

Tonkünstler Orchestra

Orchestra biography

Page 1 of 3

With its residencies at the Musikverein Wien, Festspielhaus St. Pölten and in Grafenegg, the Tonkünstler Orchestra is one of Austria's biggest and most important musical ambassadors. The focus of the orchestra's artistic work is the traditional orchestral repertoire, ranging from the Classical to the Romantic periods through to the 20th century. Yutaka Sado, one of the most important Japanese conductors of our time, has been the orchestra's Music Director since the 2015–16 season. He will be succeeded by Fabien Gabel in summer 2025. The Frenchman was the Chief Conductor of the Orchestre Symphonique de Québec in Canada until 2021 and was presented to the public at a press conference in June 2023 in Vienna.

The Tonkünstler's unique approach to programming is appreciated by musicians, audiences and press alike. The inclusion of genres such as jazz and world music as part of the «Plugged-In» series, which has entered its eleventh year, keeps the orchestra in touch with the pulse of modern life. Performances of works by contemporary composers make the Tonkünstler a key player on the current music scene. Each year, a composer in residence collaborates with the orchestra for the Grafenegg Festival. So far, these have included Brett Dean, HK Gruber, Krzysztof Penderecki, Jörg Widmann, Peter Ruzicka, Toshio Hosokawa und Georg Friedrich Haas. Composers including Arvo Pärt, Kurt Schwertsik, Friedrich Cerha and Bernd Richard Deutsch have written commissioned works for the orchestra.

The Tonkünstler are the only Austrian symphony orchestra to boast three residencies. Their traditional Sunday Afternoon concerts at the Wiener Musikverein go back almost 75 years and remain their most successful concert cycle to date. The Festspielhaus St. Pölten was officially opened by the Tonkünstler Orchestra on 1 March 1997. Since then, as resident orchestra, its opera, dance and educational projects, as well as an extensive range of concerts, have formed an integral part of the overall cultural repertoire in the Lower Austrian state capital.

In Grafenegg, the Tonkünstler have two acoustically outstanding venues at their disposal in their capacity as orchestra in residence: the Auditorium and Wolkenturm. The latter was officially opened by the orchestra. Each year, the Midsummer Night's Gala – broadcast on radio and TV in Austria as well as in several other European countries – opens the summer season in Grafenegg.

The political and social events and upheavals of the 20th century have left their mark on the orchestra's history. The first concert by the Wiener Tonkünstler-Orchester took place in the Wiener Musikverein in October 1907, with 83 musicians performing. The impressive trio of conductors that night were Oskar Nedbal, a student of Dvořák, Bernhard Stavenhagen, a student of Franz Liszt, and Hans Pfitzner. The Tonkünstler gave the first performance of Arnold Schoenberg's «Gurre-Lieder» under the direction of Franz Schreker in 1913. Wilhelm Furtwängler was Principal Conductor of the orchestra from 1919 to 1923. Bruno Walter, Otto Klemperer, Felix Weingartner, Hans Knappertsbusch and Hermann Abendroth conducted the Tonkünstler in the years that followed.

Tonkünstler Orchestra

Orchestra biography

Page 2 of 3

The Tonkünstler have been the state symphony orchestra of Lower Austria since 1945. Year after year they have fulfilled the cultural, artistic and educational mandate this entails through their extensive range of concerts at various locations across the region, including the New Year's concert series, through music education projects and their commitment to contemporary music in Lower Austria. In 2003, the Tonkünstler were the first Austrian orchestra to establish a department for music education. The «Tonspiele» («Sound Games») are one of the most extensive music education programmes in Austria. With its many activities for adults, including introductions to each symphonic concert programme, rehearsal visits, presented concert formats and the participative choir project «Seid umschlungen, Millionen», the orchestra's educational work is richly varied.

The Tonkünstler Orchestra as we know it today developed from the Landessymphonieorchester Niederösterreich (State Symphony Orchestra of Lower Austria) in the mid-20th century. Its former Music Directors include such important figures of the music world as Walter Weller, Heinz Wallberg, Miltiades Caridis, Fabio Luisi, Kristjan Järvi and Andrés Orozco-Estrada. The orchestra's guest conductors are another important source of artistic stimulus. In recent years, the Tonkünstler have welcomed many great conductors to their concerts, including Kent Nagano, Julia Jones, Michail Jurowski, Tomáš Netopil, Andrej Boreyko, Jakob Hruša, Gilbert Varga, Simone Young, Michał Nesterowicz, Ivor Bolton and Robert Trevino. Globally recognised orchestra directors including Hugh Wolff, Krzysztof Urbanski, Michael Schönwandt, Jun Märkl, Dmitrij Kitajenko and John Storgårds have repeatedly worked with the Tonkünstler, some of them over many years.

Among the star soloists who have collaborated with the orchestra are Renée Fleming, Joyce DiDonato, Elisabeth Kulman, Lisa Batiashvili, Sol Gabetta, Alban Gerhardt and Cameron Carpenter. The pianists Rudolf Buchbinder, Fazıl Say, Lars Vogt, Kit Armstrong and Lang Lang, the violin virtuosos Alina Pogostkina, Christian Tetzlaff, Augustin Hadelich, Daishin Kashimoto, Arabella Steinbacher and Julia Fischer as well the oboist Albrecht Mayer and the clarinetist Sabine Meyer have also performed with the Tonkünstler.

Recent tours have taken the Tonkünstler to Germany, Britain, Spain, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, South Korea and Taiwan and the Baltic states. After the first major Japan tour with Yutaka Sado in early 2016, the orchestra and its Music Director 2018 returned there for three weeks, giving no fewer than 14 concerts in the country's most prestigious concert halls. In 2019 the Tonkünstler made a tour of Germany, performing in venues including the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg.

The orchestra's versatile artistic profile is reflected in a wide range of CD recordings. Founded in 2016, the Tonkünstler's own label releases up to four CDs per year. These include both live recordings, mostly from the Wiener Musikverein, and independent studio productions under the baton of Music Director Yutaka Sado as well as with guest conductors.

Tonkünstler Orchestra

Orchestra biography

Page 3 of 3

The orchestra's versatile artistic profile is reflected in a wide range of CD recordings. Founded in 2016, the Tonkünstler's own label releases up to four CDs per year. These include both live recordings, mostly from the Wiener Musikverein, and independent studio productions under the baton of Music Director Yutaka Sado as well as with guest conductors. The Tonkünstler's discography with their former Music Director Andrés Orozco-Estrada includes complete recordings of the symphonies of Johannes Brahms. Also available are Franz Schmidt's «The Book with Seven Seals» and «Zeitstimmung»/«Rough Music» by HK Gruber, and many other recordings.

The orchestra is a regular radio fixture with the programme «Tonkünstler» broadcast on the fourth Friday evening of every month on ORF Radio Niederösterreich. It offers a preview of the Tonkünstler's upcoming musical highlights and information on their current projects. The book «Die Tonkünstler. Orchester-Geschichten aus Wien und Niederösterreich» («The Tonkünstler: Orchestral Stories from Vienna and Lower Austria») was published in 2007 to mark the Wiener Tonkünstler-Orchester's 100th anniversary. Contributions from Otto Biba, Ernst Kobau, Philipp Stein, Markus Hennerfeind, Wilhelm Sinkovicz, Walter Weidringer and editor Rainer Lepuschitz shed light on aspects of Austrian orchestral history that had previously been undocumented or little known.

Concert season 23–24 © Tonkünstler Orchestra