

SHOWCASE | MAY / JUNE 2022



from the editor

The Star Tribune's front page for October 12, 2000, documents a different era, recapping the previous night's debate between Vice President Al Gore and Texas Governor George W. Bush, as well as the Minnesota Wild's first-ever home game. That day, the emerging terrorist group al-Qaeda bombed the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen. Audiences in Orchestra Hall that night didn't know they were witnessing the start of a new era for classical music in Minnesota, as Osmo Vänskä first appeared as a guest conductor with the Minnesota Orchestra. Vänskä was soon named music director designate, started his post in fall 2003 and has since became one of the Orchestra's most beloved and consequential figures.

While some elements of Vänskä's tenure were predictable—such as the championing of Jean Sibelius' music and an emphasis on recording, as he had done to acclaim with Finland's Lahti Symphony-others couldn't have been anticipated. The Orchestra drew international headlines for its 2015 tour to Cuba and 2018 visit to South Africa and, sadly, for a 16-month lockout that brought about Vänskä's resignation and reinstatement. The ensemble earned its first Grammy and, with ingenuity and new initiatives, survived the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As Vänskä leads his final concerts in June before completing his tenure, his legacy comes into focus, and the curtain rises on the Orchestra's next era. Bravo, maestrowe look forward to seeing you visit the podium for many years to come!

Carl Schroeder

Carl Schroeder, Editor editor@mnorch.org

about the cover

Osmo Vänskä-who in June conducts his last full concert with the Minnesota Orchestra in his record-tying 19 years as music directoris shown on this issue's cover leading last September's season opening concert. At the front of the violins is Concertmaster Erin Keefe, who is featured in June as soloist in a Mendelssohn double concerto alongside pianist Juho Pohjonen. Photo: Tony Nelson

profile Osmo Vänskä, music director

innish conductor Osmo Vänskä, the Minnesota Orchestra's tenth music director, is renowned internationally for his compelling interpretations of the standard, contemporary and Nordic repertoires. Throughout the 2021-22 season, as Vänskä's 19-year leadership tenure comes to a close. the Orchestra is celebrating his lasting impact through performances of Sibelius symphonies and other signature repertoire, reconnections with favorite guest soloists and the continuation of a project to perform and record all ten Mahler symphonies.

Vänskä has led the Orchestra on five major European tours, as well as a 2018 visit to London's BBC Proms, and on historic tours to Cuba in 2015 and South Africa in 2018. He has also led the Orchestra in appearances at New York's Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center, Chicago's Symphony Center and community venues across Minnesota.

Vänskä's recording projects with the Orchestra have met with great success, including a Sibelius symphonies cycle, one album of which won the 2014 Grammy Award for Best Orchestral Performance. In February 2021 BIS released the Orchestra's newest album, featuring Mahler's Tenth Symphony—part of a Mahler series that includes a Grammynominated Fifth Symphony recording. Other recent releases include an album of in-concert recordings of Sibelius' Kullervo and Finlandia and Kortekangas' Migrations; albums of Beethoven and Tchaikovsky piano concertos with Yevgeny Sudbin and Stephen Hough, respectively; To Be Certain of the Dawn, composed by Stephen Paulus with libretto by Michael Dennis Browne; and a particularly widely-praised Beethoven symphonies cycle.

As a guest conductor, Vänskä has received extraordinary praise for his work with many of the world's leading orchestras, including the Boston and Chicago symphony orchestras, Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Vienna Symphony, Hong Kong Philharmonic and Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra. In January 2020 he became music director of



the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra. In 2014 he became the Iceland Symphony Orchestra's principal guest conductor; since then he has been named the ensemble's honorary conductor. He is also conductor laureate of the Lahti Symphony Orchestra, which, during two decades as music director, he transformed into one of Finland's flagship orchestras.

