



SAN FRANCISCO
SYMPHONY

MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS • MUSIC DIRECTOR

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MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS ELECTED TO THE ACADEMY OF ARTS AND LETTERS AS AMERICAN HONORARY MEMBER

**Academy's distinction celebrates Tilson Thomas's work as a composer, conductor, educator, and
advocate**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA—The American Academy of Arts and Letters announced today that **Michael Tilson Thomas** has been elected as American Honorary Member, joining nine others in the Academy with that title. Established in 1983, the American Honorary Member category of the Academy of Arts and Letters includes Americans of great distinction in the arts whose work falls outside the traditional departments of Art, Literature, and Music. With the election, the Academy recognizes Tilson Thomas's contributions as a composer, conductor, educator, and music advocate. Other American Honorary Members include Bob Dylan, Yo-Yo Ma, Robert Levin, Martin Scorsese, Alice Waters, Leontyne Price, and Meryl Streep.

Founded in 1898, the American Academy of Arts and Letters is a historic honor society that comprises the country's 250 leading architects, artists, composers, and writers, alongside the esteemed American and Foreign Honorary Members. The academy elects new members as vacancies occur, and administers over 70 awards and prizes, exhibits art and manuscripts, funds performances of new works of musical theater, and purchases artwork for donation to museums across the United States.



Credit: Spencer Lowell

Michael Tilson Thomas is currently the longest-tenured music director at any major American orchestra, and celebrates his 23rd season as Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony (SFS) during the 2017–18 season. He has been praised for innovative programming, enhancing the orchestral concert experience with multimedia and creative staging, showcasing the works of American composers, and attracting new audiences to orchestral music, both at home at Davies Symphony Hall and through the Symphony's extensive media projects. Highlights of Tilson Thomas's published compositions include a song cycle on Emily Dickinson's poems, which was premiered by the SFS in 2002; *Agnegram*, the composer's 90th-birthday orchestral tribute to longtime SFS patron Agnes Albert; and *From the Diary of Anne Frank*, for narrator and orchestra, which was commissioned by UNICEF and given its world premiere at Philadelphia's Academy of Music in 1990 by the late Audrey Hepburn and the New World Symphony, conducted by the composer. An educator and musical advocate, Tilson Thomas founded the New World Symphony in Miami in 1987, a national training orchestra for the most gifted graduates of America's conservatories, and continues as Artistic Director. Tilson Thomas and the SFS also created the landmark 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 8 composer documentaries and 8 live concert films, viewed by more than 6 million Americans on national PBS television, Blu-ray and DVD.

Tilson Thomas's other honors include the National Medal of Arts, the highest award given to artists by the US government, presented by President Barack Obama in 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. In 2006 he was also 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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