

MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA HISTORY

The Grammy Award-winning Minnesota Orchestra, now in its second century and led since 2023 by Music Director Thomas Søndergård, ranks among America's top symphonic ensembles, with a distinguished history of acclaimed performances in its home state and around the world; award-winning recordings, broadcasts and educational engagement programs; and a commitment to commissioning and performing the music of our time.

The 2026-27 season, Søndergård's fourth as music director, began in September 2026 with concerts spotlighting violinist Vadym Kholodenko and a performance of Stravinsky's *Firebird* combined with video projections as part of the Sound Unbound series, which continues later in the season with Puccini's *Tosca*. In other season highlights, Søndergård and Conductor Laureate Osmo Vänskä will each lead concerts as part of the third annual Nordic Soundscapes Festival, the Orchestra will conclude a project to record Prokofiev's final two symphonies for release in a future season on the PENTATONE label, and Søndergård will conduct his second Future Classics concert of works by top emerging composers.

Founded as the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra gave its inaugural performance on November 5, 1903, shortly after baseball's first World Series and six weeks before the Wright brothers made their unprecedented airplane flight. The Orchestra played its first regional tour in 1907 and made its New York debut in 1912 at Carnegie Hall, where it has performed regularly ever since. Outside the United States, the Orchestra has played concerts in Australia, Canada, East Asia, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and South Africa. Since 1968 it has been known as the Minnesota Orchestra. In a typical year, the ensemble presents about 175 concerts, primarily in the Lindahl Auditorium at Orchestra Hall, the downtown Minneapolis venue that celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2024. Through live and digital concerts, audio streaming, TV and radio broadcasts, more than 2.3 million people a year hear the Minnesota Orchestra.

In summer 2027 the Orchestra, in partnership with First Avenue, is scheduled to open an 8,000-capacity outdoor amphitheater, the Community Performing Arts Center, on the Mississippi riverfront in Minneapolis' North Side. The venue will host around 50 ticketed events, plus community activities, outdoors each year from May to October, with proceeds from each ticket sale reinvested directly into the local community through a partnership with the African American Community Development Corporation.

In recent years, the Orchestra's international tours have reaped significant acclaim. Under the leadership of Osmo Vänskä—the Orchestra's music director from 2003-2022 who now serves as the ensemble's conductor laureate—the Orchestra undertook six visits to Europe, a history-making 2018 tour in which it became the first professional U.S. orchestra to visit South Africa, and another seminal tour to Cuba in

2015, the first by an American orchestra since the U.S. and Cuban governments announced steps to normalize relations between the two countries.

The Orchestra's recordings have drawn acclaim since the 1920s. Its landmark Mercury Living Presence LP recordings of the 1950s and '60s included a Gold-certified recording of Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* that was the first to include an authentic military cannon and bell carillon. A recent golden period of recording came under Vänskä's direction, when the Orchestra recorded the complete symphonies of Beethoven, Mahler and Sibelius, among other works. In 2014 the Orchestra won its first Grammy Award for Best Orchestral Performance for a disc of Sibelius' Symphonies No. 1 and 4. In 2019 the Orchestra and Principal Conductor of Live at Orchestra Hall Sarah Hicks recorded two concerts with singer-rapper Dessa for *Sound the Bells*, an album released by Doomtree Records that debuted at No. 2 on the Billboard Chart for both classical crossover and current classical. The Orchestra issued its first recording under Søndergård's baton in November 2025, featuring contemporary British composer Thomas Adès' *The Exterminating Angel* Symphony and his Violin Concerto, featuring Leila Josefowicz. That album was shortlisted for a 2026 Gramophone Award in the Contemporary category.

