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The Mahler Chamber Orchestra (MCO), with its unusual structure, internationality and outstanding quality, is an ensemble unique to the present time. Its non-traditional organisation and system make it a model for the future of the European orchestral landscape. Composed of around 40 musicians from 20 different nations, and independent of external sponsorship, the MCO plays operas and concerts all over the world, in cities as well as at exclusive festivals from the North Pole to the Red Sea. The orchestra was founded in 1997 by the musicians themselves and Claudio Abbado; their years of collaboration have resulted in many memorable highlights in the European classical music world.

Daniel Harding took on a central position in the orchestra in 1998, when, at the age of 22, he became Principal Guest Conductor; in 2003, he was named Music Director, and he has served as Principal Conductor since 2008. Harding conducts around a fourth of the orchestra's projects each season. He and the orchestra have worked on central repertoire of the Classical (including the major Mozart operas and a Beethoven cycle), Romantic and Modern periods. More recently, their collective focus has shifted toward the Romantic repertoire, which they undertake with vitality and with a richness of nuance strongly influenced by their chamber-music approach.

In the 2010/11 season, the MCO plays symphony concerts, operas and chamber music in 35 cities in 12 different countries. Alongside Claudio Abbado and Principal Conductor Daniel Harding, important artistic partners include the conductors Pierre Boulez, Kent Nagano, Ton Koopman, Robin Ticciati, Yannick Nézet-Séguin and Tugan Sokhiev, and the soloists Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Janine Jansen, Thomas Quasthoff, Martha Argerich, Fazil Say and Anja Harteros. The MCO will give debut performances at the Athens Festival, the Baltic Sea Festival Stockholm, the Heidelberger Frühling, the Leipzig Gewandhaus and the Luxembourg Philharmonie. Some of the most notable projects include the world premiere of a piece commissioned by the MCO from composer Toshio Hosokawa at the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden, a concert version of Verdi's *Othello*, an extensive tour of Italy with Claudio Abbado and Europe-wide concert tours with Daniel Harding.

International in its orientation as well as in its roster, the MCO's musical sphere of influence extends across Europe. The orchestra regularly makes visits to Asia and South America as well, and gave its debut at New York's Carnegie Hall in 2007. In Europe, the MCO is welcomed by the best-known producers and festivals from southern Italy to North Norway. It enjoys close relationships with the Turin concert promoter Lingotto Musica, the Bologna Festival, the Teatro Regio in Parma, the Alte Oper Frankfurt, the Musikfest Bremen, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, the Mozartwoche Salzburg, the Musikfestival Grafenegg, the Harstad Festival in northern Norway and the Aldeburgh Festival in Snape. The MCO also benefits from a long-term artistic partnership with the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden.

The MCO's residences, places where the orchestra is present regularly for longer rehearsal and concert periods, serve as centres for its constant touring activity. The MCO became Orchestra in Residence at Ferrara Musica in 1998. Under the auspices of this residence, the orchestra has performed around 80 concert programmes and operas in the last eleven years. A large part of the concerts were led by Claudio Abbado or Daniel Harding, who were able to explore new repertoire here. Exciting first encounters with young and promising composers and soloists are another element of this residence. The MCO's activities outside of the Teatro Comunale include regular chamber music concerts and close cooperation with the University of Ferrara.

The MCO has been Orchestra in Residence in North Rhine-Westphalia since May 2009. The main venues for the residence are the concert halls in Dortmund, Essen and Cologne; the MCO's partners and sponsors in this venture are the Kunststiftung NRW and the federal state North Rhine-Westphalia. Together with the concert halls and the Orchesterzentrum|NRW in Dortmund, the MCO has planned top-

quality opera and concert performances for the coming years, as well as projects involving teaching and continuing education.

The MCO has been closely linked to the LUCERNE FESTIVAL since 2003, when Claudio Abbado declared the orchestra the core of the LUCERNE FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA (LFO). Aside from the LFO concerts, the MCO plays two concerts each summer in its usual formation, often giving premieres of new works in this context.

Larger opera projects form a regular part of the MCO's programming, and often take place within the framework of international cooperation with well-known promoters and festivals such as the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden, the Munich Opernfestspiele, the Vienna Festwochen, the Holland Festival, the Teatro Real in Madrid or the theatres in Reggio Emilia and Modena. The MCO's international breakthrough came just a few months after its founding, with the performance of Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* at the opera festival in Aix-en-Provence. Together with Daniel Harding, the orchestra has performed all the great Mozart operas in recent years. Claudio Abbado was named Opera Conductor of the Year for his 2008 production of *Fidelio* with the MCO, and the Patrice Chéreau production of Janáček's *From the House of the Dead*, conducted by Pierre Boulez, was designated Opera Production of the Year in 2007. In 2010, the orchestra played Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, under the direction of Daniel Harding, as well as the composer's second operatic work, *Lulu*, at the Wiener Festwochen. Several opera productions were recorded by European television companies and are now available on DVD.

The MCO has recorded 15 CDs, among them several prize-winners, with Virgin Classics, Deutsche Grammophon and DECCA. The releases include operas with Claudio Abbado and Daniel Harding, a Grammy-winning live recording of Beethoven's Piano Concertos nos. 2 and 3 with Martha Argerich, and a recording of Italian arias with Anna Netrebko. In 2003, the recording of *Symphonie fantastique* with Marc Minkowski won a Deutscher Schallplattenpreis (German Record Critics' Award). A CD of Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto with Janine Jansen came out in 2008, followed in early 2009 by a recording of Romantic Arias with Jonas Kaufmann.