

# philharmonia orchestra

## Orchestra History

### The Philharmonia Orchestra (1945 – 1964)

The Philharmonia Orchestra made its début on 27 October 1945, conducted by **Sir Thomas Beecham**, a close friend of the Orchestra's founder, Walter Legge. The world of classical music quickly took the Orchestra to its heart; two years after it was founded, **Richard Strauss** conducted the Orchestra, and entrusted it, in 1950, with the world première of the *Four Last Songs*. Legendary conductors came to work with the Orchestra from the very beginning, including, in 1948, three of the world's greatest in just one month: **Otto Klemperer**, **Wilhelm Furtwängler** and **Herbert von Karajan**.

In the fifties, audiences relished the impact of **Toscanini**, **Guido Cantelli** and **Carlo Maria Giulini**, as well as **Wolfgang Sawallisch** and **Lorin Maazel**. When the **Royal Festival Hall** was inaugurated in 1951, Philharmonia players took to the stage, and later that year it made the first ever recording of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. In the summer of 1954, the Orchestra was invited to become Orchestra-in-Residence at the **Lucerne Festival**, then the most prestigious of the continental music festivals. At the end of the first two decades, the Orchestra successfully resisted being disbanded by Legge and, with the support of Otto Klemperer, reconvened in 1964 as the **New Philharmonia Orchestra**.

### The New Philharmonia (1964 – 1976)

The status of the New Philharmonia was confirmed early in the next period of its life when **Igor Stravinsky** conducted them in a concert of his own works, and **Sir John Barbirolli**, **Sir Adrian Boult**, **Claudio Abbado**, **Wolfgang Sawallisch** and **Pierre Boulez** also directed the Orchestra. In 1969 **Lorin Maazel** accepted the post of Associate Principal Conductor, later becoming Principal Guest Conductor and Klemperer was still very much involved in the Orchestra's life until his retirement in 1972.

The **Martin Musical Scholarship Fund** was set up in 1968, named after its founder and administered by the Philharmonia, which has since assisted many musicians including Steven Isserlis, Kennedy and Tasmin Little. The early seventies saw **Maxim Shostakovich** conduct the British première of his father's **Fifteenth Symphony**, and débuts from **Riccardo Muti** (becoming Principal Conductor in 1972 and eventually Music Director), **Mstislav Rostropovich**, **Andrew Davis** and **Sir Simon Rattle**, as well as the eventual return to the original name of Philharmonia Orchestra.

## The Philharmonia again (1976 – 1994)

An innovation of the late seventies was the development of the idea of community involvement, and this first took place in Nottingham in 1976 with teaching, masterclasses and lectures over four days as well as concerts. A similar venture was repeated in 1978, but lack of funding prevented any further collaborations. 1977 saw the conducting début of **Vladimir Ashkenazy**, a relationship that has continued to this day with his position of Conductor Laureate, and **Yevgeny Svetlanov**. **HRH The Prince of Wales** became the Orchestra's Patron in 1979, and the Orchestra played at his wedding in 1981.

The eighties brought to the Orchestra for the first time **Giuseppe Sinopoli**, **Kurt Sanderling** (currently Conductor Emeritus), **Bernard Haitink**, **Mariss Jansons**, **Sir Roger Norrington** and **Esa-Pekka Salonen**. The first **Music of Today** concert took place at St John's Smith Square in 1980, with **Lutoslawski** conducting his own Second Symphony. In 1982, Hazel Westbury founded the **Friends of the Philharmonia**, which soon became very successful and there are now over **1,500 Friends** in London and across the UK.

**Touring** became an increasingly significant part of the Orchestra's work, including tours of Japan, USA, Canada and Australia with Ashkenazy; USA, Germany, Italy and Japan, including the joint opening with the Berlin Philharmonic of the Suntory Hall in Tokyo, with Sinopoli; and a tour to Spain and the Canary Isles conducted by **Placido Domingo**. With the advent of CDs in the late eighties, the Orchestra was kept very busy re-recording standard repertoire – at one point undertaking 250 sessions in a single year. In 1991, **James MacMillan** was appointed Visiting Composer and a new **Music of Today** series was launched, which continues today under the artistic direction of **Julian Anderson**. Sinopoli resigned from the Orchestra in 1994 and was replaced as Principal Guest Conductor by **Christoph von Dohnányi**, who became Principal Conductor in 1997.

The Orchestra gained its first Residency in 1990, which was at the **Théâtre du Châtelet** in Paris, to start in 1993, and this was to be followed within a few years by other important **Residencies**.

## Recent years

1995 was a major year for Residencies for the Philharmonia. As a result of an invitation from Bedford Borough Council, the Orchestra performed at the **Corn Exchange** with Sawallisch in May, marking the start of its Residency there that includes a variety of **education projects** as well as a series of concerts throughout the year. In the summer, the Philharmonia was invited by the South Bank Board to become Resident Orchestra alongside the London Philharmonic Orchestra at the **South Bank Centre**, where the Orchestra now puts on around 40 concerts a year.

Another residency began in 1997 at **Leicester's** De Montfort Hall, where the average attendance of concerts has virtually doubled since the Orchestra's arrival. Further collaborations including Orchestra in Partnership at the Anvil, **Basingstoke** since 2000; a residency in **Bristol** with three venues: Colston Hall, St George's Bristol and Watershed, begun in 2003; a partnership with the Concertgebouw in **Bruges**; and most recently, a new residency in **Canterbury** and throughout Kent.

2000 saw the first **Family Music Day** event at the Queen Elizabeth Hall on the South Bank. A great success, these bi-annual mornings of combining informal workshops and an orchestral concert now sell out within days of going on sale, and have also been taken to the residencies in Bedford, Leicester, Bristol and Canterbury. **Touring** is still an important part of the Orchestra's life, and recent visits include Russia, Japan, the USA and the Far East as well as most of Western Europe.

**Sir Charles Mackerras** accepted the position of Principal Guest Conductor in 2002. In 2005 the Orchestra celebrated its **60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year** with a series of major events and innovations, including the **first ever fully interactive webcast by a UK orchestra**, the **first podcast by a UK orchestra**, and becoming the first classical music organisation ever to be **shortlisted for the BT Digital Music Awards**, competing with Live 8 and The Stereophonics. In 2006 the Orchestra members voted unanimously in support of a **historic agreement** to record its live concerts for both audio and video and make them available as **downloads**, through **mobile phones, podcasts, webcasts**, and on **DVD** and **CD-ROM**.