

Biography Recipient Birgit Nilsson Prize for 2011

RICCARDO MUTI

Born in Naples, Italy, Riccardo Muti studied piano at the Conservatory of San Pietro a Majella under Vincenzo Vitale, graduating with distinction. He subsequently received a diploma in composition and conducting from the Verdi Conservatory in Milan, where he studied with Bruno Bettinelli and Antonino Votto.

It was in 1967, when he was unanimously awarded first place at the Guido Cantelli Competition for conductors in Milan, that he first came to the attention of critics and the public. The following year, he was appointed principal conductor of the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, a position he maintained until 1980. In 1971, Muti was invited by Herbert von Karajan to conduct at the Salzburg Festival, the first of many occasions; in 2010 he celebrated his 40th year of artistic collaboration with this festival. From 1972 until 1982, Muti was chief conductor and music director of the Philharmonia Orchestra in London; from 1980 to 1992, he served as music director of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and from 1986 to 2005, he was music director of the Teatro alla Scala. During his tenure at La Scala he undertook such projects as the Mozart–Da Ponte trilogy and Wagner's Ring cycle and reopened the newly restored La Scala with Antonio Salieri's *Europa riconosciuta*, originally commissioned for La Scala's inaugural performance in 1778. He also remounted Verdi's trilogy of *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata* and *Il Trovatore* after an absence of more than 20 years.

Currently the Music Director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, a post which began in September 2010, Riccardo Muti made his debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at the Ravinia Festival in July 1973 and, after a hiatus of over 30 years, in September 2007, appeared with the CSO in a month long residency that included two weeks of remarkable subscription concerts, a sold-out opening night gala and a triumphant European tour, marking the Orchestra's first performances in Italy in more than 25 years. In May 2008, the CSO announced Muti's appointment as its tenth music director.

Over the course of his extraordinary career, Riccardo Muti has conducted most of the important orchestras in the world, including the Berlin Philharmonic, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and New York Philharmonic, as well as the Vienna Philharmonic, with which he has also appeared at the Salzburg Festival since 1971. When Muti was invited to conduct the 150th anniversary concert of the Vienna Philharmonic, he was presented with the Golden Ring by the orchestra as a sign of special appreciation and affection, a prize bestowed on only a select few conductors. In December 2003, he conducted the opening concert of the newly renovated La Fenice Opera House in Venice. In 2006, he was appointed artistic director of Salzburg's Pentecost Festival.

With a commitment to sharing his musical knowledge and serving youth, Muti founded the Luigi Cherubini Youth Orchestra in 2004, which consists of young musicians selected by an international committee from some 600 instrumentalists from all over Italy. In May 2007, he

began a five-year project dedicated to the Neapolitan School of the 18th Century with the Cherubini Orchestra as part of the Salzburg Whitsun Festival.

Riccardo Muti's social and civic conscience as an artist is demonstrated by concerts in a number of locations symbolizing the world's troubled past and contemporary history, which he has conducted as part of the Ravenna Festival's *Le vie dell'Amicizia* (The Roads of Friendship) project. Starting in 1997, these have included performances in Sarajevo, Beirut, Jerusalem, Moscow, Yerevan, Istanbul, New York, Cairo, Damascus and El Djem, Tunisia. Most recent examples include September 2009, when Maestro Muti led a free concert in the shattered city of L'Aquila for survivors of the earthquake that devastated central Italy earlier in the year; and July 2010, in Trieste, Italy, where he organized an orchestra of more than 650 young musicians from Italy, Croatia and Slovenia to give a Concert for Friendship in front of a crowd numbering more than 10,000, including the presidents from those three countries in acknowledgment of their commitment to building a future of cooperation. In July 2011, Muti travels to Nairobi, Kenya, where the Cherubini Youth Orchestra will be joined by Kenyan musicians at Nairobi's historic Uhuru Park for a concert dedicated to the dwellers of the Nairobi slums, with the purpose of celebrating and invoking peace and brotherhood through music and supporting change in underprivileged areas.

Riccardo Muti's recording activities span the classical symphonic and operatic repertoires to contemporary works and have received recognition in the form of many prizes. His debut recording with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* on the CSO Resound label, has won Maestro Muti his first two Grammys, one for Best Classical Album and one for Best Choral Performance, both in 2011.

Innumerable honors have been bestowed on Riccardo Muti over the course of his career. He has been made a Cavaliere di Gran Croce of the Italian Republic and has received the Verdienstkreuz from Germany; recently he received the decoration of Officer of the Legion of Honor from French President Nicolas Sarkozy in a private ceremony held at Élysée Palace. He also was made an honorary Knight Commander of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II in Britain. The Salzburg Mozarteum awarded him its silver medal for his contribution to Mozart's music, and in Vienna he has been elected an honorary member of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, the Wiener Hofmusikkapelle and the Wiener Staatsoper. Russian President Putin awarded him the Order of Friendship, and the State of Israel has honored him with the Wolf Prize for the arts. He has received honorary degrees from many universities in Italy and abroad. He was named 2010 Musician of the Year by Musical America, and in 2011 was awarded an Opera News Award, as well as Spain's Prince of Asturias Prize for the Arts. In October 2011, Muti receives the prestigious Birgit Nilsson Prize in Stockholm, Sweden.

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www.riccardomuti.com

Photos and video clip of the recipient are available for download at: www.birgitnilssonprize.org

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