

100 Years of Extraordinary

Historical Highlights from the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra Archives

1910s

1915 – Through a \$6,000 grant from the city of Baltimore, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra is founded as a branch of the city’s Department of Municipal Music, making it the only major American orchestra to be fully funded as a municipal agency.

1916 – On February 11, the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra performs its inaugural concerts to a standing-room-only crowd at The Lyric, under the direction of Music Director Gustav Strube. All three concerts comprising the first season at the Lyric are sold out.

1920s

1924 – On February 16, the BSO hosts its first children’s concert. The Baltimore Symphony youth concert series is the first to be established by an American orchestra.

1926 – The Baltimore Symphony makes its initial broadcast performance on WBAL Radio.

1930s

1930 - George Siemonn becomes the second music director of the orchestra. He conducts his opening concert, with the musicians now numbering 83, on November 23.

1935 - In late February, George Siemonn reluctantly resigns as music director and is replaced by Ernest Schelling. Forty-four musicians apply for the position. Schelling is well-known for his children’s concert series at Carnegie Hall.

1937 - Sara Feldman and Vivienne Cohn become the first women to join the Baltimore Symphony. The older members of the orchestra are supportive, but union members picket the hall with signs saying, “Unfair to Men,” which is reported in the *New York Times*.

1937 - Ernest Schelling becomes ill and is replaced by Werner Janssen. The dynamic young conductor and his wife, the celebrated film star Ann Harding, receive an enthusiastic response when they arrive in Baltimore. As with Ernest Schelling, Janssen grows frustrated by the financial limitations set forth by the director of Municipal Music. Janssen resigns from his post in October 1939.

1939 - BSO appoints American conductor Howard Barlow as the new music director. He enjoys wide fame for his radio broadcasts and many recordings, but his innovative aims and ideals for the BSO are beyond the means of the municipal budget.



1940s

1941 - The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra celebrates its 25th anniversary.

1942 – After only one performance, the Baltimore Symphony disbands due to escalating conflicts between the Director of Municipal Music and the Musicians' Union.

On June 22, an orchestra committee visits recently appointed director of the Peabody Conservatory, Reginald Stewart, who draws up the blueprint for a new era of the Baltimore Symphony. His vision is to transform the municipal orchestra into a private corporation, with 90 musicians and an 18-concert, 20-week season, which will be made up of subscription, popular and children's programs.

The BSO is incorporated on September 9. In October, Reginald Stewart helps initiate the formulation of the Baltimore Symphony Women's Association support group. The newly reorganized Baltimore Symphony gives its debut performance on November 19.

1945 - The BSO becomes the musical ambassador for Maryland. When wartime restrictions are lifted, the orchestra, under the direction of Reginald Stewart, begins regular seasonal tours up and down the East Coast, from Canada to Florida, with the musicians and their instruments packed into three Pullman cars.

1947 - The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Reginald Stewart, performs at Carnegie Hall in New York for the first time. The Baltimore Symphony makes a return performance in February 1948.

1950s

1951 - In the early 1950s, financial difficulties begin to resurface. As fund drives fall short of their goals for the campaign "Save the Symphony," 30 orchestra members leave to seek positions elsewhere.

1952 - Reginald Stewart resigns after several disagreements with symphony management. The Italian-born conductor Massimo Freccia becomes the seventh music director of the BSO. A hallmark of the Freccia years is his presentation of large-scale works, often concert versions of operas.

1955 – The symphony begins a long-term concert series in Salisbury, Maryland, sponsored by the Eastern Shore Symphony Society. Over the next 25 years, over a dozen symphony society support groups develop throughout the state of Maryland.

1959 - Czech-born conductor Peter Herman Adler is appointed the eighth music director of the Baltimore Symphony. Under Adler's directorship, the number of concerts per season is gradually increased to 180, national tours are undertaken each spring and autumn, youth outreach is intensified, and the size of the orchestra grows to 92 musicians.

1960s

1962 – After contract negotiations deteriorate between the board and Peter Herman Adler, the orchestra reportedly begins talks to replace Adler with frequent guest conductor Leopold Stokowski. Adler signs a last minute contract offer.

1965 – The symphony celebrates its Golden Jubilee season. The orchestra makes its first appearance at Carnegie Hall since 1948.

Wilmer Wise becomes the first African-American member of the Orchestra.



In July, the Baltimore businessman, fundraiser and philanthropist Joseph Meyerhoff begins his 18-year tenure as the President of the BSO.

1968 – In April, Peter Herman Adler conducts his final concert as music director. That same month, Sergiu Comissiona is selected as the orchestra's next music director. Comissiona's appointment is delayed due to prior commitments and Brian Priestman serves a one-year term as Resident Conductor.

1968 - Lack of financial support from the community leads the orchestra to go on strike for the first time in the BSO's history. On October 25, the musicians vote in favor of the compromise proposal offered by Mayor Thomas D'Alesandro, III.

1969 - On October 1, Sergiu Comissiona officially begins his tenure as music director with the opening concert of the 1969-1970 season.

1970s

1972 - The orchestra goes on strike to demand increases in the length of the symphony season, base pay, pensions and benefits. The strike ends on March 10, when Mayor William Donald Schaefer brings both parties into his office to resolve the dispute. The 10 week work stoppage gave musicians a \$10 a week raise and lengthened the season by four weeks.

1975 – Another work stoppage is averted when the musicians accept a last minute agreement that increases the season to 45 weeks and raises salaries by \$50 per week over the three-year contract.

