
Philharmonia

Philharmonia Orchestra biography – 2025/26 season – 500 words

Founded in 1945, the Philharmonia Orchestra is one of the world's great orchestras.

Finnish conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali took up the baton as Principal Conductor in 2021, and Marin Alsop joined him as Principal Guest Conductor in 2023. They follow in illustrious footsteps: Herbert von Karajan, Otto Klemperer, Ricardo Muti, Giuseppe Sinopoli, Christoph von Dohnányi, Vladimir Ashkenazy and Esa-Pekka Salonen are some of the key figures who have honed the renowned Philharmonia sound over eight decades.

The Orchestra has premiered works by Richard Strauss, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Kaija Saariaho, Errollyn Wallen, Laufey and many others, and performs with many of the world's most admired soloists.

The Philharmonia thrives on creative collaborations: in the 2025/26 season, pianist Víkingur Ólafsson is Featured Artist, Gabriela Ortiz is Featured Composer, and dance, mime, theatre and drag artists Thick & Tight are Artists in Residence.

The Philharmonia is resident at the Southbank Centre in the heart of London, and also holds residencies in Basingstoke, Bedford, Canterbury and Leicester, at Garsington Opera and at the Three Choirs Festival. In each of these residencies, the Orchestra is deeply embedded in the community. Projects with primary and secondary schools, children in foster care, people living with dementia and their carers, young people learning instruments, and adults who face barriers to experiencing the arts, all testify to the many ways music enriches our lives.

This season the Philharmonia celebrates its 80th birthday with initiatives including offering 80 free tickets for first-time bookers to every concert in its London season; recruiting a team of 80 volunteers to help provide a warm welcome; reaching 80 schools with Orchestra Unwrapped, its programme of schools' concerts and teacher training; and establishing Philharmonia Social, a chance for audience members to meet and find out more about the orchestra.

The Philharmonia tours extensively throughout Europe and has performed in China, Colombia, Japan, Mauritius and the United States. In October 2025 the Orchestra embarks on a major US tour, culminating in two performances at Carnegie Hall. The season also includes a tour of Korea, and performances at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Musikverein in Vienna, and many other leading European venues.

The Philharmonia is known for embracing innovative technology. The Orchestra's recordings include benchmark LPs, more than 150 film and videogame soundtracks, and streamed performances. Its recording of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 is travelling through interstellar space on board the Voyager spacecraft, and its immersive installations and virtual reality (VR) experiences have introduced many thousands of people to orchestral music.

The Philharmonia Records label was established in 2023. The Orchestra has released live recordings of major works by Strauss, Mahler, Stravinsky and Shostakovich, with Santtu at the helm.

The Philharmonia's Emerging Artists Programme nurtures and develops the next generation of instrumentalists and composers, with a focus on increasing diversity within the classical music industry.

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