

A Brief History of the MSO



1 The portrait of Harry John Brown featured in MSO program books during the early 1960s.

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 the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra.



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

The Board immediately hired Milwaukee public relations professional 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.

Later that season, Harry John Brown was appointed as the first music director. Under 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 fundraising, audience development, and ticket sales became critical to the MSO's success both in its earliest years and for decades to come.



3 Representatives of the MSO in front of Carnegie Hall in April 1972.

4 Kenneth Schermerhorn, the MSO's second music director.

5 Music Director Lukas Foss interviews composer Aaron Copland on stage at the MSO's Aaron Copland Festival in 1983.

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF VISITING ORCHESTRAS
 THE CARNEGIE HALL CORPORATION
 presents the

Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra

KENNETH SCHERMERHORN, *Music Director*

ON TO CARNEGIE HALL AND EUROPE

KENNETH SCHERMERHORN SUCCEEDED HARRY JOHN BROWN IN 1968 as music director. During his tenure (1968-1980), the orchestra underwent a radical transformation from a fine regional ensemble to an orchestra of international stature. With the grand opening of the Milwaukee County Performing Arts Center in the autumn of 1969, the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra celebrated its tenth anniversary in what would become its primary home for nearly 50 years.

Schermerhorn took the MSO to Carnegie Hall for the first time in 1972 – a performance that led *The New Yorker* to proclaim the young ensemble “one of America’s great virtuoso orchestras – as beautifully trained and subtly coordinated as the finest in the land.” He led the orchestra on its first international tour to the Dominican Republic in 1974 (the same year the orchestra produced its first LP recording), collaborated with choral conductor Margaret Hawkins on the formation of the Milwaukee Symphony Chorus, which gave its debut performance with the orchestra in June 1976, initiated statewide touring, and inaugurated the orchestra’s youth and high school concert series.

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, as well as 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 themselves – 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’s musicians “highly commendable musical ambassadors of the Midwest.”

Foss’s tenure as music director concluded in 1986, but it was a commission by the MSO Women’s League that would see his return just a few short years later. In 1989, the Foss Festival was held to celebrate the music of the MSO’s third music director. *With Music Strong*, commissioned by the Women’s League, premiered in celebration of the orchestra’s 30th anniversary and was recorded on the Koss label.



6 Principal bass Roger Ruggeri and 2nd violin Andrea Wagoner performing as part of the ACE program in the early 1990s

7 Music Director Zdeněk Mácal outside of Carnegie Hall, where the MSO performed with cellist Lynn Harrell in 1989.

8 Maestro Mácal listening to the orchestra from the Koss Classics recording studio.

9 Music Director Zdeněk Mácal conducting a performance in Japan in October, 1992.



THE MÁCAL ERA

ZDENĚK MÁCAL 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 Mácal's baton, performing Mahler's Symphony No. 1 ("Titan") and accompanying Shlomo Mintz in Dvořák's violin concerto. *The New York Times* called it a "shiny young example of America's virtuoso orchestra tradition."

Zdeněk Mácal 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. More than a dozen records were produced under the label; among the most notable results were a set of CDs featuring the complete symphonies and tone poems of Antonín Dvořák.

In 1989, The Arts in Community Education (ACE) program was founded, connecting students and educators with local artists and emphasizing an interdisciplinary approach to arts education. ACE has since grown into the largest and most comprehensive education program of any American orchestra, integrating music, dance, theater, and the visual arts with the standard curriculum.

Zdeněk Mácal relinquished his post as music director at the conclusion of the 1994-95 concert season. Stanisław 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, elevating the Pops series to new levels of variety and excitement.



10

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, which brought classical music to the country and served as a gesture of goodwill between the United States and Cuba. The performances, which were met with critical acclaim, were recorded on *The Cuba Concerts*.