Vänskä began his music career as a clarinetist, holding major posts with the Helsinki Philharmonic and the Turku Philharmonic. Since taking up the instrument again for Sommerfest 2005 he has performed as clarinetist at Orchestra Hall, other Twin Cities venues, the Grand Teton Festival, the Mostly Mozart Festival, La Jolla Summerfest, the Seattle Chamber Music Festival, and several festivals in Finland. He has recorded Bernhard Henrik Crusell's three Clarinet Quartets and Kalevi Aho's Clarinet Quintet for the BIS label and is in the process of recording several duos for clarinet and violin which he has commissioned with his wife, violinist Erin Keefe.

During the 2021-22 season he is scheduled to conduct ensembles including the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic. Pittsburgh Symphony, Orchestra Orchestre National de Lyon, Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra and Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra. In addition, he will be in residence at the Curtis Institute, where he will work with conducting fellows across a fourmonth span. For more information, visit minnesotaorchestra.org.

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echoes of Cuba

Mid-May marks the seventh anniversary of a signature achievement in the Minnesota Orchestra tenure of Music Director Osmo Vänskä: the 2015 tour to Havana, Cuba, in which the ensemble was the first U.S. orchestra to visit the island nation after the warming of diplomatic relations. The tour made international headlines, and its effects are still ongoing today. Perhaps most notably, the tour inspired the creation of the Cuban American Youth Orchestra (CAYO), a national organization headquartered in Minneapolis whose mission is to promote cultural diplomacy through collaboration, performance, and education of young American and Cuban musicians.

CAYO, the Minnesota Orchestra and its musicians are undertaking a number of collaborations and exchanges during May, spanning from Minneapolis to Havana. To start the month, a chamber ensemble of Cuban and Minnesota-based student musicians will rehearse together, present in Twin Cities schools, play at MetroNOME Brewery, and perform at the Orchestra's Symphony Ball, in a portion of the program that reflects on Vänskä's legacy of touring.

The international exchange continues from May 23 to 28 in Cuba, as Minnesota Orchestra musicians Julie Gramolini Williams, Milana Elise Reiche, David Williamson and Timothy Zavadil, along with CAYO Executive Director Rena Kraut and Harlem Ouartet violinist Ilmar Gavilán. will spend a week in Havana, bringing musical supplies, teaching in secondary schools, and collaborating with local Cuban professional musicians. These activities are part of CAYO's Arts Delegations trips to Cuba for those interested in an inside look at creative collaboration with an emphasis on people-to-people interaction. CAYO's work—and other ripple effects of the Minnesota Orchestra's Cuba tour—are sure to continue for years to come; learn more at cayomusic.org.

a salute to Osmo Vänskä

This June, a remarkable era in the Minnesota Orchestra's history comes to a close, when Osmo Vänskä conducts the final performances of his 19-year tenure as the ensemble's music director. To mark the occasion, we've invited a cross-section of Orchestra musicians, staff and board members to share their favorite memories of the tenure and reflect on the legacy Osmo will leave in Minnesota for the years ahead.



"Of the many, many memories I have of Osmo's time with the Orchestra, the three that are most potent for me are the silence after our concert in Ted Mann Concert Hall, the jubilation of the National Anthems in Cuba, and the deafening joy in Soweto, South Africa. Each highlights the true power of music, and each happened largely thanks to Osmo. Thank you for challenging us to be better every time you've taken the podium and for leading us to ever greater heights over these past 19 years. I wish you much luck and continued success in all that you do!"

-R. Douglas Wright, principal trombone

"Osmo will be remembered not only for his deep respect for the musicians of our enormously talented Orchestra, but also for his willingness to get everyone out of their comfort zones and try new things."

-Joseph T. Green, Board chair

"One of Osmo's underrated talents has always been the way that he transfers his enthusiasm for particular composers and works directly to the audience. Watching him conduct is a visceral experience, and his intensity on the podium is both a magnet for the audience's eyes and a mirror of the Orchestra's collective intensity. You can never come away from an Osmo Vänskä concert with any doubt about how hard everyone on stage is working to convey the emotional content of the music."

