

Shortened versions of this biography may be printed only with the permission of the MCO Communications Department.



The Mahler Chamber Orchestra, an international touring orchestra, is on the move approximately 200 days each year. The ensemble had its breakthrough just a few months after its founding in 1997 with a production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at the opera festival in Aix-en-Provence under the direction of Claudio Abbado. Since then, the MCO has appeared all over the world, giving performances in major musical centres as well as at exclusive festivals from the North Pole to the Red Sea. When the MCO made its debut at Madrid's Teatro Real in 2008 with Beethoven's *Fidelio* under the direction of Claudio Abbado, *Le Monde* called it "the best orchestra in the world".

In spring 2011, the MCO was named Cultural Ambassador of the European Union. With its multi-national membership and the broad international reach of its activities, the MCO promotes intercultural dialogue and the mobility of the arts and music across borders. With wide-ranging education projects, the MCO is also increasingly involved in community and outreach work.

Alongside founder Claudio Abbado, Daniel Harding has been a formative figure in the MCO's history. He was named Principal Guest Conductor at the age of 22, in 2003 he became Music Director, and in 2008 he took on the title of Principal Conductor. In summer 2011, the orchestra decided unanimously to give Harding the lifetime title of Conductor Laureate. Daniel Harding and the MCO have together explored key repertoire from the Classical (the great Mozart operas and complete Beethoven symphonies), Romantic (including a Brahms symphonic cycle) and Modern (i.e. Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*) periods. Numerous CDs and DVDs document the collaboration.

The MCO's 45 members come from 20 different countries and live all over Europe. In addition to its fixed core, the MCO also works with a carefully selected and maintained network of excellent musicians who join the orchestra as needed from project to project. In this way, the orchestra is able to play an extremely wide range of repertoire at a very high level – from chamber music to large symphonies, from baroque to contemporary, from concert versions of operas to scenic productions or crossover projects. Financially independent, the MCO is funded primarily by concert revenues, with help from donors and sponsors. The MCO is democratically organised and is operated collaboratively by the orchestra board and orchestra management. The MCO's management is located in Berlin.

The name Mahler Chamber Orchestra refers to the ensemble's roots: the MCO was founded by members of the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester (GMJO) who had reached the youth orchestra's age limit and wished to continue making music together. With the help of their musical patron Claudio Abbado, they created their own ensemble. The word "chamber" in the orchestra's name refers less to the orchestra's size than to the chamber music sensibility that characterises its playing. Each individual musician bears musical responsibility, adjusting and responding to other players while also contributing something of his own personality.

In the season 2011/12, the MCO plays symphonic programmes, operas and chamber music in 41 cities in 14 different countries. The most important partners alongside Claudio Abbado and Daniel Harding in this season are conductors John Eliot Gardiner, Sir Roger Norrington and Vladimir Jurowski – all of whom come to the MCO for the first time -, Daniele Gatti, Esa-Pekka Salonen and Teodor Currentzis, and soloists Leif Ove Andsnes, Martha Argerich, Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Kolja Blacher and Ian Bostridge.

This season's highlights include the orchestra's debut in Poland (in the context of the NRW's Cultural Season in Poland), the start of a three-year cycle „Beethoven – the Journey“ with Leif Ove Andsnes (all five piano concertos will be performed in concert and released on CD by Sony Classical over the course of several extensive tours), and the return of the MCO to the opera festival in Aix-en-Provence with the world premiere of George Benjamin's opera *Written on Skin*, conducted by the composer. The MCO plays two further world premieres in the current season: *In einem Augenblick* by 25-year-old Japanese composer Eiko

Shortened versions of this biography may be printed only with the permission of the MCO Communications Department.



Tsukamoto for the 25th birthday of the Kölner Philharmonie in September 2011, and *Endorphin* – Concerto grosso for String Quartet and Orchestra by Søren Nils Eichberg, commissioned by the MCO.

The MCO explores new performance locations each year, but also maintains long-term artistic partnerships, most significantly at its residences. Here, rehearsal periods as well as concerts can take place, offering time for a wide range of additional activities from chamber music at unusual venues to open rehearsals to education projects. Residences build close and personal relationships between the musicians and concert locations, and also with the people who live and work in residence cities.

The MCO currently enjoys partnerships with three fixed residences: the oldest is in Ferrara, Italy, where the MCO has been a prominent figure on the concert scene since 1998. Over the past 13 years, around 90 concerts and operas have been performed by the MCO here. In Ferrara, MCO is increasingly active outside of the Teatro Comunale and plays a regular chamber music series at the Jazz Club Ferrara. In spring 2011, the residence contract in Ferrara was renewed again for the coming 3 years.

In the three German cities of Dortmund, Essen and Cologne in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), the MCO has had its second fixed residence since 2009. The Kunststiftung NRW and the state of North Rhine-Westphalia are partners in and supporters of the collaboration. A central component of this residence is the MCO Academy, run in cooperation with the Orchesterzentrum|NRW in Dortmund. The Academy engages in the education and training of the next generation of professional orchestral musicians, and highlights of its work include the yearly Academy concerts, in which students audition for the chance to join the MCO and gather valuable orchestral experience playing under the baton of top conductors. MCO Academy concerts have been led by Daniel Harding, Ton Koopman and Pierre Boulez, and Esa-Pekka Salonen conducts in the current season. The residence also provides the framework for concert and opera projects of the highest artistic quality created by the three concert halls in Dortmund, Essen and Cologne in discussion with the MCO. These projects originate in NRW and, through the ensemble's touring activity, are brought to international stages, so that they resonate far beyond the borders of the region and contribute to the establishment of networks both within and outside of NRW.

A further long-term partnership connects the MCO with Lucerne, where the ensemble has had a regular presence ever since Claudio Abbado named the MCO as the core of the LUCERNE FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA (LFO) in 2003. Alongside the LFO concerts, the MCO also plays two concerts in its regular ensemble formation at each festival, often including world premiere performances or operas in concert version. Summer 2011 also included the first MCO chamber music programme presented at the Lucerne Festival.

The MCO has released 19 recordings, among them several award winners, on labels such as Virgin Classics, harmonia mundi, Decca and Deutsche Grammophon. The discography includes operas with Claudio Abbado (most recently Beethoven's *Fidelio*) and Daniel Harding, the Grammy-winning live recording of Beethoven piano concertos with Martha Argerich, and aria albums with Anna Netrebko and Jonas Kaufmann. Several new recordings were released in 2011, including Brahms' Violin Concerto with Isabelle Faust and Daniel Harding, which already received a Diapason d'Or, and a Rachmaninoff recording under the direction of Claudio Abbado with the young Chinese pianist Yuja Wang.