

Press release

## 2011 Birgit Nilsson Prize awarded to Maestro Riccardo Muti

Stockholm, Sweden, 13 October 2011

**Maestro Riccardo Muti was awarded the 2011 Birgit Nilsson Prize by H.M. King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden at a festive ceremony of celebration and musical inspiration held at the Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm on Thursday evening, October 13. This Prize of one million dollars, established by Birgit Nilsson herself, is the most generous prize in the world of classical music.**

Upon receiving this award, Maestro Muti said, "I am truly honoured to receive this distinguished award, especially as it was established by one of the greatest artists in history, Birgit Nilsson. My profound thanks to His Majesty for this presentation, to the Foundation and to the Panel who selected me, and to the public who support classical music."

### **An evening in honour of Maestro Riccardo Muti**

Maestro Riccardo Muti was chosen as the 2011 laureate by an international Panel of five operatic experts from the countries where Birgit Nilsson was most active during her career (see list of names and countries at end of release). Maestro Muti was recognized for his extraordinary contributions in opera and concert, as well as his enormous influence in the music world both on and off the stage.

In her speech honouring the laureate, Royal Swedish Opera Managing Director Birgitta Svendén said, "Maestro Muti is respected as one of history's greatest conductors – he is a legend in his own time. One of the most influential musicians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, he has perfected an expressive style in music that has become his critically acclaimed signature. Muti wants to make 'the sounds speak.' In achieving this goal, Muti becomes one with the scores."

### **Musical inspiration and a 'grand finale'**

The Award Ceremony featured soprano Sondra Radvanovsky singing 'Tacea la notte placida' from Verdi's *Il Trovatore*, accompanied by the Royal Swedish Orchestra under the baton of Gianandrea Noseda. To conclude the festivities, the Royal Swedish Opera Choir and the Swedish Radio Choir accompanied by the Royal Swedish Orchestra performed the world-renowned 'Va, Pensiero' from the third act of the opera *Nabucco* by Giuseppe Verdi. Following the ceremony, guests were invited to Stockholm City Hall to dine in the presence of Their Majesties. Among the guests were Swedish Culture Minister Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth; Panel member Eva Wagner-Pasquier, Co-Director of the Bayreuth Festival; President of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Deborah Rutter; and Swedish soprano Nina Stemme.

### **Contacts**

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### **To be awarded every second or third year**

Professor Rutbert Reisch, President of the Birgit Nilsson Foundation – which organises the event – welcomed the guests and introduced the evening's festivities, which also included a video tribute to Maestro Muti. The date of the next presentation has not yet been determined. The Prize will be awarded every second or third year for outstanding achievement in opera or concert to a currently active singer or a conductor, or to an institution such as an opera house for an outstanding production which reflects the intentions of the composer, an orchestra or a chorus. In Professor Reisch's own words, "The Prize aims to designate artists/institutions who have added a chapter to music history and whose legacy will stand the test of time."

### **THE PANEL**

- Austria: Clemens Hellsberg, President of the Vienna Philharmonic
- Germany: Eva Wagner-Pasquier, Co-Director of the Bayreuth Festival
- Sweden: Bengt Hall, Managing Director of the Malmö Opera, and former General Manager of the Royal Swedish Opera Stockholm
- United Kingdom: Rupert Christiansen, Opera Critic of the Daily Telegraph and Member of the Editorial Board of OPERA
- USA: Speight Jenkins, General Director of the Seattle Opera

Photos, video clips, and TV and audio material are freely available for download at:  
[www.birgitnilssonprize.org/press](http://www.birgitnilssonprize.org/press)

### **Caption for attached photo**

*H.M. King Carl XVI Gustaf presents Maestro Riccardo Muti the one million dollar Birgit Nilsson Prize for outstanding achievement in opera and concert.*

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