

## MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA HISTORY

The Grammy Award-winning Minnesota Orchestra, now in its second century and led since 2003 by Music Director Osmo Vänskä, ranks among America's top symphonic ensembles, with a distinguished history of acclaimed performances in its home state and around the world; award-winning recordings, radio broadcasts and educational engagement programs; and a visionary commitment to building the orchestral repertoire of tomorrow.

The Orchestra began its 2020-21 season in October 2020 with the launch of "This Is Minnesota Orchestra," a series of Friday night concerts in Orchestra Hall featuring smaller ensembles of Orchestra musicians performing for TV, radio and livestream audiences. Co-produced with Twin Cities PBS (TPT) and Classical Minnesota Public Radio, the performances are the first held inside Orchestra Hall since mid-March 2020, when the Orchestra performed a concert for live radio broadcast without an in-person audience shortly after COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic.

Since March, the Orchestra has remained active, connecting with audiences through new programming on digital platforms and in the community. Vänskä and musicians have recorded more than 70 "at-home" performances from living rooms and home studios, as well as collaborative projects with Dessá, pianist and Creative Partner Jon Kimura Parker and the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra. Small ensembles of players have performed in their front yards for neighborhood and livestreaming audiences; musicians have hosted live online chats to stay connected to audiences; and the Orchestra has offered a variety of educational initiatives for elementary to university-level students. In August 2020, the Orchestra presented four weeks of outdoor "thank you" concerts on Peavey Plaza for nightly audiences of up to 200 people.

Founded as the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra gave its inaugural performance on November 5, 1903, shortly after baseball's first World Series and six weeks before the Wright brothers made their unprecedented airplane flight. The Orchestra played its first regional tour in 1907 and made its New York City debut in 1912 at Carnegie Hall, where it has performed regularly ever since, most recently in March 2016. Outside the United States, the Orchestra has played concerts in Australia, Canada, East Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and South Africa. Since 1968 it has been known as the Minnesota Orchestra. The ensemble presents about 175 programs in a typical year, primarily at Orchestra Hall in downtown Minneapolis, and its concerts are heard by live audiences of 300,000.

The Orchestra's international tours have reaped significant acclaim. Under Vänskä's leadership, the ensemble has undertaken five European tours as well as a summer 2018 visit to London's BBC Proms. Also in summer 2018, the ensemble made history as the first professional U.S. orchestra ever to visit South Africa, in a five-city tour from Cape Town to Soweto—the culmination of a month-long Music for Mandela celebration of Nelson Mandela's centennial—during which Vänskä and the Orchestra collaborated with South African musicians; performed music from South Africa, the U.S. and Europe; and engaged with local communities, students and the South African National Youth Orchestra. In 2015 Vänskä and the Orchestra undertook another momentous tour, performing two historic concerts and collaborating in educational projects in Havana, Cuba, where it became the first major American orchestra to perform in the island nation since the U.S. and Cuban governments announced steps to normalize relations between the two countries. The trip drew widespread international attention and prompted *The New York Times* to hail the Orchestra's new place "at the cultural vanguard."

The Orchestra's recordings and broadcasts have drawn acclaim since the early 1920s, when the ensemble became one of the first to be heard via these media—notably making its radio debut in 1923 by playing a nationally broadcast concert under guest conductor Bruno Walter. The Orchestra's landmark Mercury Living Presence LP recordings of the 1950s and 1960s included a Gold-certified recording of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* that was the first to include an authentic military cannon and bell carillon. Under Osmo Vänskä, the Orchestra has undertaken several acclaimed recording projects, primarily for BIS Records. In 2014 the Orchestra and Vänskä won their first Grammy Award for Best Orchestral Performance for a disc of Sibelius' Symphonies No. 1 and 4.

The Orchestra's newest recording initiative focuses on the ten symphonies of Gustav Mahler. The series' first release, featuring the Fifth Symphony, received a 2017 Grammy Award nomination for Best Orchestral Performance. To date, five additional albums in the series have been released. In March 2019, the Orchestra recorded two sold-out performances with singer-rapper Dessá for an album called *Sound the Bells* that was released by Doomtree Records in November and debuted at No. 2 on the Billboard Chart for both classical crossover and current classical.