Under Delfs's baton, the MSO became widely known as a purveyor of new music, with annual performances of world premiere pieces and newly-commissioned works. Among the music debuted by the MSO were Philip Glass's suite from *The Hours* in 2002, Gil Shohat'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, sharing the stage with Yo-Yo Ma, Itzhak Perlman, Ute Lemper, and Renée 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 *Hänsel und 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 online, including through iTunes. Soon after, the MSO launched an online music store at www.mso.org, where the first live orchestral binaural recording was released, featuring Saint-Saëns's Symphony No. 3, the "Organ Symphony."

Late in 2006, Andreas Delfs announced his intentions to step down after the MSO's 50th anniversary season in 2009, and 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, the "Symphony of a Thousand" – Andreas Delfs assumed his new role as the MSO's conductor laureate.



11

10 Maestro Delfs, concertmaster Frank Almond, and principal bass Roger Ruggeri performing Kurt Weill's suite from *The Threepenny Opera* at Delfs's inaugural concerts as Music Director in September 1997.

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

12 Maestro Delfs celebrating the release of *Hänsel und Gretel* in 2004.



12



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's *Metamorphosen*, brought more than 9,000 audience members to Uihlein Hall to witness his Milwaukee premiere.

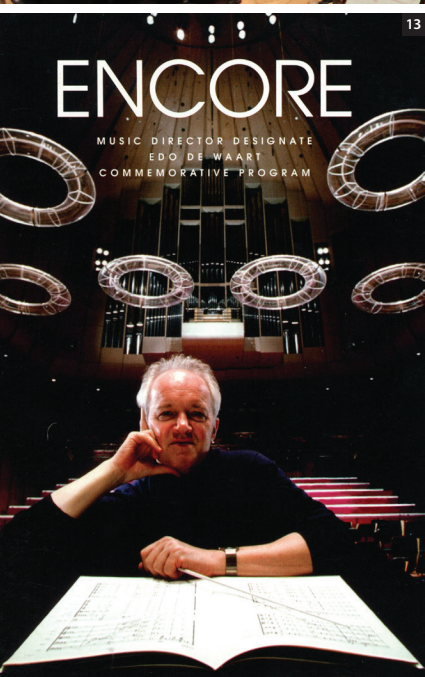
De Waart's first season as music director drew much critical acclaim and featured performances of Mahler's Symphony No. 5, the MSO premiere of Leonard Bernstein's Symphony No. 1 ("Jeremiah"), and a highly celebrated all-Rachmaninoff program, which included virtuoso pianist Joyce Yang.

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's *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 Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, replete 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's *Harmonium*, Beethoven's "Eroica", an encore all-Rachmaninoff weekend with Joyce Yang, the return of Itzhak Perlman and Joshua Bell, and a three-week German Festival featuring Act I of Wagner's *Die Walküre*.

On May 11, 2012, the MSO went to Carnegie Hall for the 12th time in its 50-year history as part of the Spring for Music festival, performing works by Messiaen, Debussy, and Qigang Chen under de Waart's baton.

From 2014 through 2016, de Waart conducted the complete Mozart-da Ponte opera cycle in semi-staged productions, beginning with a production of *Don Giovanni* that was described as a "spectacular evening of opera" and a "finely honed performance" in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. In the 2015-16 season, the Milwaukee Symphony Chorus celebrated its 40th anniversary with a performance of Verdi's *Requiem*, and in May 2016, the MSO and de Waart recorded the entirety of Johannes Brahms's symphonies, which were made available for commercial release. De Waart gave his final performances as music director in spring 2017, leading the orchestra in Mahler's Symphony No. 3.



12 The MSO performing at Carnegie Hall's Spring for Music Festival on 11 May 2012. Photo credit Steve J Sherman.

13 Music Director Laureate Edo de Waart's arrival in Milwaukee was honored in a special commemorative edition of *Encore*, the MSO's playbill.

14 Maestro de Waart's staging of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* was described in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* as "a taut, musically rich performance."





