



"I usually don't look at my photographs or paintings" ... Vladimir Ashkenazy, right, with the artist Ralph Heimans in front of Heimans' portrait of the conductor at the Sydney Opera House. Photo: Nick Mair

Portrait of the maestro as a modest but irrepressible conductor

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THE Russian maestro who has been a boon for Sydney Symphony is to continue conducting the orchestra for an extra year and has left his door open to collaborating beyond then.

But Vladimir Ashkenazy is not as keen to commit to an opinion of the painting of him unveiled yesterday when it was announced his contract was being extended.

"It's very difficult for me to

appreciate a painting of my likeness because I'm not terribly keen on my likeness," he said at the Sydney Opera House yesterday.

"I usually don't look at my photographs or paintings or anything. It's for you to decide how good the painting is.

"My wife likes it, so this is some good point already."

Securing Ashkenazy as chief conductor and artistic adviser for another year from the end of next year when his four-year term expires is a coup for Sydney Symphony, its profile and

fortunes have risen significantly during his tenure. A loss of \$1.1 million in 2009 was reduced to a loss of \$236,769 last year. The orchestra's management aims for a surplus this year.

The Sydney Symphony's chairman, John Conde, said extending Ashkenazy's contract would continue a "wonderfully successful relationship".

During Ashkenazy's extended term, the orchestra's focus would continue to be on increasing its recordings, international touring and attracting

the best soloists, Mr Conde said. Ever frank, Ashkenazy said he agreed to the extra year because "they asked me". "It's a great orchestra - otherwise I'd say no."

His priority for that year was "just playing good concerts". Works by Richard Strauss and Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades* are included.

Ashkenazy, who lives in Switzerland, will continue visiting Australia for about 10 weeks a year. This month he is conducting Gustav Mahler's symphonies.

'[Sydney Symphony] is a great orchestra - otherwise I'd say no.'

Vladimir Ashkenazy

Ashkenazy's portrait is by the Australian artist Ralph Heimans, who lives in London.

The maestro, 73, suggested his collaboration with the orchestra could continue beyond his extra year because there was so much

to complete. "Probably ... we won't be able to finish those, so I have to come - not even as principal conductor, just as another conductor."

The orchestra's managing director, Bory Jeffes, said he hoped the collaboration with Ashkenazy would go "as far into the future as is imaginable".

Heimans said he wanted his portrait to reflect Ashkenazy's "humility and the emotions he brings through in his music".

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