-Sam Bergman, viola

"The relationship with BIS recordings will be an enduring legacy of Maestro Vänskä that will be spoken of for many years to come. This Orchestra grew tremendously making those recordings. The tours come next, as they were important and helped shape the way orchestras in the U.S. think about touring and how our goals have changed to the good."

-Manny Laureano, principal trumpet

news

Minnesota Orchestra

"When I was serving as concertmaster of the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra, a community orchestra in the Twin Cities, I asked Osmo if he would participate in conducting the Symphony in an outreach side-by-side service with a Bloomington youth orchestra. He was very gracious and accepted the invitation—despite turning down work with the San Francisco Symphony. Imagine how thrilled all involved were to have Osmo as their conductor! Osmo has always been dedicated to community outreach, working with young performers, and holding fast to his commitments. I have always appreciated his selfless focus on making music and sharing it with others!"

—Milana Elise Reiche, violin

"I'll always remember an evening of ABBA music, and Osmo in full festive attire! Bring out the white tuxedo again!"

—Helen Chang Haertzen, violin

"I will always remember the first European tour with our final stop at Sibelius Hall in Lahti, Finland. The tour schedule had been relentless and the timing for the last leg was tight. We boarded the plane in Glasgow, Scotland, and the plane announced a delay that lasted a couple of hours. We landed in Helsinki with snow falling and we were quite delayed. Buses arrived in Lahti, stage crew swiftly set-up; musicians quickly grabbed a bite to eat while changing into concert attire; Osmo was swept away for some quick media interviews and to get ready. In the whirlwind, I took my seat with a huge exhale and listened to one of the most memorable concerts by Osmo and the Orchestra—it was a magical moment to be there, and it set the tone for what Osmo had in store for all of us. Osmo's legacy will be one of deep commitment to the Minnesota Orchestra family and audiences."

—Michael Pelton, artistic planning manager and executive assistant to the music director



Vänskä and leaders from the Orchestra and community unveiling the Orchestra's first Grammy Award for Best Orchestral Performance in September 2014.



Osmo Vänskä working with composer Missy Mazzoli in advance of the first Future Classics concert in December 2006.



Vänskä leading a rehearsal at the Regina Mundi Church in Soweto, South Africa, in August 2018.



Vänskä making an appearance on the Orchestra's pops series in March 2006, leading a program of the music of ABBA with guest ensemble Rajaton while wearing a suit custom-designed for the occasion by Mark Caligiuri.



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Osmo Vänskä: Finishing a Legacy

by Michael Anthony

ears from now, what will we remember best—and most fondly-about the Vänskä Era, the 19 years beginning in 2003 that Osmo Vänskä served as music director of the Minnesota Orchestra?

There are many potential answers to this question, because this has been a time of high accomplishment for this Orchestra and its conductor, who rather quickly developed a special chemistry together—the result of which has surely been the most successful collaboration in the Orchestra's 119-year history.

Besides the individual performances, it might be the tours—five trips to Europe plus the high-profile visits to Cuba and South Africa. Or the much-praised recordings on the Swedish BIS label, among them the complete sets of symphonies by Beethoven, Sibelius and (soonto-be-completed) Mahler, released at a time when most American orchestras go unrecorded. Or it could be the awards that continued to pile up, most recently, Gramophone magazine's Orchestra of the Year 2021 award.

For me, one memory stands out, more poignant perhaps than celebratory, but offering a clear picture of the affection that audiences here have come to feel for this Finnish conductor, who has said more than once, "A concert is a holy thing for me." The occasion was a Friday night in October 2013, the first of three concerts the Orchestra's musicians played with Osmo that weekend at Ted Mann Concert Hall with the pianist Emanuel Ax as soloist.

The mood of the evening couldn't have been more tense. The lockout of the Orchestra's musicians was entering its 13th month, and Osmo had resigned three days earlier after the Orchestra's scheduled concerts at Carnegie Hall were cancelled due to the contract dispute. The concerts at Ted Mann, put together and financed by the musicians themselves, were billed as Osmo's farewell. They were sold out.

