

A Brief History of the MSO



THE BIRTH OF AN ORCHESTRA

IT WAS A CHILLY JANUARY EVENING IN 1959, and members of the Board of the Milwaukee Pops Orchestra were witnessing the climax of their most successful season to date. Six thousand and three hundred people crowded into the old Auditorium to watch the ensemble, led by a young conductor named Harry John Brown, perform in concert with a young Texan pianist named Van Cliburn. After ten years of ups and downs, the fledgling orchestra was experiencing the beginnings of stability.

For more than a decade, under the baton of John Anello, the Milwaukee Pops Orchestra had grown and persevered. With the success of the 1958/59 season, the Directors — including President Stanley Williams, Judge Robert Landry, George Everitt and others — realized that they had come to a crossroads. In May of 1959, prior to the start of the 1959/60 season, the Board gathered in Judge Landry's chambers, and the name of the ensemble was officially changed to Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra.

The Board immediately hired Milwaukee public relations man Robert S. Zigman as the first business manager. Under Zigman's skilled leadership, the establishment of the new orchestra progressed swiftly. On October 29, 1959, the MSO performed its first concert since assuming its new name, under the direction of Arthur Fiedler. The first classical concert was performed on January 15, 1960, under the baton of Hans Schwieger.

1 Harry John Brown is appointed the MSO's first music director.

2 Music Director Harry John Brown meets with Miss Gertrude Puelicher, founder of the Milwaukee Symphony Women's League, ca. 1961.



Later that season, Harry John Brown was appointed the first music director. Under Mr. Brown's direction, Zigman proceeded with the hiring of the first full time musicians — 16 during the 1961/62 season — and the progressive expansion in the number of performances. The Milwaukee Symphony Women's League was founded by Miss Gertrude Puelicher that same season. The League's tireless efforts in fund raising and ticket sales were critical to the MSO's success during the early years, and remain key elements to this day.



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3 Gene Gilmartin, Michael J. Schmitz, Orren J. Bradley, William D. Van Dyke, III, and Charles Krause at Carnegie Hall, October 1989.

4 Charismatic Music Director Kenneth Schermerhorn conducts the orchestra in Uihlein Hall; Edward Mumm, concertmaster.

5 Music Director Lukas Foss interviews composer Aaron Copland on stage at the MSO's Aaron Copland Festival.



ON TO CARNEGIE HALL AND EUROPE

KENNETH SCHERMERHORN succeeded Harry John Brown in 1968 as music director. During his tenure (1968 –1980), Schermerhorn collaborated with Margaret Hawkins on the formation of the Milwaukee Symphony Chorus, initiated state touring, and inaugurated the youth and high school concert series. He took the MSO to Carnegie Hall for the first time — a performance that led *The New Yorker* to proclaim the young ensemble “as beautifully trained and subtly coordinated as the finest in the land.”

At the beginning of the 1981/82 season, the music director’s baton was turned over to Lukas Foss. A noted conductor, composer, and pianist, Foss broadened the MSO’s repertoire to include a greater emphasis on contemporary and American music and the lesser known works of traditional composers. The Foss era included festivals celebrating the music of Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland (both attended by the composers), as well as the recording of two albums on the ProArte label.

In 1986 the MSO, led by Lukas Foss, embarked on its first European tour, performing in England, Holland, West Germany, and Austria. *The London Financial Times* declared the orchestra “worthy of international status.” Hamburg’s *Die Welt* called the MSO musicians “highly commendable musical ambassadors of the Midwest.”

THE MACAL ERA

ZDENEK MACAL became the fourth music director in September 1986. Under his baton the orchestra refined its skills and enhanced its reputation. In 1987 the MSO returned to Carnegie Hall for the first time under Macal’s baton. *The New York Times* called it a “shiny young example of America’s virtuoso orchestra tradition.”

Zdenek Macal took the MSO on tour throughout the eastern United States in 1989 and on a major tour of Japan in 1992. In 1989 the Milwaukee Symphony returned to the recording studio under a new Milwaukee-based label, Koss Classics, founded by MSO Board member Michael J. Koss as a subsidiary of the Koss Corporation. Among the most notable results was a set of CDs featuring the symphonies and tone poems of Antonin Dvořák.

In 1990, The Arts in Community Education (ACE) program was formed and has since grown into the largest and most comprehensive education program of any American orchestra.

Zdenek Macal relinquished his post as music director at the conclusion of the 1994-1995 concert season. Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, former music director of the Minnesota Orchestra, was appointed artistic advisor for the 1995/96 and 1996/97 seasons. Doc Severinsen accepted the post of Principal Pops Conductor beginning in 1994, leading the Pops series to new levels of variety and excitement.





