History of the Munich Philharmonic

The Munich Philharmonic was founded in 1893 through the private initiative of Franz Kaim, the son of a piano manufacturer. Since then, the orchestra has left an indelible imprint on Munich's cultural life under the leadership of renowned conductors. In the orchestra's earliest years – initially under the name »Kaim Orchestra« – conductors like Hans Winderstein, Hermann Zumpe, Felix Weingartner and the Bruckner pupil Ferdinand Löwe guaranteed both a high technical standard of performance and enthusiastic support of contemporary artistry.

Gustav Mahler directed the orchestra in 1901 and 1910 at the respective world premières of his Fourth and Eighth Symphonies. In November of 1911, the orchestra, then called the »Konzertverein Orchestra« performed the world première of Mahler's »Das Lied von der Erde« (The Song of the Earth) under Bruno Walter's direction – only six months after the composer's death in Vienna.

Ferdinand Löwe conducted the first large-scale Bruckner concerts and thereby founded the orchestra's Bruckner tradition, which has continued unbroken to the present day. During the administration of Siegmund von Hausegger, who guided the orchestra as its General Music Director from 1920 to 1938, the world premières of two Bruckner symphonies in their original versions took place as well as the final, definitive change of the orchestra's name to »Munich Philharmonic«. From 1938 to the summer of 1944, Austrian conductor Oswald Kabasta led the orchestra.

The first concert after the Second World War was opened by Eugen Jochum. With Hans Rosbaud, the Philharmonic gained a man who passionately advocated modern music. Rosbaud's successors were Fritz Rieger and Rudolf Kempe.

In 1979, Sergiu Celibidache was appointed General Music Director. The legendary Bruckner concerts made a major contribution to the orchestra's international standing, and during the Celibidache era the orchestra was repeatedly invited to accompany the Federal Government or the Federal President as musical ambassadors.

Following the wartime destruction of its old home, the so-called »Tonhalle«, the orchestras spent over forty years in Munich's Herkulessaal. In 1985, the Philharmonic once again acquired its own concert hall with the Philharmonie in the Gasteig, Munich's municipal cultural center.

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From September 1999 until July 2004, James Levine was Chief Conductor of the Munich Philharmonic. In January of 2004, the Munich Philharmonic named Zubin Mehta the first »Honorary Conductor« in the history of the orchestra. For the 100ths anniversary of the première of Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 8 in Munich, Christian Thielemann conducted two performances of this work in October 2010. He was succeeded as chief conductor by Lorin Maazel, who held the position until his death in 2014.

From 2015 to 2022 the position of chief conductor of the Munich Philharmonic was held by Valery Gergiev, during which time they recorded all of Anton Bruckner's symphonies in St. Florian basilica on the orchestra's own MPHIL label. Following the successful Brahms cycle under conductor laureate Zubin Mehta in January 2024, the release of all four symphonies on that label is being planned, while the two Brahms piano concertos with Yefim Bronfman are set to be released on LP.

With »Spielfeld Klassik«, the Munich Philharmonic has developed a comprehensive music education programme for young and old. Up to 35,000 people of all ages attended the more than 150 events held each year.

In 2018/19, the Munich Philharmonic celebrated its 125th anniversary. In October 2021, the Munich Philharmonic inaugurated the Isarphilharmonie – the orchestra's new home and concert hall while the Gasteig is being renovated. The hall was designed by architects »Gerkan, Marg und Partner«, with the acoustics designed by Yasuhisa Toyota and his company Nagata Acoustics. True to the Munich Philharmonics' new motto, »Being approachable and breaking new ground«, the orchestra is expanding its festival programme and will create new points of access for audiences with formats such as »mphil late« and »Wandelkonzerte« to be held regularly from now on.

In February 2023, the Munich Philharmonic appointed Lahav Shani as its principal conductor. Even before taking up his post officially in September 2026, he will conduct six different programmes in the 2024/25 season under the motto »Dreams«, both in Munich and on tour. The Munich Philharmonic's concerts at Klassik am Odeonsplatz will also take place under his baton.

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