The Orchestra also has a long history of radio broadcasts, dating to its radio debut in 1923 by playing a nationally broadcast concert under guest conductor Bruno Walter. The Orchestra's Friday night classical performances, hosted by Melissa Ousley, are broadcast live regionally by YourClassical Minnesota Public Radio, a weekly tradition for more than 50 years. Many programs are subsequently featured on American Public Media's national programs including *SymphonyCast* and *Performance Today* and distributed by the European Broadcasting Union. In recent years the Orchestra has brought new dimension to its broadcast history by launching *This Is Minnesota Orchestra*, an Upper Midwest Regional Emmy Award-winning series of concert broadcasts and digital exclusives for television, radio and online audiences that began in September 2020. *This Is Minnesota Orchestra* continues during the 2026-27 season, with four select concerts broadcast live on Minnesota PBS and streamed free of charge on the Orchestra's YouTube channel.

In a typical year, Orchestra connects with more than 85,000 music lovers through family concerts and educational programs including Young People's Concerts, which date back to 1911. The Orchestra's Hall Pass initiative also allows young listeners ages 6 to 18 to attend select concerts free of charge.

In 2011, extending a long tradition of performances throughout the state of Minnesota, the Orchestra launched Common Chords. This multi-year initiative creates partnerships between the Orchestra and participating Minnesota cities, culminating in a celebratory festival week that features performances and dozens of activities that reflect the interests, diversity and heritage of each community. These performance partnerships have taken the Orchestra to Austin, Bemidji, Detroit Lakes, Grand Rapids, Hibbing, Mankato, North Minneapolis and Willmar. In November 2025, Thomas Søndergård led the Orchestra in concert at the University of

Iowa's Hancher Auditorium, with musicians participating in master classes and special sessions with students as part of the experience. The Orchestra will visit California in February 2027 for a concert at the Granada Theatre in Santa Barbara led by Søndergård and featuring violin soloist Augustin Hadelich.

Along with its core series of classical concerts, the Orchestra presents Live at Orchestra Hall, a lineup of concerts by a broad spectrum of artists; conductor Sarah Hicks, a member of the Orchestra's artistic leadership since 2006, leads the series, which features a wide range of genres including film music, jazz, musicals, and folk rock. Since 1980 the Orchestra has concluded each season with a popular summer music festival known initially as Sommerfest and, more recently, as Summer at Orchestra Hall.

In 2017 the Orchestra launched the Minnesota Orchestra Fellowship, an ongoing program of two-year residencies for emerging professional orchestral musicians from diverse backgrounds early in their careers. The Minnesota Orchestra Fellowship is generously supported by Rosemary and David Good, and Margee and Will Bracken. The Orchestra's current Fellows are cellist Miles Goosby and horn player Douglas Nunes, whose tenures began in September 2026.

The Orchestra nourishes a strong commitment to contemporary composers, and in the past two decades its Composer Institute has offered 155 emerging composers an intense immersion into the orchestral world. Since 1903 the Orchestra has premiered and/or commissioned more than 300 compositions, including works by John Adams, Kalevi Aho, Dominick Argento, Béla Bartók, Aaron Copland, John Corigliano, John Harbison, Charles Ives, Aaron Jay Kernis, Libby Larsen, Bongani Ndodana-Breen, Stephen Paulus, Kevin Puts, Carlos Simon, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski and Ellen Taaffe Zwilich.

In October 2021 the Orchestra won the Gramophone Orchestra of the Year Award, chosen by popular vote from a curated slate of 10 orchestras from around the world. Other major honors earned in recent years include 20 awards for adventuresome programming from the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), including five Leonard Bernstein Awards for Education Programming between 2005 and 2012 and, in 2008, the John S. Edwards Award for Strongest Commitment to New American Music.

Music Directors of the Orchestra have included Emil Oberhoffer (1903-1922), Henri Verbrugghen (1923-1931), Eugene Ormandy (1931-1936), Dimitri Mitropoulos (1937-1949), Antal Dorati (1949-1960), Stanislaw Skrowaczewski (1960-1979), Sir Neville Marriner (1979-1986), Edo de Waart (1986-1995), Eiji Oue (1995-2002) and Osmo Vänskä (2003-2022). Thomas Søndergård began his tenure as the Orchestra's 11th music director in September 2023.

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