



## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

Now in its 126th season, the Boston Symphony Orchestra gave its inaugural concert on October 22, 1881, and has continued to uphold the vision of its founder, the businessman, philanthropist, Civil War veteran, and amateur musician Henry Lee Higginson, for well over a century. The Boston Symphony Orchestra has performed throughout the United States, as well as in Europe, Japan, Hong Kong, South America, and China; in addition, it reaches audiences numbering in the millions through its performances on radio, television, and recordings. It plays an active role in commissioning new works from today's most important composers; its summer season at Tanglewood is regarded as one of the world's most important music festivals; it helps develop the audience of the future through BSO Youth Concerts and through a variety of outreach programs involving the entire Boston community; and, during the Tanglewood season, it sponsors the Tanglewood Music Center, one of the world's most important training grounds for young composers, conductors, instrumentalists, and vocalists. The orchestra's virtuosity is reflected in the concert and recording activities of the Boston Symphony Chamber Players, one of the world's most distinguished chamber ensembles made up of a major symphony orchestra's principal players, and the activities of the Boston Pops Orchestra have established an international standard for the performance of lighter kinds of music. Overall, the mission of the Boston Symphony Orchestra is to foster and maintain an organization dedicated to the making of music consonant with the highest aspirations of musical art, creating performances and providing educational and training programs at the highest level of excellence. This is accomplished with the continued support of its audiences, governmental assistance on both the federal and local levels, and through the generosity of many foundations, businesses, and individuals.

Henry Lee Higginson dreamed of founding a great and permanent orchestra in his hometown of Boston for many years before that vision approached reality in the spring of 1881. The following October the first Boston Symphony Orchestra concert was given under the direction of conductor Georg Henschel, who would remain as music director until 1884. For nearly 20 years Boston Symphony concerts were held in the Old Boston Music Hall; Symphony Hall, one of the world's most highly regarded concert halls, was opened on October 15, 1900. The BSO's 2000-01 season celebrated the centennial of Symphony Hall, and the rich history of music performed and introduced to the world at Symphony Hall since it opened a century ago.

Georg Henschel was succeeded by a series of German-born and -trained conductors – Wilhelm Gericke, Arthur Nikisch, Emil Paur, and Max Fiedler – culminating in the appointment of the legendary Karl Muck, who served two tenures as music director, 1906-08 and 1912-18. Meanwhile, in July 1885, the musicians of the Boston Symphony Orchestra had given their first "Promenade" concert, offering both music and refreshments, and fulfilling Major Higginson's wish to give "concerts of a lighter kind of music." These concerts, soon to be given in the springtime and renamed first "Popular" and then "Pops," fast became a tradition.

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In 1915 the orchestra made its first transcontinental trip, playing 13 concerts at the Panama-Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. Recording, begun with the Victor Talking Machine Company (predecessor to RCA Victor) in 1917, continued with increasing frequency. In 1918 Henri Rabaud was engaged as conductor. He was succeeded the following year by Pierre Monteux. These appointments marked the beginning of a French-oriented tradition that would be maintained, even during the Russian-born Serge Koussevitzky's time, with the employment of many French-trained musicians.

The Koussevitzky era began in 1924. His extraordinary musicianship and electric personality proved so enduring that he served an unprecedented term of 25 years. The BSO's first live concert broadcasts, privately funded, ran from January 1926 through the 1927-28 season. Broadcasts continued sporadically in the early 1930s, regular live Boston Symphony broadcasts being initiated in October 1935. In 1936 Koussevitzky led the orchestra's first concerts in the Berkshires; a year later he and the players took up annual summer residence at Tanglewood. Koussevitzky passionately shared Major Higginson's dream of "a good honest school for musicians," and in 1940 that dream was realized with the founding of the Berkshire Music Center (now called the Tanglewood Music Center).

In 1929 the free Esplanade concerts on the Charles River in Boston were inaugurated by Arthur Fiedler, who had been a member of the orchestra since 1915 and who in 1930 became the 18th conductor of the Boston Pops. Fiedler would hold the post for half a century, to be succeeded by John Williams in 1980. The Boston Pops Orchestra celebrated its 100th birthday in 1985 under Mr. Williams' baton. Keith Lockhart began his tenure as 20th conductor of the Boston Pops in May 1995, succeeding Mr. Williams.

Charles Munch followed Koussevitzky as music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1949. Munch continued Koussevitzky's practice of supporting contemporary composers and introduced much music from the French repertory to this country. During his tenure the orchestra toured abroad for the first time and its continuing series of Youth Concerts was initiated under the leadership of Harry Ellis Dickson. Erich Leinsdorf began his seven-year term as music director in 1962. Leinsdorf presented numerous premieres, restored many forgotten and neglected works to the repertory, and, like his two predecessors, made many recordings for RCA; in addition, many concerts were televised under his direction. Leinsdorf was also an energetic director of the Tanglewood Music Center; under his leadership a full-tuition fellowship program was established. Also during these years, in 1964, the Boston Symphony Chamber Players were founded. William Steinberg succeeded Leinsdorf in 1969. He conducted a number of American and world premieres, made recordings for Deutsche Grammophon and RCA, appeared regularly on television, led the 1971 European tour, and directed concerts on tours throughout the United States.

Seiji Ozawa became the BSO's thirteenth music director in the fall of 1973, following a year as music adviser and three years as an artistic director at Tanglewood. His historic twenty-nine-year tenure, from 1973 to 2002, exceeded that of any previous BSO conductor; in the summer of 2002, at the completion of his tenure, he was named Music Director Laureate. Besides maintaining the orchestra's reputation worldwide, Ozawa reaffirmed the BSO's commitment to new music through the commissioning of many new works (including commissions marking the BSO's centennial in 1981 and the TMC's fiftieth anniversary in 1990), played an active role at the Tanglewood Music Center, and further expanded the BSO's recording activities. In 1995 he and the BSO welcomed

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### **3-3-3-3 HISTORY OF THE BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

Bernard Haitink as Principal Guest Conductor. Named Conductor Emeritus in 2004, Mr. Haitink has led the BSO in Boston, New York, at Tanglewood, and on tour in Europe, and has also recorded with the orchestra.

In the fall of 2001, James Levine was named to succeed Seiji Ozawa as music director. Maestro Levine began his tenure as the BSO's fourteenth music director—and the first American-born conductor to hold that position—in the fall of 2004. His wide-ranging programs balance great orchestral, operatic, and choral classics with equally significant music of the 20th and 21st centuries, including newly commissioned works from such important American composers as Milton Babbitt, Elliott Carter, John Harbison, Peter Lieberson, and Charles Wuorinen. He also appears as pianist with the Boston Symphony Chamber Players, conducts the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra, and works with the TMC Fellows in classes devoted to orchestral repertoire, Lieder, and opera.

Today the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Inc., presents more than 250 concerts annually. It is an ensemble that has richly fulfilled Henry Lee Higginson's vision of a great and permanent orchestra in Boston.