Shortly after 8 p.m., the lights dimmed, Osmo walked onstage, and the audience exploded in applause, offering the first of several standing ovations that occurred that night. To start out, Osmo led the Orchestra's musicians through the national anthem and then turned to Beethoven's Egmont Overture. The musicians played impeccably and with furious energy.

Wearing his trademark dark suit with a mandarin collar, Osmo was a whirling dervish at the podium, leaping and gesturing frantically, in his customary manner, with swooping thrusts, occasionally dropping almost to the floor in what has come to be known as the "Vänskä crouch."

Osmo returned to the stage after intermission, and as the applause faded, someone shouted from the back of the hall, "We love you, Osmo." The crowd exploded again. Osmo looked out and smiled faintly. He then turned away as if trying to compose himself, then turned back and nodded his thanks. Later, there was another standing ovation after the musicians played Stravinsky's Firebird Suite, and that's when Osmo took the microphone and spoke.

"Thank you very much," he said. "This might be the last time I have the chance to conduct this great Orchestra. I don't know what to say except that I am going to miss you all very, very much."

As the final notes of the encore, Sibelius' Valse Triste, faded, Osmo and the musicians left the stage in silence, and the subdued crowd filed out of the hall. In the lobby, many people were in tears.

Some five months later, on the evening of March 28, the mood at Orchestra Hall was jubilant. No more tears. The musicians had signed a contract at the end of January, and Osmo was making his official return to the podium he had last visited in June 2012, but this time as a guest conductor. Finnish flags, including a full-size one draped over a balcony rail, were everywhere. As the concert was about to start, someone shouted, "Osmo, come home," which touched off nearly five minutes of applause. And, yes, he did officially come home. He signed a contract a month later that reinstated him as music director.

It seems odd to realize now that all this might have gone in a different direction. As a guest conductor Osmo had made a stunning debut with this Orchestra in October of 2000 at a time when the Orchestra was seeking a replacement for its ninth music director, Eiji Oue. (Though hardly anyone had a recollection of it, Osmo actually made his Twin Cities debut, not as a conductor but as a clarinetist, back in 1993 in a concert at the University of Minnesota as part of a chamber





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ensemble drawn from Finland's Lahti Symphony, of which he was principal conductor.) His all-Finnish program in 2000 included the world premiere of a fresh and vital harp concerto by Einojuhani Rautavaara, Finland's most honored living composer, with Principal Harp Kathy Kienzle as soloist, and two works by Sibelius: the Symphony No. 6 and, in a sublime performance, the Violin Concerto with Joshua Bell. This was a startling new view of Sibelius, one that could be heard on Osmo's celebrated recordings with the Lahti Symphony and nowhere else: unsentimental and anti-Romantic, with crisp attacks and detailed precision.

Rather quickly, Osmo's name went on the search committee's short list, alongside that of Roberto Abbado and Yakov Kreizberg. Some wondered: he had conducted just one program here. Was that enough to assess him? As the committee began to focus more and more on Osmo, the members flew to hear him in other cities, and they listened to experts like the veteran music critic from Washington. D.C., Richard Freed, a long-time Vänskä watcher. "Osmo's the most interesting conductor alive today," said Freed in 2001. "Every orchestra's after him. He has what all Finnish conductors seem to have: the ability to release his musicians from whatever they imagine their limitations to be."

In the spring of 2001, the details of the contract agreed upon with Osmo's management and the Board of the Minnesota Orchestra having made its final vote, the offer to become the Orchestra's 10th music director of was finally put to him by phone in Finland. Osmo heard the offer, said yes and then burst into tears.

Why was this union such a success? Partly it was that Osmo was the right man at the right time. The perpetually sunny Oue hadn't been demanding enough, and the result was an orchestra hungry to show what it could do. So here was Vänskä, almost the opposite of Oue, a conductor of depth with an insatiable appetite for rehearsal whose philosophy was "verk, verk, verk," words that soon became a slogan at Orchestra Hall.

