



SAN FRANCISCO
SYMPHONY
MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS • MUSIC DIRECTOR



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Michael Tilson Thomas (MTT) celebrated his 20th season as Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony (SFS) during the Orchestra's 2014-15 season. MTT is currently the longest-tenured music director at any major American orchestra, and has surpassed Pierre Monteux as the longest-tenured San Francisco Symphony Music Director. MTT assumed his post as the SFS's 11th Music Director in September 1995, consolidating a strong relationship with the Orchestra that began two decades earlier, with his SFS debut at age 29, leading the Orchestra in Mahler's Symphony No. 9.

MTT and the Orchestra have 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 for orchestral music, both at home in Davies Symphony Hall and through the Orchestra's extensive media projects. In the 2014-15 season he and the SFS launched SoundBox, a new, experimental concert space and live music series backstage at Davies Symphony Hall that was received with capacity crowds and national critical acclaim. MTT closes out his 20th season with the SFS with a Beethoven Festival featuring three weeks of concerts, each focusing on a major hallmark of the composer's career: the extraordinary *Missa solemnis* in a new semi-staged production, concert performances of Beethoven's only opera *Fidelio*, and a recreation of the famous four-hour 1808 Vienna Theater an der Wien marathon concert that introduced the world to five of the composer's masterpieces. In 2014-15 MTT also lead the SFS and academy-award winning actor Tim Robbins in a performance of John Cage's *Renga*. In 2012, Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony presented a landmark two-week *American Mavericks* festival, a celebration of America's maverick musical heritage of the 20th century; following the festival, MTT and the SFS toured nationally with the *American Mavericks* repertoire, including four concerts at Carnegie Hall. MTT has also led the Orchestra in internationally acclaimed explorations of the music of Mahler, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Beethoven, Wagner, and Weill, and semi-staged productions including Britten's *Peter Grimes*, Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, Debussy's *Le martyre de Saint Sebastian*, music from *Peer Gynt* by Grieg, Robin Holloway, and Alfred Schnittke; Rimsky-Korsakov's opera-ballet *Mlada*, and *The Thomashefskys*, celebrating MTT's grandparents, Boris and Bessie Thomashefsky, pioneers of the American Yiddish theater.

MTT's many recordings have won numerous international awards, including 12 Grammy awards for his recordings with the SFS: for John Adams's *Harmonielehre* and *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*, Mahler's Symphonies Nos. 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*. For the San Francisco Symphony's own SFS Media label, Tilson Thomas and the Orchestra recorded all of Mahler's symphonies and his works for voices, chorus and orchestra. In 2014 MTT and the Orchestra released the first ever live concert recording of Bernstein's complete score for *West Side Story*, featuring Broadway and television star Cheyenne Jackson. Other recent recordings include *Masterpieces in Miniature*, a collection of short orchestral works close to MTT's heart, including Henry Litoff's Scherzo from *Concerto symphonique* No. 4 featuring pianist Yuja Wang; *American Mavericks* with works by Henry Cowell, Lou Harrison, and Edgard Varèse, featuring pianist Jeremy Denk and organist Paul Jacobs; Ives's *A Concord*

Symphony, arranged by Henry Brant; Copland's *Organ Symphony* with Paul Jacobs; and most recently Beethoven's Symphonies Nos. 2, 5, 7 and 9 and his Cantata on the Death of the Emperor Joseph II and Piano Concerto No. 4, with soloist Emanuel Ax. Tilson Thomas's recordings also include pioneering work with the music of American composers Carl Ruggles, Steve Reich, John Cage, and George and Ira Gershwin.

Since 1996, Tilson Thomas and the Orchestra have made more than two dozen national and international tours together. They continue to tour every year and perform regularly in Europe and throughout the United States, including annual visits to Carnegie Hall. In March 2014 they returned to Europe for a three-week tour, performing new and rarely performed music as well as core classical repertoire from the SFS Media catalogue, including John Adams's *Absolute Jest*, Ives's *A Concord Symphony*, Mahler's *Symphony No. 3*, and Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. Following the tour, MTT and the Orchestra were honored with an ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming and American Programming on Foreign Tours. Acclaimed interpreters of Mahler's music, MTT and the SFS performed several of his symphonies in 2011 on tour in Europe's leading music capitals for the anniversaries of the composer's birth and death, including the centerpiece: a rare four-concert engagement at the famed Vienna Konzerthaus. Other recent touring highlights, in addition to the two-week *American Mavericks* tour of the U.S. in 2012, include the Orchestra's 10-concert tour of Asia in 2012, 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 (BSO). 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. In 1987 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. A newly-built Frank Gehry venue, the New World Center, conceived as a laboratory for the way music is taught, performed and experienced, opened in Miami Beach in 2011. As Artistic Director of the YouTube Symphony Orchestra, MTT led the globally-sourced ensemble in both its first concert in 2009 at Carnegie Hall and the new group of musicians who performed at the Sydney Opera House in 2011. That event was the most popular live YouTube concert, with 33 million viewers.

MTT and the SFS 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 eight composer documentaries

and eight live concert films, viewed by more than six million Americans on national PBS television, Blu-ray and DVD; an interactive web site to explore and learn about music, www.keepingcore.org; and a national radio series with episodes hosted by MTT. Its education program for K-12 schools was designed to further teaching through the arts by integrating classical music into core subjects. *Keeping Score* composers include Tchaikovsky, Beethoven, Stravinsky, Copland, Ives, Berlioz, Shostakovich, and Mahler.

Recognized 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 MTT 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 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 in 2015 he was named to the magazine's Hall of Fame. 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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