15 From 16 full-time musicians to 71 in 2024 – over six decades of musical excellence.

A GRAND FUTURE WITH MAESTRO MASUR

KEN-DAVID MASUR LED BOTH THE ORCHESTRA AND THE CHORUS IN HIS FIRST CONCERTS in May of 2018, conducting Ralph Vaughan Williams’s *Flos Campi* and Ravel’s *Daphnis et Chloé Suite No. 2*, which was reviewed in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* as “a musically rich, beautifully crafted performance.” A former conducting fellow of the Tanglewood Festival and associate conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Masur returned in September to guest conduct once more, and by November of the same year, it was announced that he had been appointed the seventh music director of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra effective in the following season.



16 Maestro Masur discussing Tan Dun’s *Water Concerto* with New York Philharmonic principal percussionist Christopher Lamb in February 2023. Photo credit Jonathan Kim.

After nearly five decades of performing in Uihlein Hall at the Marcus Performing Arts Center, the MSO announced its intentions to purchase, restore, and relocate to the historic Warner Theater in downtown Milwaukee. Ground was broken on Wisconsin Avenue in the summer of 2018, and a year later, C.D. Smith Construction, International Chimney, and Expert House Movers successfully moved a 625-ton wall 35 feet into 2nd Street, keeping the 860 square foot wall intact and successfully preserving the 1932 steel frame, “cream city” brick, and terracotta cladding. Allen-Bradley Hall had officially assumed its correct dimensions.

Beginning in March 2020 and until the close of the 2019-20 season, the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra cancelled a total of 45 in-person performances in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. By autumn, administrative leadership and Maestro Masur had collaborated to introduce a reimagined season to the public, featuring a dozen classical and four pops performances. The newly-announced season began with the creation of a digital application, which allowed patrons to stream live MSO performances well before even small audiences were able to sit in the hall. These virtual programs began with socially-distanced chamber performances and grew in scope before culminating in a performance of Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 7* in June 2021. From March until December of 2020, Masur hosted *Musical Journeys*, an online radio series featuring interviews with MSO musicians, community advocates, and internationally-renowned guest artists – including Yo-Yo Ma, Emanuel Ax, and composers Augusta Read Thomas and Matthias Pintscher – in addition to airing archival recordings of the MSO hand-picked by Masur.



The Bradley Symphony Center welcomed its first patrons in March of 2021. The first full in-person season in the orchestra's new home began the following October, with over 188,000 households viewing the opening weekend performance via local and national PBS broadcast. The performance included the world premiere of composer Eric Nathan's *Opening*, commissioned by the orchestra to celebrate its arrival in Allen-Bradley Hall, alongside Stravinsky's *Firebird* and Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*.



Masur's tenure has given rise to an artist-in-residence program – held from 2021-2023 by jazz pianist Aaron Diehl and from 2023 to the present by bass-baritone Dashon Burton – featured contemporary and innovative repertoire, and produced unique festival programming, ranging from the sounds of the 1930s, when the Warner Theater was built, to a city-wide celebration of the music of J.S. Bach. An advocate of vocal literature, Masur has led the Milwaukee Symphony Chorus in a number of important choral works, including Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, and a semi-staged production of Grieg's *Peer Gynt*. In November 2023, the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra announced that it had extended Ken-David Masur's contract through the 2025-26 season.



In the fall of 2024, acclaimed conductor, trumpeter, and showman Byron Stripling took to the podium as the newly appointed Stein Family Foundation Principal Pops Conductor. A graduate of the Eastman School of Music and the Interlochen Arts Academy, Stripling served as soloist and lead trumpeter with the Count Basie Orchestra, earning his stripes on tours around the world with jazz luminaries such as Dizzy Gillespie, Woody Herman, Sonny Rollins, the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, and the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band. Preparing for his 2024-25 season debut, Stripling remarked, "People don't realize how good you guys are. It's amazing that this quality exists. I want people to know the beauty and the joy of what this orchestra can do."