
Philharmonia

Philharmonia Orchestra

800-word biography

The Philharmonia is a world-class symphony orchestra for the 21st century. Based in London at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, the Philharmonia creates thrilling performances for a global audience. Through its network of residencies, the Orchestra has a national footprint, serving communities across England both in performance and through its extensive outreach and engagement programme.

Founded in 1945, in part as a recording orchestra for the nascent home audio market, today the Philharmonia uses the latest digital technology to reach new audiences for symphonic music. The Orchestra is led by Finnish conductor and composer Esa-Pekka Salonen, its Principal Conductor & Artistic Advisor since 2008. Fellow Finn Santtu-Matias Rouvali takes over from Salonen as Principal Conductor in the 2021/22 season.

The Philharmonia is a registered charity that relies on funding from a wide range of sources to deliver its programme and is proud to be generously supported by Arts Council England.

The Orchestra's home is Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall where it has been resident since 1995. Southbank Centre is currently closed due to Covid-19, but we are working closely with the venue to plan our return to live performance. Under Salonen and other key conductors, the Philharmonia has created a series of critically-acclaimed, visionary projects, distinctive for both their artistic scope and supporting live and digital content. In 2019, Salonen presented *Weimar Berlin: Bittersweet Metropolis*, a celebration of the Weimar Republic era through the prism of its music, drama and film.

The Philharmonia is orchestra-in-residence at venues and festivals across England: Bedford Corn Exchange, De Montfort Hall in Leicester, The Marlowe in Canterbury, Anvil Arts in Basingstoke, the Three Choirs Festival in the West of England, and Garsington Opera. At the heart of the Orchestra's residencies is an outreach and engagement programme that empowers people in every community to engage with, and participate in, orchestral music.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, we are working with all our partner venues to maintain our relationship with audiences around the country, and in particular with groups of vulnerable young people and adults who have experienced the orchestra through our outreach programmes.

Internationally, the Philharmonia is active across Europe, Asia and the USA. Recent projects include a US tour with two performances at Lincoln Center, New York, and performances at CAL Performances in Berkeley, California (March 2019), and a three-week residency at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence built around a critically acclaimed production of Kurt Weill's *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. In September 2019, the Orchestra travelled to Europe, including a return to Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie; in January 2020 Salonen led a tour of Japan and South Korea.

The Philharmonia's strong digital programme has enabled the Orchestra to maintain an international presence during lockdown, with streams of archive performances, educational films introducing the sections of the orchestra, and videos made at home by individual players giving an insight into the life of the Orchestra to a global audience. The Philharmonia's YouTube channel has over 97,000 subscribers.

The Philharmonia's international reputation in part derives from its extraordinary recording legacy, which in the last 10 years has been built on by its pioneering work with digital technology. Two giant audio-visual walk-through installations have introduced hundreds of thousands of people across the world to the symphony orchestra. VR experiences featuring music by Sibelius, Mahler and Beethoven, placing the viewer at the heart of

Philharmonia

the orchestra, have been presented internationally. The Orchestra's 2018/19 London Season opened with a new, audio-led VR installation, *VR Sound Stage*, which was presented for free in the foyer of Royal Festival Hall.

A new research and development project, in a consortium led by the Royal Shakespeare Company and funded by the British Government's *Audience of the Future* programme, is exploring how immersive technologies such as VR, Augmented Reality (AR) and Mixed Reality (MR) can re-imagine what a live performance can be.

The Philharmonia records and releases music across multiple channels and media. An app for iPad, *The Orchestra*, has sold tens of thousands of copies; Hollywood composers choose to record their scores with the Orchestra; the Philharmonia is Classic FM's 'Orchestra on Tour' and broadcasts extensively on BBC Radio 3; with Signum Records the Philharmonia releases live recordings of signature concerts.

The Orchestra has won four Royal Philharmonic Society awards for its digital projects and audience engagement work. In its most ambitious audience development project to date, the Philharmonia presented *The Virtual Orchestra* – a six-week festival of digital content, workshops and community engagement – in each of its town-based residency locations in 2018-19.

The Philharmonia was founded in 1945 by EMI producer Walter Legge, and has worked with a who's who of twentieth century music, especially in the recording studio. Herbert von Karajan, Otto Klemperer, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Richard Strauss, Arturo Toscanini and Riccardo Muti are just a few of the great artists to be associated with the Philharmonia.

Finnish conductor and composer Esa-Pekka Salonen has been Principal Conductor & Artistic Advisor of the Orchestra since 2008. Santtu-Matias Rouvali is Principal Conductor Designate, succeeding Salonen in 2021. Jakub Hrůša is Principal Guest Conductor; Christoph von Dohnányi is Honorary Conductor for Life and Vladimir Ashkenazy is Conductor Laureate. Composer Unsuk Chin is Artistic Director of the *Music of Today* series.

As well as its membership of 80 players from all around the world, the Philharmonia's Emerging Artists programme develops the next generation of composers and instrumentalists. Composers' Academy champions three developing composers each year. The Philharmonia works with Salonen and the Colburn School in LA to deliver performance opportunities and training for talented young conductors on the conservatory's conducting programme. The Philharmonia MMSF Instrumental Fellowship Programme supports instrumentalists seeking an orchestral career.

The Philharmonia's Principal International Partner is Wuliangye.

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2019/20 Season biography.