Not only that, Osmo liked Minnesota. It reminded him of Finland. And right away, he did two things that music directors don't normally do in their first year: He took the orchestra to Europe and he launched an ambitious recording project—the Beethoven symphonies—that got sensational reviews. Faced with such immediate challenges, Orchestra and conductor did what they had to do: they bonded. The Finns have a word for it, "sisu," the determination to do what has to be done.

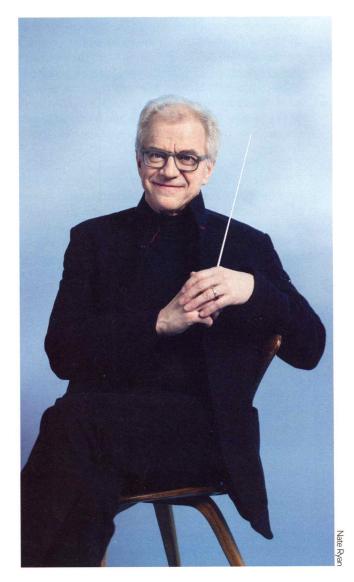
Though he is at the top of his game, Osmo remains—and will always be—a reluctant star. His biggest influence,

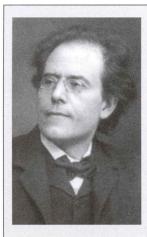
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he has said, is his fellow Finn, the late Paavo Berglund. And, he added, "I would even say some kind of idol as far as how to be a conductor. Paavo did his job without compromises, and he used every bit of rehearsal time. He was a great conductor, but he didn't want to be a star. Actually, he hated this star culture we have now. He just wanted to do music."

And so it is with Osmo. His years here have been golden. We all wish him well.

Michael Anthony served as music critic of the Star Tribune from 1971 to 2007, writing about a wide range of music: rock and jazz to classical and opera. The author of the biography Osmo Vänskä: Orchestra Builder, published in 2009, he has written for numerous publications ranging from The New York Times to the Los Angeles Times to Opera News, and contributes often to MinnPost.





Gustav Mahler

Born: July 17, 1860,

Kalischt, Bohemia

Died: May 18, 1911,

Vienna, Austria

Symphony No. 8 in E-flat major, Symphony of a Thousand

Premiering: September 12, 1910

uring the decade that Gustav Mahler was director of the Vienna Court Opera, only the summer holidays were free to him for composing. Of all his symphonies, none was created more swiftly than the gigantic Eighth, written in a spirit of exultation and assurance in the span of a mere eight weeks. Because of the mass of singers and enlarged orchestra it demands, it is known as the *Symphony of a Thousand*—a title Mahler disliked but was used to publicize the work's premiere. Completing his draft of the score on August 18, 1906, Mahler jubilantly addressed the conductor Wilhelm Mengelberg: "I have just finished my Eighth! It is the biggest thing I have done so far. And so individual in its content and form that I cannot describe it in words. Imagine that the whole universe begins to vibrate and resound. These are no longer human voices, but planets and suns resolving..."

Indeed, the voices of the Symphony No. 8 seem to transcend their humanity, for Mahler puts them to work as if they were instruments. Voices and orchestra are so interwoven, sharing equally in the sublime musical ideas, that the work is no mere symphony with singing, but a genuine marriage of vocal and instrumental sonorities. Why such monumental forces? Perhaps to match the scale of the thought, which expresses not only the hope for all mankind for redemption, but of the artist for the breath of inspiration.

"my greatest work"

In 1906, as soon as Mahler had unpacked his bags at Maiernigg, on the shores of the beautiful Carinthian lake known as the Wörthersee, he was tormented by a fortnight of despairing idleness. His wife recalled that "he was haunted by the spectre of failing inspiration." One morning, just as he entered the little lakeside cottage where he tried to work (sparsely furnished, with only a piano and the collected works of Kant and Goethe), the exalted idea of the ancient Latin hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* (Come, Creator Spirit), took hold of him and—in his own words—"shook me and drove me on for the next eight weeks until my greatest work was done." Recalling how quickly the work evolved, he noted in a letter to his wife Alma: "In art as in life I am at the mercy of spontaneity. If I had to compose, not a note would come."

