

**CRITICAL ACCLAIM FOR MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS  
AND THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY**

"The last two weeks of concerts at Davies Symphony Hall typified what is best about the maestro's inspiring leadership. Balanced programming, thematically chosen, with insightful (and amusing) introductions and powerful performances, is an MTT trademark. The most recent program also displayed the savvy showman's brilliant grasp of multi-tasking."

– *Bay Area Reporter*

"The past two weeks at DSH have also started a season-long mini-festival celebrating visiting foreign conductors, presenting music of their native lands. Guest artists from all over join in. We give props and the ubiquitous standing ovation for diversity at the SFS, as international visitors appear at Davies throughout the month of October."

– *Bay Area Reporter*

"Debussy's *La Mer* was the final piece of the night and as I was watching it being played, I could truly appreciate the polyphony created by the various instruments that Dutoit brought out during the performance – something that isn't always obvious in recordings. Separate lines in the strings ebb and flow, evoking the mystery that is *La Mer*. Beautiful swells of textures and timbres were commanded masterfully by Dutoit and solo lines were executed thoughtfully by the members of the SFS. I also appreciated a balanced approach to the ritardandos, while the tension and drama in the final movement kept us at the edge of our seats. Finally, a thrilling finish wrapped up an excellent night for Dutoit and the SFS."

– *Bachtrack*

"After intermission came a vibrant account of Bartók's egalitarian Concerto for Orchestra, 1943, written for Boston and Koussevitzky, and here a splendid showcase for the San Francisco musicians. From ruminative opening to blazing Finale MTT probingly explored the many contrasting moods of the five movements, the cool and penetrating atmosphere of the central 'Elegy' being the most impressive. Throughout, the fervid and lustrous strings, the superb woodwinds and brass, and the precise percussion played with verve and color."

– *Classical Source*

"Which brings us happily to Michael Tilson Thomas. Happy is an understatement. Mr. Thomas, from his earliest years, was raised in the tradition of American music. His parents' dinner table filled with the likes of Stravinsky and Cowell and Cage and Schoenberg. His own musical genius clearly in line with the greatest minds of post-war America. Thus, his San Francisco Orchestra is a reflection not only of Mr. Thomas' talents but of his openness, of his vivid pictorialism. Yes, his players are technically masters of their instruments. But in ensemble, their sounds are totally different from our–still–East Coast European ensembles. Our groups are stentorian, brilliant, they deliver us to their own heavens. The San Francisco Orchestra is more open, it has a singular transparency. At its best, even the great orchestral climaxes resemble a voluminous chamber group, every instrument enunciated, every texture glistening with terrestrial delight."

– *Concerto.net*

"Tilson Thomas closed with Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra. The low strings and winds responded with a weight and character that told us much about their progress in the past few years. The fourth movement, which contains a snarling anti-Shostakovich jibe, was dispatched with malicious panache. Thrills abounded."

– *Financial Times*

"On Thursday, March 23, Music Director Michael Tilson Thomas led the orchestra in one of the friendliest, most accessible — and, let's not forget to add, most rewarding — programs the Symphony has seen in months.... After intermission, Thomas and his colleagues combined for a vibrant and thoroughly alluring account of Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra, one that highlighted both the expertise of individual members and the communal vitality of the Symphony as a whole. No one could hear this performance and not feel sanguine about the current artistic state of this ensemble."

– *San Francisco Chronicle*

“The team of Thomas, Mahler and this orchestra remains an unbeatable combination.”

– *San Francisco Chronicle*

“The orchestra was tremendous throughout -- huge, dynamic, illuminating all of the score's dark tones and polishing them until they gleamed.”

– *San Jose Mercury News*

“The performance was simply thrilling—the strings playing with tremendous refinement and fleet energy, and Tilson Thomas shaping the dynamics and tempo changes in each movement to keep the musical and expressive tension mounting, finally to bloom in glorious climaxes.”

– *New York Classical Review*

“*On the Town* had the character of a revelation. For what had to be the first time, every element, classical and pop, proved authentic. There was no need for compromise.”

– *Los Angeles Times*

“What Michael Tilson Thomas and a cast of wonderfully gifted singers have created is nothing less than a bolt of pure concentrated euphoria, one of the zippiest and most delightful theatrical presentations the Symphony has put forward in years [*On The Town*]...That sure-footedness was a result of Thomas' remarkable gifts — not witnessed here quite often enough — as a theatrical conductor, and of the vivacious, rhythmically alert work by the Symphony players.”

– *San Francisco Chronicle*

“In other victorious news, the SFS tour conquered with full houses and rave reviews at two concerts in Carnegie Hall, one in Washington's Lincoln Center, and one in the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. The New York tour signifies that SFS remains the only visiting orchestra to perform annually in Carnegie Hall.”

– *San Francisco Classical Voice*

“The combination of Michael Tilson Thomas, the San Francisco Symphony and the symphonies of Robert Schumann is shaping up to be a dazzling partnership, marked by robust instrumental playing and canny interpretive decisions.”

“[In Schumann] Thomas and the Symphony players seem to have found a slice of the repertoire that invigorates them like nothing has since the glory days of their first Mahler collaborations.”

