



## HISTORY OF THE HOUSTON SYMPHONY

Founded in 1913 by the guiding hand of Miss Ima Hogg, the Grammy Award-winning Houston Symphony has played a central role in Houston's cultural and civic life for more than 100 years. It is now one of America's oldest performing arts organizations with a distinguished musical history. The orchestra has grown and matured under the direction of leaders such as Ernst Hoffmann (1936–47), Efrem Kurtz (1948–54), Ferenc Fricsay (1954), Leopold Stokowski (1955–61), Sir John Barbirolli (1961–67), André Previn (1967–69), Lawrence Foster (1971–78), Sergiu Comissiona (1979–88), Christoph Eschenbach (1988–99), and Hans Graf (2001–13). Andrés Orozco-Estrada began his role as the 15<sup>th</sup> Music Director and holder of the *Roy and Lillie Cullen Chair* of the Houston Symphony in September 2014. Steven Reineke serves as Principal POPS Conductor, Robert Franz is Associate Conductor, and Dr. Betsy Cook Weber directs the Houston Symphony Chorus.

The orchestra's inaugural performance was held at The Majestic Theater in downtown Houston June 21, 1913. Two decades later, the Palace Theatre served as the location for six concerts in 1931–32. City Auditorium and the Houston Music Hall showcased Symphony performances from the late 1930s through the early 1960s. The orchestra's current home, Jones Hall for the Performing Arts, was dedicated October 2, 1966, with a special performance by the Houston Symphony under the baton of Sir John Barbirolli. In October 2016, a concert featuring the Houston Symphony, esteemed violinist Itzhak Perlman, and Music Director Andrés Orozco-Estrada celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jones Hall.

In 1937, the Houston Symphony began a series of special student matinee concerts coordinated with Houston Independent School District. By 1956, there were six pairs of concerts with an average attendance of 3,000. Toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Symphony was an annual destination for HISD's fifth grade students. Today, four types of concerts make up The Robbins Foundation Student Concert Series, serving students in grades 2–12 with hourlong concerts during the school day. This includes concerts for Lower Elementary, Upper Elementary, Middle School, and High School students. Collectively, they serve more than 46,000 students from across Greater Houston, with the goal of inspiring students to begin or further their involvement in music.

The orchestra came of age in the 1940s when Maestros Hoffmann and Kurtz began hiring highly talented professional musicians, many of whom remained with the orchestra for more than 30 years. Leopold Stokowski brought the Symphony international recognition by commissioning new works and making recordings; and, in Sir John Barbirolli's years, the Houston Symphony flourished? under the influence of his lush romantic style.

Regional tours were common for the Symphony in the 1940s, especially wartime visits to military bases in Texas and Louisiana. In 1950, the orchestra embarked on its first national tour to 17 cities as far north as Chicago. Its Carnegie Hall debut occurred March 11, 1965, as part of the International Festival of Visiting Orchestras. To date, the Symphony has performed 16 times at the world-famous venue; the most recent performance was in May 2012 when the Houston Symphony kicked off the second annual Spring for Music Festival. The orchestra's first overseas trip occurred in June 1990 with an appearance in Japan at the Singapore Festival of Arts. Throughout the 1990s, the Houston Symphony toured Europe several times and returned to Japan. In October 2010, the orchestra journeyed to the United Kingdom to perform *The Planets—An HD Odyssey* to sold-out crowds in a seven-city tour. In June 2012, the Houston Symphony became the first-ever American orchestra to perform at the Annual Festival of the World's Symphony Orchestras in Moscow, Russia, known as the highlight of the Moscow musical season.

In March 2018, Music Director Andrés Orozco-Estrada led the Houston Symphony on a four-country, eight-city tour through some of Europe's most prestigious concert halls and festivals. World-renowned violinist and three-time Grammy Award-winner

Hilary Hahn joined the Houston Symphony for all performances. The high-profile tour, which featured concerts in Vienna, Berlin, Hamburg, and Munich, was Orozco-Estrada's first international tour with the orchestra and the Houston Symphony's first major European tour in more than 20 years. This great achievement was made possible by more than 70 donors who contributed more than \$1.76 million for the tour, including 12 who traveled to Europe to support and celebrate the Symphony during the tour.

In 1986, the Symphony commissioned more than 20 fanfares from American composers to commemorate Texas' sesquicentennial. Unfortunately, in 2001, the fanfare scores—along with the majority of the contents in the Symphony's music library—were destroyed in devastating floods caused by Tropical Storm Allison. Since 2001, the library's holdings have returned to more than 2,300 catalogued items, including scores, sheet music, and reference materials. In August 2018, Harvey forced the cancellation of 18 concerts, including Opening Night, cutting significantly into both ticket sales and donations. Over the course of the 2017–18 season, Houston Symphony donors generously contributed \$3.6 million to Harvey Recovery, ensuring the organization could continue providing outstanding music as well as education and community programs.

The Houston Symphony has recorded under various prestigious labels, including Naxos, Koch International Classics, Telarc, RCA Red Seal, and Virgin Classics. Most recently, the Houston Symphony and Andrés recorded the last four symphonies of Dvořák on the Dutch recording label Pentatone. Additional recordings under the Dutch label include a *Music of the Americas* disc (featuring Gershwin's *An American in Paris*, Revueltas' *Sensemaya*, Piazzolla's *Tangazo*, and Bernstein's Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*) and *Haydn—The Creation*. The *Music of the Americas* and *Haydn—The Creation* recordings were released February 2018 and April 2018 respectively. In 2017, the Houston Symphony was awarded an ECHO Klassik award for the live recording of Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* under the direction of former Music Director Hans Graf. The orchestra earned its first Grammy nomination and Grammy Award at the 60<sup>th</sup> annual ceremony for the same recording in the Best Opera Recording category in 2018.

In the 2015–16 season, the orchestra launched its Community-Embedded Musician Program, hiring four musicians who are integrated in Houston schools, neighborhoods, and healthcare settings as teaching artists and performers, while also performing onstage with the Houston Symphony. Enhancing the impact of the orchestra's growing education and community engagement activities, the Community-Embedded Musicians offer nearly 80,000 community-based interactions each year, both individually and through small ensembles.

The Houston Symphony offers many free concerts each summer, including several Neighborhood Concerts throughout the Houston area each June, reaching thousands of Houstonians. The orchestra can be heard on select June weekends during the ExxonMobil Summer Symphony Nights at Miller Outdoor Theatre, in addition to the annual July 4 "Star-Spangled Salute" celebration. The last free performance is Fiesta Sinfónica at Jones Hall, an annual concert celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month. Additionally, the Engie Community Connections Program broadens musical contact with Houston's diverse population by providing nearly 200 opportunities for members of the orchestra to perform or provide instructional coaching in close, personal settings.

Each year, the Houston Symphony holds the Ima Hogg Competition, a national competition for young musicians, ages 16–26, who play standard orchestral instruments and piano. A collaborative effort between the Houston Symphony and the Houston Symphony Leagues, the Ima Hogg Competition will celebrate its 45<sup>th</sup> year in 2020 as a prestigious international event for emerging musicians seeking careers in music.

Today, the Houston Symphony's 88 musicians perform approximately 170 concerts annually, making it the most active performing arts organization in Houston. The season, which starts in September and runs through May, includes 18 weeks of classical concerts, nine weeks of POPS concerts, four weekends family concerts, a number of special performances including holiday concerts each December, School Concerts, and summer performances at Miller Outdoor Theater and The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion in The Woodlands.