Earlier recordings by the Orchestra and Vänskä include a five-disc cycle of the complete Beethoven symphonies that *The New York Times* wrote “may be the definitive [cycle] of our time.” The recording of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony received a 2008 Grammy nomination for Best Orchestral Performance, and the album featuring the Second and Seventh Symphonies was nominated for a 2009 Classic FM Gramophone Award. The Orchestra and Vänskä also recorded a two-CD set of Tchaikovsky’s piano-and-orchestra works with soloist Stephen Hough; a disc featuring Bruckner’s Fourth Symphony; two albums of Beethoven and Mozart piano concertos with Russian pianist Yevgeny Sudbin; and a three-album cycle of the complete Sibelius symphonies, including the Grammy-winning disc of Symphonies No. 1 and 4 and a Grammy-nominated album of the Symphonies No. 2 and 5; the Holocaust memorial oratorio *To Be Certain of the Dawn*, composed by Stephen Paulus with libretto by Michael Dennis Browne; and a live-in-concert recording of Sibelius’ *Kullervo* and *Finlandia* and Olli Kortekangas’ *Migrations*, all performed with Finland’s YL Male Voice Choir and vocal soloists.

The Orchestra’s Friday night performances are broadcast live regionally by Minnesota Public Radio, a weekly tradition for more than 40 years. Over the years, many programs have been subsequently featured on American Public Media’s national programs, *SymphonyCast* and *Performance Today*.

In addition to offering traditional concerts, the Minnesota Orchestra connects with more than 85,000 music lovers annually through family concerts and educational programs including Young People’s Concerts, a series that marked its centennial in 2011. In the last decade nearly half a million students have experienced a Young People’s Concert. In recent seasons the Orchestra brought the series to a global online audience with Young People’s Concert webcasts, which have reached students around the globe in hundreds of cities across more than 20 countries. During the 2020-21 season, all of the Orchestra’s Young People’s Concerts will be shared in an entirely digital online format, allowing families and students to attend the concerts for free from their homes.

In 2011, extending a long tradition of performances throughout the state of Minnesota, the Orchestra launched Common Chords. This multi-year initiative creates partnerships between the Orchestra and participating Minnesota cities, culminating in a celebratory festival week that features performances and dozens of activities that reflect the interests, diversity and heritage of each community. Launched with support from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Common Chords presented its first festival week in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, in 2011; subsequent partnerships have taken the Orchestra to the Minnesota cities of Willmar, Hibbing, Bemidji, Detroit Lakes and Mankato. In January 2019 the Orchestra held its first Twin Cities-area Common Chords week, spending a week in North Minneapolis.

Along with its core series of classical concerts, the Minnesota Orchestra presents Live at Orchestra Hall, a lineup of concerts by a broad spectrum of artists; conductor Sarah Hicks leads the series, which features genres including popular music, jazz, film scores and world music. Since 1980 the Orchestra has ended each season with Sommerfest, its beloved urban summer music festival. In summer 2017 conductor Andrew Litton concluded his 15-year tenure as the festival’s artistic director. In 2019, the Orchestra outlined a new leadership model for the festival and appointed pianist Jon Kimura Parker as its first-ever Creative Partner for summer programming. The first edition of Summer at Orchestra Hall will take place in July 2021, focusing on the music and influence of Ludwig van Beethoven.

In 2017 the Orchestra launched the Rosemary and David Good Fellowship, a two-year program intended to encourage greater diversity in the orchestral field by supporting the career development of outstanding young musicians of African American, Latin American and Native American descent as they embark on professional orchestral careers. To date, four musicians have served as Good Fellows.

The Minnesota Orchestra nourishes a strong commitment to contemporary composers. Since 2002 its annual Composer Institute, under the direction of Pulitzer Prize-winner Kevin Puts, has offered more than 140 emerging composers an intense immersion into the orchestral world. Since 1903 the Orchestra has premiered and/or commissioned more than 300 compositions, including works by John Adams, Kalevi Aho, Dominick Argento, Béla Bartók, Aaron Copland, John Corigliano, Paul Hindemith, Charles Ives, Aaron Jay Kernis, Libby Larsen, Bongani Ndodana-Breen, Stephen Paulus, Kevin Puts, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich.

The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) has bestowed upon the Orchestra 20 awards for adventuresome programming, including five Leonard Bernstein Awards for Education Programming between 2005 and 2012 and, in 2008, the John S. Edwards Award for Strongest Commitment to New American Music.

Music directors of the Orchestra have included Emil Oberhoffer (1903-1922), Henri Verbrugghen (1923-1931), Eugene Ormandy (1931-1936), Dimitri Mitropoulos (1937-1949), Antal Dorati (1949-1960), Stanislaw Skrowaczewski (1960-1979), Sir Neville Marriner (1979-1986), Edo de Waart (1986-1995), Eiji Oue (1995-2002) and Osmo Vänskä (2003-present).

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