– *San Francisco Chronicle*

“Since its inaugural concert in 2014, SoundBox has simply exceeded all expectations. Converted from a cavernous rehearsal room at the back of Davies Hall into an immersive environment featuring video projections, a Meyer Sound Constellation system, relaxed open seating and cocktails, the Symphony's alternate performance space has become the place where hipsters, the club crowd and the orchestra's subscribers come to meet and mingle. A youthful vibe dominates and the music is wide-ranging. What started as a kind of experiment has turned into one of the Bay Area's go-to spots for music.”

– *San Jose Mercury News*

“The Symphony players came out of the gate sounding fresh, energetic and rhythmically vibrant, with the conductor maintaining superb orchestral balances while drawing out an unmistakable sense of drama and a wealth of telling detail.”

– *Bay Area News Group*

“Since its beginning in 1911, the San Francisco Symphony has been known for innovative programs that offer a spectrum of traditional repertory and new music. Today, the Orchestra's artistic vitality, recordings, and groundbreaking multimedia educational projects carry its impact throughout American musical life.”

– *Delmarva Public Radio*

“Time and again there were moments of quietness where the performances looked inward and found the music's soul. On this evidence San Francisco has become the most introspective and European of the American orchestras.”

– *Financial Times*

“Tilson Thomas sees no reason whatsoever to put himself in the limelight with an extravagant interpretation. Instead, his

efforts are obviously directed toward emphasizing the marvelous qualities of the ensemble, which this time, as well, proved that it is one of the ten best orchestras in the world.”

– *Rhein-Main-Zeitung*

“Beethoven’s Eroica made a lasting impression...Unquestionably a highlight of this year’s Lucerne Festival.”

– *Badische Zeitung*

“To watch Maestro Thomas and his large ensemble breath as a single unit is to understand why this orchestra is considered one of the finest, if not the finest, on this planet—or any planet, for that matter.”

– *Stage and Cinema*

“Music director Michael Tilson Thomas, the San Francisco Symphony, and Symphony Chorus Director Ragnar Bohlin were out to show they could astonish with anything, from the most difficult to the banal.”

– *Classical Voice North America*

“The level of musicianship on display in Davies Symphony Hall week after week, year after year, remains a marvel, and the unspoken communication between podium and stage only seems to become deeper and more effortless with each passing day.”

– *The San Francisco Chronicle*

“Something is happening in this city. A new wave of techies has moved into the city, sending home prices up and the median age down. You see them everywhere, driving their smart cars and displaying their tattoos. And these days, you see them at the Symphony. Call it a trend. Call it a youth movement. As orchestras around the country bemoan the decline in younger audiences, music director Michael Tilson Thomas and his orchestra are pulling them in.

Tilson Thomas, of course, is prepared. Throughout his tenure in San Francisco, he’s presented a remarkably youthful, forward-thinking musical spirit. This month, which marks the start of his 20th season with the orchestra, he’s already presided over a gala opening night starring blues rocker Bonnie Raitt and pianist Yuja Wang. Last week, he conducted a program featuring music by rising composer Mason Bates. Later in the season, he’ll unveil a new “SoundBox” performance space for informal concerts by small groups of Symphony musicians. In a walkthrough for members of the press, it looked like a rave room.”

– *Musical America*

“One of the great success stories in American musical life is the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, which just celebrated its centennial season. One of the contributing factors to that greatness is the 17-year tenure of music director Michael Tilson Thomas.”

– *Baltimore Sun*

“Since the death of Leonard Bernstein, the conductor Michael Tilson Thomas has been America’s most charismatic music teacher. “

– *The New York Times*

“Fifteen years at an orchestra is a long tenure these days. Even good relationships between conductors and orchestras can lose a little chemistry. But he [Michael Tilson Thomas] is a cultural force in San Francisco, and the vitality of the orchestra is palpable.”

– *The New York Times*

“In two decades with the San Francisco Symphony, Michael Tilson Thomas has become as much a part of his adopted city as cable cars, tech start-ups, and world championship baseball.”

– *Christian Science Monitor*

“There aren’t many musical sure bets these days as sure as a Mahler symphony from Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony.”

– *The San Francisco Chronicle*

“The [2012] Rest is Noise Person of the Year is Michael Tilson Thomas, for his splendidly multifarious *American Mavericks* festivals in San Francisco, Ann Arbor, and New York.”

– *The Rest is Noise* (blog)

“Michael Tilson Thomas has become a curator of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Classical Tradition.”

– *Independent* (U.K.)

“This is how it should be in the concert world, with a great orchestra showing (and enjoying) its command of repertory old and new.”

– *San Jose Mercury News*

“One or two such [semi-staged] productions each season has become the norm, putting this orchestra at the cutting edge of new technology in the concert hall ... Still, it's hard not to admire the way this orchestra and its leader think outside the box; it's getting to be a habit for them.”

– *San Jose Mercury News*

“[The San Francisco Symphony] has an overpowering personality that is discernible in the meticulousness and energy of the sound, in the power of the brass section, in the transparency of the woodwinds and in the rotundity and warm melodic character of the strings. Above all, Tilson Thomas seeks clarity, without relinquishing a breathtaking sonority...”

