

# SFSYMPHONY

## Michael Tilson Thomas Music Director Laureate of the San Francisco Symphony

Michael Tilson Thomas is Co-Founder and Artistic Director of the New World Symphony, Music Director Laureate of the San Francisco Symphony and Conductor Laureate of the London Symphony Orchestra. Born in Los Angeles, he is the third generation of his family to pursue an artistic career. His grandparents, Boris and Bessie Thomashefsky, were founding members of the Yiddish Theater in America; his father, Ted Thomas, was a producer at the Mercury Theater Company in New York before moving to Los Angeles where he worked in film and television; and his mother, Roberta Thomas, was the head of research for Columbia Pictures.

Mr. 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 age nineteen he was named Music Director of the Young Musicians Foundation Debut Orchestra. During this same period, he was the pianist and conductor in master classes of Gregor Piatigorsky and Jascha Heifetz and worked with Stravinsky, Boulez, Stockhausen and Copland on premieres of their compositions at Los Angeles' Monday Evening Concerts.

In 1969, after winning the Koussevitzky Prize at Tanglewood, Mr. Tilson Thomas was appointed Assistant Conductor and pianist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. That year he also made his New York debut with the BSO and gained international recognition after replacing Music Director William Steinberg mid-concert. He was later appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, a position he held until 1974. He was Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic from 1971 to 1979 and a Principal Guest Conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic from 1981 to 1985. In 1987, he co-founded and became Artistic Director of the New World Symphony, a position he still holds. That same year, he was appointed Principal Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra and served in that role until 1995, when he became Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony. He is Conductor Laureate of the LSO and became Music Director Laureate of the SFS in June 2020, when he concluded his 25-year directorship of the orchestra. As a guest conductor, he has appeared with orchestras worldwide, including the major orchestras of Europe and the United States.

Mr. Tilson Thomas is a two-time Carnegie Hall Perspectives artist, curating and conducting series at the hall from 2003 to 2005 and from 2018 to 2019. In the most recent series, he led Carnegie Hall's National Youth Orchestra of the United States of America both at the hall and on tour in Asia, opened the Carnegie Hall season over two evenings with the San Francisco Symphony, conducted two programs with the Vienna Philharmonic and finished with a pair of concerts leading the New World Symphony.

A winner of twelve Grammy Awards, Mr. Tilson Thomas appears on more than 120 recordings. His discography includes *The Mahler Project*, a collection of the composer's complete symphonies and works for voice and orchestra performed with the San Francisco Symphony, in addition to pioneering recordings of music by Charles Ives, Carl Ruggles, Steve Reich, John Cage, Ingolf Dahl, Morton Feldman, George Gershwin, John McLaughlin and Elvis Costello. His recordings span repertoire from Bach and Beethoven to Debussy and Stravinsky, and include collaborations with artists ranging from Sarah Vaughan to Metallica.

His television work includes a series with the London Symphony Orchestra for BBC Television, broadcasts of the New York Philharmonic Young People's Concerts from 1971 to 1977 and numerous productions on PBS's *Great Performances*. With the San Francisco Symphony, he created a multi-tiered media project, *Keeping Score*, which includes a television series, web sites, and radio programs. He received a Peabody Award for his SFS Media radio series *The MTT Files*.

Mr. Tilson Thomas's compositions are published by G. Schirmer. In 1991, he and the New World Symphony were presented in a series of benefit concerts for UNICEF in the United States, featuring Audrey Hepburn as narrator of his work *From the Diary of Anne Frank*, which was commissioned by UNICEF. This piece has since been translated and performed in many languages worldwide. In August 1995, he led the Pacific Music Festival Orchestra in the premiere of his composition *Shówa/Shoáh*, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. His vocal music includes settings of poetry by Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, which were premiered by Thomas Hampson and Renée Fleming, respectively. In 2016, Yuja Wang premiered his piano piece *You Come Here Often?*.

His song cycle *Four Preludes on Playthings of the Wind*, a setting of Carl Sandburg's poem, was premiered in 2016 by the New World Symphony, with Measha Brueggergosman as soloist. In 2019, the piece was recorded for Medici.tv at the New World Center and given its New York premiere as part of Mr. Tilson Thomas's second Carnegie Hall Perspectives series. His first Perspectives series also featured performances of his own compositions, including *Island Music* for four marimbas and percussion; *Notturno* for solo flute and strings, featuring soloist Paula Robison; and new settings of poems by Rainer Maria Rilke. In 2020, he led the San Francisco Symphony in the world premiere of his six-part song cycle *Meditations on Rilke*, and he subsequently conducted the work at the Cleveland Orchestra. Additional compositions include *Street Song* for brass instruments; *Agnegram*, an overture for orchestra; and *Urban Legend*, a concerto for contrabassoon that was premiered by the San Francisco Symphony. In June 2020, SFS Media released an album of works composed by Mr. Tilson Thomas, featuring live concert recordings of *From the Diary of Anne Frank*, narrated by mezzo-soprano Isabel Leonard, and *Meditations on Rilke*, sung by mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke and bass-baritone Ryan McKinny. This recording won the 2021 Grammy Award for Best Classical Compendium.

Mr. Tilson Thomas co-founded the New World Symphony in Miami Beach, a postgraduate orchestral academy dedicated to preparing young musicians of diverse backgrounds for leadership roles in classical music. The New World Symphony has long been at the forefront of developments in the arts and in education. As Artistic Director, he works with NWS Fellows to further their performance abilities and to expand their understanding of professional responsibilities in our ever-changing musical environment. Of the more than 1,100 alumni of the New World Symphony, 90% maintain careers in music, often as musicians or administrators in major orchestras. Since 2011, the campus of the New World Symphony has been the technologically advanced, Frank Gehry-designed New World Center.

Mr. Tilson Thomas's tenure as Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony was a period of significant growth and heightened international recognition for the orchestra. In addition to his continued exploration of the standard repertoire with the SFS, he led the orchestra in championing and cultivating relationships with today's leading composers, generating awareness and appreciation of American Maverick composers of the 20th century and enriching the concert experience through semi-staged performances. He also led the orchestra in numerous summer festivals and tours of Europe, the United States and Asia. As SFS Music Director Laureate, he continues to lead the orchestra in four weeks of concerts each season, as well as in special projects.

As Principal Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra, Mr. Tilson Thomas led the orchestra on regular tours in Europe, the United States and Japan, as well as to the Salzburg Festival. In London, he and the orchestra have mounted major festivals focusing on the music of Steve Reich, George Gershwin,

Johannes Brahms, Toru Takemitsu, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov and the School of St. Petersburg, Claude Debussy and Gustav Mahler. As Conductor Laureate of the LSO, he continues to lead the orchestra in concerts in London and on tour. His 70th birthday was celebrated by the orchestra with a concert he conducted at Buckingham Palace before the Queen of England.

Michael Tilson Thomas is an Officier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres of France, is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, was *Musical America*'s Musician of the Year and Conductor of the Year, was *Gramophone* magazine's Artist of the Year and has been profiled on CBS's *60 Minutes*, ABC's *Nightline* and PBS's *American Masters*. He has been awarded the National Medal of Arts, was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and was a 2019 recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors.

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