

Orchestra of a new world

Their long history, the way they always stood their ground and a persistent joy in discovery, the Vienna Symphony Orchestra has always been the beating heart of the metropolis of classical music that is Vienna. For over 120 years, the orchestra has been an essential part of the design of Vienna's unique musical culture, and their ability to conjoin past, present, and future in music is almost unparalleled. Chief conductor Andrés Orozco-Estrada, long-term Viennese-by-choice, manages the ensemble's work and puts their musical roots in the limelight.

It is not a coincidence that the birth of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra was the year 1900. The winds of change of the Viennese Modern Age were blowing around this new orchestra, that tackled the challenges of life in the 20th century head-on and with vision. This also included a confident handling of their own past - the Vienna Symphony Orchestra was the first orchestra in Vienna that played all of Beethoven's symphonies in a cycle. Beethoven's humanist and forward-looking legacy, and Viennese Romanticism in general has always been like tailor-made for the Symphony orchestra, and so these genres are still predominant in their repertoire to this day.

The orchestra's pioneering spirit also reflects in the fact that within very little time, they became one of Europe's leading orchestra for premieres. Milestones in musical history such as Anton Bruckner's Ninth Symphony, Arnold Schönberg's Gurre-Lieder, Maurice Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand, and Franz Schmidt's The Book with Seven Seals were premiered by the Symphony Orchestra. Concerts that paved the way for completely new soundscapes and that made them accessible to the masses. To this day, the Vienna Symphony Orchestra values the cooperation with contemporary composers such as Olga Neuwirth, Wolfgang Rihm, HK Gruber, Thomas Larcher, Johann Maria Staud, Michael Jarrell, Guillaume Connesson, Dieter Ammann or Jörg Widman, and they are one of the most important drivers of contemporary music, both in Vienna and internationally. Numerous visionaries were also among the chief conductors of the past 120 years - such as Wilhelm Furtwängler, Hans Swarowsky, Herber von Karajan, Wolfgang Sawallisch, and Georges Prêtre. They all have had a lasting effect on the future of global classical music.

Despite their progressiveness, the Vienna Symphony Orchestra has always remained very down-to-earth and has valued their close relation to their audience. With their so-called "volkstümliche Concerte" (popular concerts) at the Vienna Volksgarten and the legendary labourer symphony concerts, they have made sure from the very beginning that classical music is not only accessible to a small elite. These days, the orchestra performs at the Grätzl concerts (neighbourhood concerts) in unusual places in all of Vienna's districts, thus filling every nook and cranny of the metropolis with musical life. Since 2013, they have also been performing on the day of liberation, at the "Festival of Joy" on Vienna Heldenplatz, and since 2017 they also perform live at the summer opening of the Vienna MuseumsQuartier. Open air, in the middle of a vibrant city and easily accessible for everyone - this is how the Vienna Symphony Orchestra have been presenting themselves for their open-air concerts in the city that have long become a popular benchmark of the year in music.

As official cultural ambassadors of the city of Vienna, the Vienna Symphony Orchestra has also made their distinctive sound heard outside of the city walls, as they have long been welcome guest performers at large international concert halls. The same way the orchestra travels into the world, the world also comes to Vienna - something that beautifully reflects in the illustrious list of guest conductors, among them regulars such as Lorin Maazel, Zubin Mehta, Claudio Abbado, Carlos Kleiber, and Sergiu Celibidache. As Orchestra in Residence at the Bregenz Festival, the Vienna Symphony Orchestra has also been performing for a raving and diverse audience for many decades.

ARTISTS FEST DER FREUDE 2021

In the period 20-21, the Vienna Symphony Orchestra and their new chief conductor have been reflecting on their roots as musical companions - as befits an orchestra that faces the challenges of time confidently and with vision.