids, I really was eager. And of course, when you're isolated in a way, the three of you travelling from an orchestra to an orchestra, I mean of course there is no possibility to have either by the babysitter but with all the kids you know.

Rebecca Toal 38:51

Yeah yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 38:52

So I think for the rest of my ... I cannot say career, but I think I might just actually travel on my own, which is fine. But I said to my manager, again, "I don't want to travel more than two weeks." That's ... you know, two weeks out ...

Rebecca Toal 39:10

That's your boundary.

Chloé van Soeterstède 39:11

...I'll probably. That's my boundary. I think it we need to set boundaries.

Rebecca Toal 39:14

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 39:15

And then two weeks in or at least a week and a half in and then two weeks out. It's more difficult when I go to the US because I don't want to go to the US for one concert. I mean ... so in March I've... I've just looked at my schedule and it's two weeks, two weeks in the US which is crimping my heart, you know?

Rebecca Toal 39:36

Yeah. Is that the longest you've been away from her so far?

Chloé van Soeterstède 39:40

The 10 days with The Halle, yes, in December was so difficult. At the end I was in tears to my manager and the last concert I was like "I don't want to go on stage. I want to take the train and I want to go back to Elsa." It was awful. Awful. But then I feel like such a difficult situation. The next time I'm away, it will be fine. You just have to go through the difficulty once.

Rebecca Toal 40:04

Build on it every time.

Chloé van Soeterstède 40:05

Yeah, you build on it. But I think 10 days straight away was too much after seven weeks....

Rebecca Toal 40:11

One-on-one.

Chloé van Soeterstède 40:11

Yeah. 24/24 all the time.

Rebecca Toal 40:14

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 40:14

Was tricky.

Rebecca Toal 40:15

That's a lot. Do you feel like a pressure to... I mean, I know that your manager and your relationship with your manager is really good, but do you feel a pressure to say yes to "oh maybe I will just do like a two and a half week thing here" or maybe "ohh like, I could just like, make my boundaries a bit more flexible"?

Chloé van Soeterstède 40:35

If I, you know, I've been always so honest with them, because I've got my manager in Europe, Intermusica, I've got a management in the US, in the North America. And he is a man, but he has two kids, young kids, and he understands etc. I've never felt pressured. If there is... Yeah, if there is a big orchestra debut within this period of you know, it's like "Chloé, can you maybe push it a bit?" ... I have ... And then I said, "Okay, I'm going to talk with Tris, my partner."

Rebecca Toal 41:16

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 41:16

So he's also is always in the discussion.

Rebecca Toal 41:18

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 41:19

I don't want to make decisions for my family on my own. So ... but he's very, very supportive. So he would say, "Well, if you think this is going to be a big change for your career, just go for it." But then then it's me. The question for me is like, "do I want ..."

Rebecca Toal 41:37

Yes.

Chloé van Soeterstède 41:37

"...to go away for that much time, you know." So at the moment, I think it's only only two weeks. Even my last concert in the US in March, I'm going to take an overflight night - overnight flight!

Rebecca Toal 41:50

I prefer overflight night, that's nice!

Chloé van Soeterstède 41:52

Overnight flight! For arriving the ... not to waste any time, you know

Rebecca Toal 41:58

Yeahhh.

Chloé van Soeterstède 41:58

... this is kind of like this....This excitement about ... it's nothing negative about it. It's more like, when I leave the house I'm excited to ...Well, first we also have time to myself, in between rehearsals with the orchestra, without having to think about nappies and feeding or something. But then it's also the excitement to go back home and to see... Yeah, to see your baby. I'm sure that two weeks, she changes. Like at the moment her third tooth is piercing through and this morning, I was bringing her to nursery before rehearsal, and I was like, "Oh my God, your third tooth, it's just like really going!"

Rebecca Toal 42:39

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 42:40

...going out. So I'm sure in two weeks time she will acquire many more skills. It's going to be such a change ...

Rebecca Toal 42:46

Such a steep...

Chloé van Soeterstède 42:47

And the thing is I said to Tris that I don't want, I want ... I think this time when they were very young, this so precious, because we can't catch back.

Rebecca Toal 42:56

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 42:57

...Catch back the time, the time is gone. And every day is a day that is gone, I mean...

Rebecca Toal 43:03

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 43:04

So I think I would love to ... I will want to increase my concert later. At the moment, we're thinking a little easy in a way to feel well balanced.

Rebecca Toal 43:15

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 43:16

And I'm not someone who is saying yes to all the invitations, because otherwise I would just be working every week. So sometimes you had to say like, "well, it's cramped. Chloé's season is totally cramped." Because I need time to breathe and to learn my scores. So it's good to say no to orchestra wise because they will want to reinvite you in any case.

Rebecca Toal 43:42

Yeah, I guess it's like you can't get the time back with Elsa.

Chloé van Soeterstède 43:45

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 43:46

But the work will ... they will ask you again.

Chloé van Soeterstède 43:49

Exactly.

Rebecca Toal 43:49

So actually...

Chloé van Soeterstède 43:50

Exactly.

