

**MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS**  
SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY MUSIC DIRECTOR

Michael Tilson Thomas (MTT) assumed his post as the San Francisco Symphony's (SFS) 11<sup>th</sup> Music Director in September 1995, consolidating a strong relationship with the Orchestra that began some two decades earlier. He made his San Francisco Symphony conducting debut in 1974 at 29, leading the Orchestra in Mahler's Symphony No. 9.

Tilson Thomas celebrates his 17<sup>th</sup> season as Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony during the Orchestra's 2011-12 Centennial Season. He and the Orchestra have been praised by critics for innovative programming and for bringing the works of American composers to the fore, and have brought new audiences into Davies Symphony Hall. During his inaugural 1995-96 season, Tilson Thomas included an American work on nearly every one of his San Francisco Symphony programs, and ended the season with *An American Festival*, a groundbreaking two-week celebration of American music. In 2000, Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony presented a landmark 12-concert *American Mavericks Festival*, a celebration of America's maverick musical heritage of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which MTT and the Orchestra revive in March 2012. MTT has led the Orchestra in internationally acclaimed explorations of the music of Mahler, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Beethoven, Wagner, and Weill. Semi-staged productions have included Rimsky-Korsakov's opera-ballet *Mlada*, Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, Beethoven's *Fidelio*, and *The Thomashefskys*, celebrating MTT's grandparents, Boris and Bessie Thomashefsky, pioneers of the American Yiddish theater.

Michael Tilson Thomas's acclaimed recordings have won numerous international awards, including 11 Grammys for SFS recordings of Mahler's symphonies 3, 6, 7, 8, and the Adagio from Symphony No. 10, scenes from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*, and a collection of three Stravinsky ballet scores – *Le Sacres du printemps*, *The Firebird*, and *Perséphone*. His recordings also include works by Bach, Beethoven, and Prokofiev, as well as his pioneering work with the music of Ives, Ruggles, Reich, Cage and Gershwin. For the San Francisco Symphony's own SFS Media label, Tilson Thomas and the Orchestra have recorded Mahler's nine symphonies, the Adagio from the unfinished Tenth Symphony, and Mahler's songs for voices, chorus and orchestra. Their recordings of Copland's Organ Symphony with Paul Jacobs; Ives' *A Concord Symphony*, arranged by Henry Brant; Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 4 with Emanuel Ax; and Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 were issued in 2011.

In 1996, Tilson Thomas led the Orchestra on the first of their more than two dozen national and international tours together; they continue to tour every year and perform regularly in Europe, Asia and throughout the United States. Acclaimed interpreters of Mahler's music, Tilson Thomas and the SFS performed his symphonies in some of Europe's leading music capitals for the anniversaries of the composer's birth and death, including the centerpiece: a rare four-concert engagement in May 2011 at the famed Vienna Konzerthaus. MTT and the Orchestra opened Carnegie Hall's 2008-09 season with a gala tribute to Leonard Bernstein that was filmed for national broadcast on PBS's *Great Performances* and released by SFS Media on DVD. Other recent touring highlights include the Orchestra's inaugural visit to mainland China, where they performed in Shanghai and opened the Hong Kong Arts Festival, and a 2007 tour of summer festivals including the London Proms and festivals of Edinburgh, Rheingau, Berlin and Lucerne.

A Los Angeles native, Tilson Thomas began his formal studies at the University of Southern California, where he studied piano with John Crown and conducting and composition with Ingolf

Dahl. At 19, he was named Music Director of the Young Musicians Foundation Debut Orchestra. He worked with Stravinsky, Boulez, Stockhausen, and Copland on premieres of their works at Los Angeles's famed Monday Evening Concerts. During this period he was also pianist and conductor for Gregor Piatigorsky and Jascha Heifetz.

In 1969, at age 24, after winning the Koussevitzky Prize at Tanglewood, Tilson Thomas was appointed Assistant Conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Ten days later he made his New York debut with the Boston Symphony, gaining international recognition when he replaced Music Director William Steinberg mid-concert at Lincoln Center. He was later appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the BSO, where he remained until 1974. He led the television broadcasts of the New York Philharmonic's famed Young People's Concerts from 1971 to 1977. He has also served as Chief Conductor and Director of the Ojai Festival, Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic, and a Principal Guest Conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. He has toured the world with the London Symphony Orchestra, of which he became Principal Conductor in 1988 and now serves as Principal Guest Conductor. Until 2000 he was co-Artistic Director of the Pacific Music Festival, which he and Leonard Bernstein inaugurated in Sapporo, Japan, in 1990. His guest conducting engagements include frequent appearances with the major orchestras of Europe and the United States.

Tilson Thomas is noted for his commitment to music education and young people. He founded the New World Symphony in Miami, a national training orchestra for the most gifted graduates of America's conservatories, and continues as Artistic Director. As Artistic Director of the YouTube Symphony Orchestra, he led the globally-sourced ensemble in both its first concert in April 2009 at Carnegie Hall and the new group of musicians who performed at the Sydney Opera House in March 2011. That event was the most popular live YouTube concert, with 33 million viewers.

MTT and the SFS created the acclaimed national *Keeping Score* PBS television series and multimedia project, unprecedented among American orchestras. Designed to make classical music more accessible to people of all ages and musical backgrounds, *Keeping Score* is anchored by eight composer documentaries and eight live concert films, viewed by more than nine million Americans on national PBS television and DVD; an interactive web site to explore and learn about music, [www.keepingcore.org](http://www.keepingcore.org); and a Peabody Award-winning national radio series with episodes hosted by MTT. Its education program for K-12 schools furthers teaching through the arts by integrating classical music into core subjects. *Keeping Score* composers include Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Stravinsky, Copland, Ives, Berlioz, Shostakovich, and Mahler.

Acclaimed for his work as a composer, MTT has given world premieres of many of his works with the San Francisco Symphony. In 1999, MTT conducted the SFS in the first orchestral version of *Three Songs to Poems by Walt Whitman*, and in 2001, Renée Fleming and the SFS premiered his song cycle *Poems of Emily Dickinson*. In 2002, Tilson Thomas led the SFS in the world premiere of his contrabassoon concerto *Urban Legend*, with SFS contrabassoonist Steven Braunstein as soloist. In 2005, MTT and the SFS performed Tilson Thomas's *Island Music*, dedicated to the memory of Lou Harrison. In 1991, Tilson Thomas and the New World Symphony performed *From the Diary of Anne Frank*, composed by Tilson Thomas and commissioned by UNICEF. His composition *Shówa/Shoáh* was written in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima.

Tilson Thomas's many honors include the National Medal of Arts, the highest award given to artists by the U.S. government, presented by President Barack Obama in February 2010. He has also been recognized with Columbia University's Ditson Award for services to American Music and the President's Award from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. He was

named 1995 Conductor of the Year by *Musical America*. Tilson Thomas was a Carnegie Hall Perspectives Artist from 2003-2005. In 2006 he was recognized with *Gramophone's* Artist of the Year award, and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Tilson Thomas is a Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres of France.

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