6 Public Relations Director Andy Buelow welcomes Maestro Andreas Delfs to Milwaukee.

7 The MSO on stage in Cuba in 1999 — the first major orchestra to visit the country in nearly 40 years.

A NEW GENERATION

ANDREAS DELFS was appointed the fifth music director of the MSO beginning in September 1997. Under his dynamic leadership, the MSO continued to expand musically on its strong artistic foundations and to build new bridges into the community.

In 1999, the MSO embarked on the Cuba Millennium Tour, the first by a major orchestra in nearly 40 years. International media attention brought the MSO into the spotlight for its efforts that brought classical music to the country and showed a gesture of improved U.S. relations with Cuba.

Under Delfs' baton, the MSO became widely known as a purveyor of new music with annual performances of world premiere pieces and commissioned works. Among the works were Philip Glass' *The Hours Suite* in 2002, Gil Shohot's *Songs of the Bathsheba* in 2005, Roberto Sierra's *La Salsa* in 2006, and Lowell Liebermann's *Piano Concerto No. 3* in 2006. Delfs also attracted tremendous talent to Milwaukee with Yo-Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman, Ute Lemper, and Renee Fleming.



A string of recording 'firsts' for the MSO occurred between 2004 and 2007, beginning with the release of the first modern recording in English of Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* on the Avie label. In 2005, under the MSO Classics label, the MSO became the first American orchestra to distribute its own live recordings through online stores including iTunes. Soon after, the MSO launched an online music store at www.mso.org where the first live orchestral binaural recording was released, the Saint-Saens *Organ Symphony*.

Late in 2006, Andreas Delfs announced his intentions to step down after the MSO's 50th anniversary season in 2009. Also in 2006, Principal Pops Conductor Doc Severinsen announced that the 2006/07 season would be his last. He assumed the title of pops conductor emeritus at the end of that season.

In November of 2007, legendary entertainer Marvin Hamlisch became the MSO's new Stein Family Foundation Principal Pops Conductor, continuing the pursuit of artistic and entertainment excellence in the Pops series.

Following his triumphant final concert in June of 2009 — Mahler's dramatic *Symphony No. 8* *Symphony of a Thousand* — Andreas Delfs assumed his new role as the MSO's conductor laureate.

THE EDO EFFECT

ON JANUARY 3, 2008, PREEMINENT DUTCH CONDUCTOR EDO DE WAART was named the orchestra's sixth music director. His concerts in April of 2008, which featured Holst's *The Planets* and Strauss' *Metamorphosen*, brought more than 9,000 audience members to Uihlein Hall to witness his Milwaukee premiere.

De Waart's first season as music director drew much critical acclaim with performances of Mahler's Symphony No. 5 and the MSO premiere of Leonard Bernstein's Symphony No. 1 *Jeremiah*, as well as a highly celebrated all-Rachmaninoff program which included virtuoso pianist Joyce Yang.



8 Music Director Edo de Waart in his third season with the MSO.

9 From 16 full-time musicians in 1959 to 88 full-time musicians in 2011—over five decades of musical excellence.

In October 2009, de Waart embarked on his first Wisconsin State Tour which included concerts in Marinette, Merrill, Madison, and Ripon, as well as Naperville, Illinois. The Naperville performance enjoyed a rave review in the *Chicago Tribune*. During the tour week, de Waart was asked to step in for an ailing James Levine to conduct Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier* with opera superstars Susan Graham and Renée Fleming at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. The performances, as well as the extraordinary lengths de Waart took to conduct concerts in both New York and Wisconsin, were covered in a front-page story in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. He capped off his marathon of October concerts by leading the MSO in sold-out performances of Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle* with set designs by world-famous glass artist Dale Chihuly.

De Waart's second season started with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Of the performance, Elaine Schmidt (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*) wrote, "It's entirely possible that people passing by Uihlein Hall heard the final movement of the Milwaukee Symphony's thrilling season opener Friday evening." The season also included John Adams' *Harmonium*, Beethoven's *Eroica*, an encore all-Rachmaninoff weekend with Joyce Yang, the return of Itzhak Perlman and Joshua Bell, as well as a three-week German Festival featuring Wagner's *Die Walküre*, Act. 1.

In addition, the MSO went to Carnegie Hall for the 12th time in its 50-year history as part of the Spring for Music festival, with the concert held on May 11, 2012.

To learn more about the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, visit www.mso.org.

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