

‘...the unique strength of music as an ambassador for peace...’



World Orchestra for Peace

Founder Sir Georg Solti
Conductor Valery Gergiev
Patron Lady Solti
Director Charles Kaye

THE WORLD ORCHESTRA FOR PEACE

a symbol of the ‘the unique strength of music as an ambassador for peace’

Founder: Sir Georg Solti
CONDUCTOR: VALERY GERGIEV

Brainchild of the outstanding conductor Sir Georg Solti, the World Orchestra for Peace was formed in 1995 at the behest of the United Nations to celebrate the 50th anniversary of its founding. The seed of this ambitious idea had been sown three years previously, at a concert to celebrate Solti’s 80th birthday at Buckingham Palace, hosted by TRH Prince Charles and Princess Diana. As well as the many stars who paid tribute to Solti, thirteen musicians from thirteen of the greatest orchestras in the world gave a performance of Wagner’s Siegfried Idyll without a conductor. As Solti thanked them, he explained what had most struck him as he listened: ‘I could not escape one very essential idea. Isn’t it amazing that we musicians can produce a united Europe or more... even a united world. Why can’t the politicians?’

The World Orchestra for Peace is an orchestra put together to serve music’s highest aspirations, as an expression of harmony on all levels. In keeping with that aim, its players are the finest, drawn from top ensembles all over the world to form a truly ‘all-star’ orchestra. At the inaugural UN concert in Victoria Hall in Geneva, astonishingly every single one of the 81 players Solti had asked accepted immediately and came. They played Rossini’s William Tell Overture as a homage to Switzerland, Bartok’s Concerto for Orchestra to mark the 50th anniversary of the composer’s death, and the finale of Act II from Beethoven’s Fidelio, to reflect its qualities of brotherhood, liberty and humanity. It was an inspiring realisation of Solti’s vision, as he was able to declare then: ‘I am a passionate believer in peace. All my life I have been involved in revolution, both fascist and communist. It has taught me to believe passionately in peace. When we started this concert idea, I wanted to prove – which I now prove so brilliantly – we are about 40 nations in this orchestra together, [and] we live in such harmony, playing so beautifully [together], we prove that we can live in peace. I wish politicians, left and right, could do the same.’

The second occasion the orchestra was due to reassemble was for the inaugural concert of the new Festspielhaus in Baden-Baden in 1998. Preparations were progressing well, nearly three-quarters of the original Geneva players had signalled their readiness to play again when, in September 1997, Solti suddenly died.

www.worldorchestraforpeace.com

‘...the unique strength of music as an ambassador for peace...’



World Orchestra for Peace

At this point Charles Kaye, Solti's Executive Administrator for over 20 years and keen to preserve Solti's achievement in bringing such a concept into being, approached the man whom Solti had seen as his natural successor: Valery Gergiev. The magic and electricity of Geneva was rekindled and within minutes of coming off the podium at Baden-Baden, Gergiev was asking Kaye to find an opportunity to reassemble the orchestra.

That request bore fruit two years later, on the penultimate night of the BBC Proms 2000, 60 years to the day after the start of the London Blitz, where the orchestra played Debussy's *La Mer* and the Leningrad Symphony, Shostakovich's tribute to Leningrad's heroism during the desperate siege of 1941, but also hymning the beauties of a peaceful way of life. Gergiev explained why he had chosen the Shostakovich symphony: 'There can be political differences. There can be religious differences based on these differences but we are all daughters and sons of world culture. We all share the same values: we all love music, art – we love the human element in music... This is, in a way, why we play Shostakovich. The Leningrad Symphony No.7 has this human message, about the 20th century in particular.'

Again, the musicians came from all over – Brazil, Hungary, England, Germany, Switzerland, Finland, France, Austria, America, Canada, Russia, Portugal, Belgium, Japan – in all, twenty-six countries were represented by these 109 players drawn from 66 orchestras. Among the 16 first violins, half were concertmasters of their home orchestras.

Gergiev then asked Kaye if he would again assemble the World Orchestra for Peace for two concerts in Russia; opening the 11th 'Stars of the White Nights' Festival dedicated to the celebrations of St Petersburg's 300th anniversary and closing the second Moscow Easter Festival in May 2003. This time 110 players represented 77 orchestras from 44 countries, including 15 concertmasters.

And so the orchestra goes from strength to strength, a living, playing testament to a rare idealism. It gathers only at special occasions to promote peace or celebrate reconstruction – the essence of its special mission, but a consequence also of the logistical challenge in reassembling this remarkable collection of people, plucking each of them from their home orchestras so they can once again appear together on the podium, to bear witness to the encompassing power of music and its unique strength as an ambassador for peace.