

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra



Soon after its establishment in 1888, the Concertgebouw Orchestra developed into one of the best orchestras in Europe. The composer and conductor Richard Strauss described the orchestra as “really magnificent, full of youthful vigor and enthusiasm” in 1897. The Orchestra was conferred “royal” status by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands in 1988. The orchestra has made more than 1100 LPs, CDs and DVDs and is regarded as one of the world’s most prestigious symphony orchestras. The Orchestra’s limited number of chief conductors has played a decisive role in this development. The RCO is a symphony orchestra of international renown whose character has been shaped by several generations of musicians, longstanding collaboration with each of the six chief conductors and the unique acoustic properties of the Concertgebouw’s main hall.

The Orchestra has gained its unique international acclaim because of its ‘velvet’ strings, ‘golden’ brass and the exceptional and personal timbre of the woodwinds. The Concertgebouw Orchestra consists of 120 virtuoso musicians who are the guardians of the playing culture that gives the Orchestra its unique sound and flexibility.

During the fifty years of Willem Mengelberg’s reign, a wide variety of composers such as Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler, Claude Debussy and Igor Stravinsky conducted the Concertgebouw Orchestra. Celebrities such as Béla Bartók, Sergey Rachmaninoff and Sergey Prokofiev performed their own works as soloists. This crucial bond with contemporary composers was continued with Bruno Maderna, Witold Lutoslawski, Peter Schat, Otto Ketting, Luciano Berio, Hans Werner Henze, Pierre Boulez, and John Adams. To this day, the Concertgebouw Orchestra continues to foster its connections with contemporary composers.

The Orchestra’s interpretations of the late romantic repertoire have earned it great international acclaim. The Mahler tradition, developed through the many Concertgebouw performances led by Mahler, achieved great heights during the Mahler Festivals in 1920 and 1995. Conductor Bernard Haitink continued the tradition with his complete recording of the Mahler symphonies and the Christmas Matinée concert series of Mahler compositions, which was also released as a recording. In addition to Mahler, the symphonies of composer Anton Bruckner were also a vital part of the Orchestra’s repertoire, due to the influence of conductor Eduard van Beinum.

With the arrival of Mariss Jansons in 2004, a new phase has begun for the Concertgebouw Orchestra. While the Orchestra’s repertoire continues to feature the work of Mahler, Bruckner and Richard Strauss, it has grown to include major twentieth-century composers such as Shostakovich and Messiaen. In Mariss Jansons’ time as chief conductor, he has conducted a broad repertoire ranging from Haydn and Mozart to contemporary Dutch compositions and a commissioned work by Henze.

The Concertgebouw Orchestra has worked with several world-famous guest conductors, each of whom made a unique contribution to the development of the Orchestra’s sound and the repertoire. These conductors include Arthur Nikisch, Karl Muck, Bruno Walter, Otto Klemperer, Rafael Kubelik, Pierre Monteux, Eugen Jochum, Karl Böhm, Herbert von Karajan, Georg Solti, George Szell, Carlos Kleiber, Leonard Bernstein, Colin Davis, Kurt Sanderling, Kirill Kondrashin, Carlo Maria Giulini, Kurt Masur, Lorin Maazel, Zubin Mehta and honorary guest conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt.

The landmark Concertgebouw concert hall is world-famous for its magnificent acoustics. It was designed by the architect A.L. van Gendt and officially inaugurated on 11 April 1888. The hall was renovated in the 1980s with the addition of a new wing. For over a century, it has been the center of classical music in the Netherlands.