1978 - Increasing problems with the Lyric Theatre, including scheduling conflicts and too few playing dates, which hamper the orchestra's ability to provide more concerts to the community, lead Joseph Meyerhoff to pursue the idea of a dedicated symphony hall. He undertakes to contribute one third of the cost—\$5 million—an amount that will double before the building is complete. On November 10, the start of a new era for the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra is symbolized by the groundbreaking ceremony for the Joseph Meyerhoff Symphony Hall, attended by Meyerhoff, Sergiu Comissiona, and city and state officials.

1979 - In September, the Baltimore Symphony makes its first tour outside the United States, performing in Mexico City and Puebla, Mexico.

1980s

1981 - The BSO tours Europe for the first time, and becomes the first American orchestra to tour East Germany.

1982 – In January, a three-and-a-half month lockout between players and management ends with a four year agreement that raises weekly wages from \$410 to \$620 over the course of the contract. The contract also establishes a 52-week season marking the Baltimore Symphony's official status as a major orchestra.

1982 - On September 16, the Baltimore Symphony receives national attention with the opening of the 2,467-seat Joseph Meyerhoff Symphony Hall, named for its benefactor and President, who ranks with George Peabody, Johns Hopkins, Henry Walters and Enoch Pratt among the great philanthropists in Baltimore history.

1983 - Catherine Comet becomes the highest ranking woman conductor of a major symphony orchestra when she is appointed the BSO's associate conductor.

1985 - David Zinman is officially handed the baton as music director of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra during a gala concert on September 14.



1986 - Christopher Rouse becomes Composer-in-Residence.

1987- A 14-city visit to Europe includes the first performances in 11 years by an American orchestra in the USSR.

1988 - BSO performs two-week tour of the United States with cellist Yo-Yo Ma.

1989 – In February, a 22-week long strike comes to an end through the help over Mayor Schaefer’s office. By the end of the four-year agreement, musician base pay reaches \$1,040 a week. Seniority pay, pension payments, and recording guidelines are also better defined.

1990s

1990 - The BSO and David Zinman win their first Grammy Award for a Sony Classical recording of cello concertos by Barber and Britten with soloist Yo-Yo Ma. This marks the beginning of the BSO’s Grammy Award-winning status, as the Orchestra goes on to earn Grammy Awards and nominations for many future recordings.

1994 - From October 22 to November 18, cellist Yo-Yo Ma and violinist Anne Akiko Meyers, join David Zinman and the BSO for an 18-performance tour of 13 cities in Korea, Taiwan and Japan.

1996 - David Zinman resigns after a 13-year tenure (1985-98) as music director of the Baltimore Symphony.

1997 - Yuri Temirkanov is appointed the BSO’s 11th music director.

2000s

2000 - On January 20th, Yuri Temirkanov leads his inaugural concerts as music director. The program included Mahler’s Second Symphony, “Resurrection.”

2001– Under Yuri Temirkanov, the BSO embarks on a European Tour, accompanied by Maryland Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend and a 20-member trade delegation to enhance exchange opportunities in the areas of business and economic development, higher education and trade. A third tour to Japan followed in 2002 and the BSO returned to Europe in 2005.

2005 - On February 5, Yuri Temirkanov leads the BSO, cellist Yo-Yo Ma and soprano Janice Chandler-Etemé in the opening concert at the new Music Center at Strathmore, the orchestra’s second home in Bethesda, Maryland. The BSO becomes the nation’s first major orchestra with year-round venues in two metropolitan areas.

2005 – In July, Marin Alsop is appointed as the BSO’s 12th music director. She becomes the first woman in history to head a major American orchestra.

2006 - In June, BSO Music Director-designate Marin Alsop and violinist Joshua Bell, record for Sony Classical a BSO co-commission, *The Red Violin*, based on John Corigliano’s Academy Award-winning score from the film of the same name.

In October, Paul Meecham joins the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra as President and CEO.



2007 – In September, the BSO makes history when Marin Alsop conducts her inaugural concerts as the orchestra's 12th music director.

BSO announces that all subscription tickets in Maestra Alsop's inaugural season are available for just \$25, thanks to a \$1 million gift from PNC Bank.

2008 - The orchestra's year-round after school music and life enrichment program OrchKids, modeled after Venezuela's El Sistema, is launched under the founding leadership of Marin Alsop.

The BSO makes two appearances at Carnegie Hall, the second in October performing Bernstein's *Mass*.

2009 - The orchestra announces an unprecedented fundraising campaign on April 29. The \$2M initiative, called Music Matters, is spurred by the BSO musicians, who voluntarily donate \$1 million back to the organization through wage freezes and other means.

On August 25, the BSO and Marin Alsop release their recording of Bernstein's *Mass: A Theatre Piece* for Singers, Players and Dancers on the Naxos label; it is also nominated for a Grammy Award.

2010s

2010 - In March, following several months of negotiations during the global economic downturn, the orchestra announces a successful new labor agreement with its musicians, which maintains the BSO as one of only 17 full-time orchestras in America.

In June, the BSO hosts the inaugural BSO Academy, supported by the Mellon Foundation, which invited amateur musicians to practice and perform with the BSO for a week-long, summer camp immersive experience.

2012 - The BSO absorbs the Greater Baltimore Youth Orchestras and renames these youth ensembles the Baltimore Symphony Youth Orchestras.

2015 - In February, the BSO celebrates its 10th Anniversary at its second home, The Music Center at Strathmore in Bethesda, Maryland.

The Baltimore Symphony Orchestra thanks Judith Krummeck, Michael Lisicky and the Maryland State Archives for their assistance in compiling the BSO's historical timeline.