— *Vela del Campo, El País* (Spain)

“Although Mr. Tilson Thomas relishes exploring the scenic possibilities of the concert hall, his strength as a stage director emphasizes subtlety over spectacle.”

— *The New York Times/Bay Citizen*

“What a wonderful jewel we have in the San Francisco Symphony. It has been an integral part of the City for almost a century and enriches all of us in countless ways.”

— *San Francisco Examiner*

“From his original American Mavericks Festival in 2000, to a magisterial Mahler cycle and recordings, to his engaging PBS Keeping Score programs, Thomas is both the racing pulse and reassuringly familiar face of the Symphony.”

— *San Francisco Classical Voice*

“In everything he does, from conducting the San Francisco Symphony to spearheading that orchestra's multimedia educational project *Keeping Score*, Michael Tilson Thomas brings thorough musicianship sparked with theatrical flair.”

— *The New York Times*

“Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony were able to raise the music to higher spheres...thus giving it a whole new expressive dimension, demonstrating the highest level of interpretational and music-making artistry.”

— *Tageblatt Luxemburg*

“The San Francisco Symphony is definitely a top level ‘super-orchestra.’ The music director led a luminous performance full of extraordinary assurance and power. Each solo was executed to perfection and even ordinary passing phrases were marked with focus and musicality worth noting. It made this writer reflect on how major works from the repertoire are invigorated and given new life by performances that surpass those that have come before.”

— *Classical Japan*

“Michael Tilson Thomas, the SFS music director, understands perhaps better than any other conductor the potential of the brave new media world...”

— *Washington Post*

“Michael Tilson Thomas' visits to New York with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra are invariably refreshing, partly because the orchestra's playing is flexible and energetic but mainly because Mr. Thomas' programs usually step beyond the standard canon.”

— *The New York Times*

“I would love to tell you why I believe that Michael Tilson Thomas is the best Musical Director in the United States. It would be a long argument but I think at the end of it you'd simply have to nod...this is an absolutely extraordinary man at the helm of an extraordinary institution that is of, not simply national, but international preeminence right now, and...in many, many ways a light to the rest of the country.”

– *Dana Gioia, former chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts*

“Can every conductor be MTT? Obviously not, but every conductor can learn from him the value of bringing a sense of adventure back to the concert hall.”

– *The Toronto Star*

“The world-renowned [San Francisco] Symphony and its charismatic conductor, Michael Tilson Thomas, rarely disappoint—offering a season that features works from the classical canon as well as groundbreaking modern compositions. Thomas is famed for his interpretation of Mahler, with several works usually presented each year.”

– *USA Today*

“The San Francisco Symphony was expert before Michael Tilson Thomas became its music director in 1995. But since then, the ensemble has become ever-more sophisticated. The conductor has deepened its affinity for contemporary American repertoire, and the orchestra’s cycle of audiophile Mahler recordings on its in-house label won multiple Grammy Awards.”

– *Newark Star Ledger*

“One of the world’s happy marriages between orchestra and conductor”

– *The New York Times*

“Tilson Thomas continues his regime without missing a beat, and his formula for successful and cohesive musical celebrations remains a hallmark of his ‘perfect-fit’ administration...The orchestra is, by now, fine-tuned to the point of a transcendent union with their leader...They simply played like gods for a conductor who combines modesty, scholarship and intelligence with his own brand of theatrical charisma.”

– *Bay Area Reporter*

“As a Mahler conductor Mr. Thomas has dramatic flair and deep feeling for the cultural and stylistic background of Mahler’s music. Yet his performances are models of cleareyed musicianship and textual transparency.”

– *The New York Times*

“An electric performance [of *Symphonie fantastique*] by Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony as 11 television cameras filmed the event for the orchestra’s Keeping Score series on PBS...was ridiculously good...Tilson Thomas and his 96 players were engaged in an unflinching collaboration, passionate and precise, blowing life into Berlioz’s notes, reanimating the composer’s piping-hot hallucinations.”

– *San Jose Mercury News*

“A serious orchestra that’s accessible too: under Thomas’ guidance, the San Francisco Symphony has accomplished the impossible: a symphony for the everyman as well as for classical music aficionados...”

– *Michigan Daily*

“Michael Tilson Thomas, the definition of a civic treasure, led the San Francisco Symphony into its centennial year with the energy and verve that has made it a world-class unit.”

– *San Francisco Chronicle*

“It’s more than just a world class symphony, it is part of the Bay Area’s fabric... as the San Francisco Symphony logs a century of performance and youth education, there’s a common theme that’s been around since its beginning – *in good times and bad San Francisco doesn’t just appreciate its music, it lives it!*”

– *KNTV NBC Bay Area*

“Nobody has mined the vein of rugged lunacy running through American music with more glee than Michael Tilson Thomas, who unleashed deliberate vintage mayhem at Carnegie Hall.”

– *Vulture.com*

“San Francisco [Symphony] has every right to be proud of their accomplishments and leadership. Paint in an A on their report card in 100 colors.”

– *San Francisco Classical Voice*

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