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MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS IS AWARDED NATIONAL MEDAL OF ARTS

Nation's Highest Award for Artistic Achievement Presented Today by President Barack Obama in White House Ceremony

(WASHINGTON, D.C., February 25, 2010) - [Michael Tilson Thomas](#) (MTT), Music Director of the [San Francisco Symphony](#), Founder and Artistic Director of the [New World Symphony](#), America's Orchestral Academy, and Principal Guest Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, has been awarded the National Medal of Arts, the nation's highest award for artistic achievement. The award will be presented by President Barack Obama Thursday afternoon, February 25 at a ceremony in the East Room of the White House, where Tilson Thomas will be recognized for his contributions to American culture.

"I am grateful to have the opportunity to share the deep and ongoing tradition of classical music with all Americans," said Tilson Thomas. "I receive this award with gratitude to President Obama, the National Endowment for the Arts and to my many musical colleagues throughout the country whose devotion makes all this possible. I especially want to thank the San Francisco Symphony and the New World Symphony families for our special collaborations over these many years."

US Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, who nominated MTT for the award, stated "Michael Tilson Thomas has brought pride to all San Franciscans as President Obama honors him as a recipient of a National Medal of Arts. Thomas has been a remarkable mentor and supporter to many young artists, and he has educated millions about the joy of music. His tenure at the San Francisco Symphony has been marked by artistic excellence. President John F. Kennedy once said: 'The life of the arts — far from being an interruption in the life of a nation — is very close to the center of a nation's purpose.' As we recognize Michael Tilson Thomas and other artists, we honor them for enriching our lives, our country, and our world with their creativity."

The 2009 National Medal of Arts Recipients include Tilson Thomas, singer Bob Dylan, actor and director Clint Eastwood, singer Rita Moreno, architect Maya Lin, singer Jessye Norman, composer John Williams, designer Milton Glaser, painter Frank Stella, and design advocate Joseph P. Riley, Jr.

"These individuals and organizations show us how many ways art works every day. They represent the breadth and depth of American architecture, design, film, music, performance, theatre, and visual art," said NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman. "This lifetime honor recognizes their exceptional contributions, and I join the President and the country in saluting them."

The National Medal of Arts, established by Congress in 1984, is awarded by the President and managed by the National Endowment for the Arts. Award recipients are selected based on their contributions to the creation, growth, and support of the arts in the United States. The National Council on the Arts, the Arts Endowment's presidentially-appointed and Senate-confirmed advisory body, reviews the nominations and provides recommendations to the President, who selects the recipients.

Michael Tilson Thomas is acclaimed as a conductor, composer and educator. Currently in his 15th season as music director of the San Francisco Symphony, he is also the Founder and Artistic Director of the New World Symphony, the premier orchestral academy for gifted young musicians. With a background that includes grandparents, Boris and Bessie Thomashefsky, founding members of the Yiddish Theater in America, and working relationships with legendary composers of the 20th century, such as Igor Stravinsky, Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein, MTT's wide ranging perspectives on music have won him respect and trust among musicians and audiences worldwide.

He conducts and has recorded musical works ranging from Bach, Tchaikovsky and Beethoven to Gershwin, Ives and Reich. The recordings of the complete Mahler symphony cycle by MTT and the San Francisco Symphony have been recognized with seven Grammy Awards, including three this year for Mahler's Symphony No. 8 and the Adagio from Symphony No. 10.

MTT's commitment to music education is longstanding. He was Director of the New York Philharmonic's *Young People's Concerts* from 1971 to 1977, helped to create the *Discovery Series* with the London Symphony Orchestra and is currently creating the [Keeping Score](#) Project with the San Francisco Symphony. *Keeping Score* includes the nationally televised *PBS* series, radio programming, [interactive websites](#) and a K-12 education program, all designed to make classical music more accessible to people of all ages and musical backgrounds. His *Keeping Score* radio series, *The MTT Files*, won a Peabody Award in 2008.

In 1987, he founded the New World Symphony (NWS), an orchestral academy dedicated to the artistic, personal and professional development of outstanding young instrumentalists. There, in addition to a full season of master classes and concerts, he employs Internet2 technology to bring conductors, soloists and coaches from across the globe into virtual collaboration with NWS fellows. Hundreds of NWS alumni are working in 175 professional orchestras around the world. A new Frank Gehry-designed campus will open in Miami Beach in January 2011.

MTT served as artistic director of the [YouTube Symphony Orchestra](#) (YTSO), a 96-member ensemble selected from 3,000 video auditions created by musicians from 30 countries and all walks of life and the first orchestra auditioned entirely online. He conducted the [YTSO](#) in April 2009 at a Carnegie Hall concert, which received global coverage.

He has won ten Grammys for his recordings and is a *Chevalier dans l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres* of France. He has been named by *Musical America* as both “Musician of the Year” and “Conductor of the Year” and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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