

Biography

Recipient Birgit Nilsson Prize for 2014

VIENNA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

There is perhaps no other musical ensemble more consistently and closely associated with the history and tradition of European classical music than the Vienna Philharmonic. In the course of its 172-year history, the musicians of this most prominent orchestra of the capital city of music have been an integral part of a musical epoch that - thanks to an abundance of uniquely gifted composers and interpreters - must certainly be regarded as unique. Additionally, the Vienna Philharmonic's extensive touring schedule, prolific recordings and global television broadcasts allow its artistry to be experienced around the world.

The orchestra's close association with this rich musical history is best illustrated by the statements of countless preeminent musical personalities of the past. Richard Wagner described the orchestra as being one of the most outstanding in the world; Anton Bruckner called it "the most superior musical association"; Johannes Brahms counted himself a "friend and admirer"; Gustav Mahler claimed to be joined together through "the bonds of musical art"; and Richard Strauss summarized these sentiments by saying: "All praise of the Vienna Philharmonic reveals itself as understatement."

When Hans Knappertsbusch said that the Philharmonic was "incomparable," his comment was correct in more ways than one. One notable aspect of this incomparability is certainly the unique relationship between the Vienna State Opera Orchestra and the private association known as the Vienna Philharmonic. In accordance with Philharmonic statutes, only a member of the Vienna State Opera Orchestra can become a member of the Vienna Philharmonic. Before joining the Philharmonic, therefore, one must first successfully audition for a position with the State Opera Orchestra and prove oneself capable over a period of three years before becoming eligible to submit an application for membership in the association of the Vienna Philharmonic. The engagement in the Vienna State Opera Orchestra provides the musicians a financial stability that would be impossible to attain without relinquishing their autonomy to private or corporate sponsors. The independence that the Philharmonic musicians enjoy through the opera is returned in kind by a higher level of artistic performance gained through the orchestra's experience on the concert podium.

Since its inception by Otto Nicolai in 1842, the fascination that the orchestra has held for prominent composers and conductors, as well as for audiences all over the world, is based not only on a homogenous musical style carefully bequeathed from one generation to the next, but also on its unique structure and history. The desire to provide artistically worthy performances of the symphonic works of Mozart and Beethoven in their own city led to the decision on the part of the court opera musicians to present a "Philharmonic" concert series independent of their work at the opera, and under their own responsibility and at their own risk. The organizational form chosen for this new enterprise was democracy, a concept that in the political arena was the subject of bloody battles only six years later.

Over the course of more than one and a half centuries, this chosen path of democratic self-administration has experienced slight modifications, but has never been substantially altered. The foremost ruling body of the organization is the orchestra itself.

The Vienna Philharmonic has made it its mission to communicate the humanitarian message of music into the daily lives and consciousness of its listeners. With concerts at home and on tour around the world, today's Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra is much more than Austria's most coveted "cultural export". The orchestra's members are considered ambassadors, expressing through their performances the ideals of peace, humanity, and reconciliation with which music is so inseparably bound, and regularly donating services to create events that promote peace through music. Examples of this include the orchestra's historic performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with Sir Simon Rattle in 2000 at Mauthausen, the former site of Austria's largest concentration camp during World War II; the 2002 concert in New York City's St. Patrick's Cathedral in remembrance of victims of terrorism; annual benefits in New York City benefiting the American Austrian Foundation/Salzburg Cornell (Medical) Seminars; and, beginning in 1999, an annual donation of 100,000 euros from the VPO's New Year's Concert to a variety of humanitarian organizations, such as in 2012 to *Amnesty International* and to *Light in Darkness*, an Austrian foundation that aids disabled people of all ages.

In 2011, the Vienna Philharmonic played two benefit concerts, one in Vienna (May) and one in Tokyo (October), dedicated to the victims of Fukushima's tsunami and atomic disasters, for which they donated both their services and their proceeds. Additionally, the VPO gave one million euros, an amount matched by Suntory Holdings Ltd., to create the *Vienna Philharmonic & Suntory Music Aid Fund* for the victims of Fukushima.

On June 28, 2014, the VPO will present a very special concert in Sarajevo's former City Hall and National Library Vijećnica to commemorate the outbreak of World War I, which followed the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand; Franz Welser-Möst conducts the VPO and a chorus from Bosnia and Herzegovina in this historic concert that will be televised throughout Europe. Since 2005, the Vienna Philharmonic have been Goodwill Ambassadors for the World Health Organization, and since 2012, they have been the official Goodwill Ambassadors for IIASA (International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis). In October of 2014, the VPO will receive the coveted Birgit Nilsson Prize for outstanding achievements and major contributions to the field of opera/concert. Since 2008, Rolex is the Exclusive Sponsor of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra.

The musicians of the Vienna Philharmonic endeavor to implement the motto with which Ludwig van Beethoven, whose symphonic works served as a catalyst for the creation of the orchestra, prefaced his *Missa solennis*: "From the heart, to the heart."

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<http://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/en>

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

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