Rebecca Toal 43:50

She ... that time has to come first with her.

Chloé van Soeterstède 43:53

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 43:53

...it seems.

Chloé van Soeterstède 43:54

Yeah. When she's especially very small.

Rebecca Toal 43:57

Yes.

Chloé van Soeterstède 43:57

I think until she's maybe five or something. It doesn't mean that after it's not...

Rebecca Toal 44:01

Yeah! Now it doesn't matter! I can just move country. Yeah, no of course.

Chloé van Soeterstède 44:05

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 44:06

Yeah. Well, it's been amazing talking to you. We're coming up to the end of our interview, and we usually finish on a win of the week. So we think of something small or big. We've had people you know, lots of people say, "Well, I wrote a book this week," and we go "oh, well, good for you." Just anything from your past week that you've been like, "yeah, that's a win." I'll go first because it's unfair to just spring it on you. And my win is that, like recently, I have finally kind of told a lot of my private students that I'm leaving them, and I've been trying to kind of tell them for maybe two years, but I just feel too bad and I feel too attached to them and I've been teaching them for you know, their whole childhood and everything. But it was just getting too much with balancing everything so I kind of finally said... I broke the news in person, because I have such a fear of confrontation and, and letting people down. I was like, "no, no, I really need to do this just in person."

Chloé van Soeterstède 45:09

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 45:09

I will be really annoyed at myself if I do it like by text or just kind of disappear. So yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 45:16

Well done!

Rebecca Toal 45:16

I'm happy about that.

Chloé van Soeterstède 45:19

Yes!! Well done! And I'm sure that you feel much more Zen about.

Rebecca Toal 45:22

So Zen!

Chloé van Soeterstède 45:23

It feels like the shoulders can eventually sink.

Rebecca Toal 45:26

Yeah. And like, I can process the ending with them. Because I've told them in advance, and I'm going to like, write them a little letter and really kind of go through the ending properly.

Chloé van Soeterstède 45:37

Yeah.

Rebecca Toal 45:39

Do you have a win of the week?

Chloé van Soeterstède 45:40

Win of the week... uhhh... Well, I don't know... t's not related to any of this subject of ...

Rebecca Toal 45:46

No, that's perfect!

Chloé van Soeterstède 45:49

I just tiled my kitchen.

Rebecca Toal 45:51

Oh, my God!

Chloé van Soeterstède 45:53

And renovation work is just a joy, I want just to say, because it's something else than doing music.

Rebecca Toal 46:02

Yes.

Chloé van Soeterstède 46:03

You do something else. You ... I've put a little story I think, or even...

Rebecca Toal 46:07

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 46:07

A reel or something on Instagram about the steps that we have been doing, cutting the ties and ... that's the second kitchen I'm tiling actually, the first kitchen was in London - the London flat before we moved out, and now we are in in Surrey, in Walton-on Thames.

Rebecca Toal 46:21

That's the real one.

Chloé van Soeterstède 46:22

That's ... well. That's, that's not the last house.

Rebecca Toal 46:26

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 46:26

Because it's just too small for another kid. And we want to have a bit more space. But I mean, we cannot afford at the moment. Like, we will need to sell one of these, you know, we can't have everything. But yeah, I think it was .. it's just like detaching yourself from the music. And then when you resume on the music, I remember taking Sibelius Violin Concerto that I'm doing in March as well, that is really actually difficult to conduct - and probably to play - but to get everything... Then after this tiling session where you're just like ... full of, I don't know something else in your brain, you go back to the Sibelius and it's like, "Oh, wow, this is so obvious." Like, I don't know ... there is this kind of zoom in and out from different activities that for me, it's kind of a win.

Rebecca Toal 47:11

Yeah! I love DIY. I'm so bad at it, but I had the same - I just feel so refreshed afterwards. Like, "oh, maybe I should just do more things that's not music all the time."

Chloé van Soeterstède 47:21

Yeah! Exactly. I'm doing origami - maybe you saw also on Instagram?

Rebecca Toal 47:25

No?

Chloé van Soeterstède 47:25

I'm doing a lot of origami birds. And I've got a wall in the kitchen that is just plain.

Rebecca Toal 47:30

Yeah.

Chloé van Soeterstède 47:30

And I put one, two and now it's massive origami bird, lots of colours, and Elsa loves it. And she's like ... next to plants. Lots of plants. Yeah, have a little look on the Instagram.

Rebecca Toal 47:43

You should take bookings for tiling and origami!

Chloé van Soeterstède 47:46

Well, uhh....

Rebecca Toal 47:48

Maybe not yet!

Chloé van Soeterstède 47:49

Yeah, exactly. Maybe I will...

Rebecca Toal 47:51

Well, yeah, I've really appreciated your transparency on social media. And I think it's really something that the classical music world or just the world in general really needs. So thank you for ...

Chloé van Soeterstède 48:02

Thank you so much!

Rebecca Toal 48:03

... for your transparency and for talking with me today and making time in your busy schedule.

Chloé van Soeterstède 48:07

Yeah, no worries. Thank you so much for having me! It's been very nice.

Rebecca Toal 48:10

Thank you so much.