While the impresario Emil Gutmann was making preparations for the premiere of the Eighth Symphony in Munich on December 12, 1910, Mahler was busy conducting in America; in his absence, Bruno Walter was charged with the preliminary rehearsals, though Mahler returned in time to lead the forces of just over a thousand participants in the final rehearsals. Walter has left a vivid account of that week:

"Those were great days for us who were privileged to attend the rehearsals of the Eighth. The immense apparatus obeyed with devotion the master's effortless direction. All performers were in a state of solemn exaltation, and this was true, above all, of the children, whose hearts he had captured from the beginning. It was a great moment when, greeted by the thousands who filled the giant exhibition hall, he took his place facing the thousand performers—at the zenith of his life and yet marked for an early death—when his music invoked the creator spiritus by whose fires it had been generated within him, and when from all lips burst forth the yearning call of his life....

"When the last note of the performance had died away and the waves of enthusiastic applause reached him, Mahler ascended the steps of the platform, at the top of which the children's choir was posted. The little ones hailed him with shouts of jubilation and,

one-minute notes

Mahler: Symphony No. 8, Symphony of a Thousand

In Mahler's Eighth Symphony, a massive force of voices and orchestra are so interwoven, sharing equally in the sublime musical ideas, that the work is no mere symphony with singing, but a genuine marriage of vocal and instrumental sonorities. This mystical and stirring work, of which Mahler led the premiere performance only eight months before his death, brings together a medieval hymn (molded into an immense sonata structure) and the final scene of Goethe's verse drama, *Faust*.

walking down the line, he pressed every one of the little hands that were extended towards him....At the performance itself he seemed to be at the height of his power—the uplifting of his soul once more had given back to the tired heart its onetime vigor. But it was the last performance of one of his creations that he himself conducted."

Eight months later, Mahler was gone, leaving a mystical and stirring work that brings together a medieval hymn (molded into an immense sonata structure) and the final scene of Goethe's verse drama, *Faust*. Only Mahler would have dared such a conception for a choral symphony.

the music: playing by its own rules

hymnus: veni, creator spiritus. Like Mahler's other symphonies, the Eighth proceeds according to its own rules. A massive chord resounding from the organ heralds the tumultuous cry of the two choruses, *Veni*, *veni*, *creator spiritus*, a march-like theme that functions as the principal subject of the 25-minute sonata movement. A contrasting theme, a sweetly expressive setting of the third and fourth line as the poet begs for grace, is given to the soprano. The development gets under way in an orchestral interlude marked by the tolling of bells. In its course, the main theme is transformed into a striking new cry (beginning with the word *Accende*—"Kindle the light of our understanding"), and its summit is crowned with the double fugue based on the original theme. Additional brass are summoned for the gleaming coda. "No other work of Mahler," observed Walter, "is so saturated with the spirit of fervent affirmation."

final scene from Faust. Of all the composers who drew inspiration from Goethe's drama *Faust*—and the ranks include, among others, Berlioz, Liszt, Schumann and Gounod—none may have more closely paralleled the poet's intention than Mahler. He restricts himself entirely to the closing scene of Part II, Faust's triumphant redemption, a scene unmanageable on the stage, which Goethe never intended anyhow. The original choruses and solos are given perfect realization by Mahler, and though the sections vaguely trace the slow movement, scherzo and finale of a more traditional symphony, the unorthodox structure emanates from the flow of the poetry itself.

The final scene traces Faust's journey to heaven, and his course to salvation counterbalances the supplication of the opening hymn to the Spirit. The setting is a mountainous landscape where, on different levels, hermits have built their cells, each symbolizing a level of perfection. Faust's remains are borne by angels who affirm the central thesis of the drama, "Whoever strives with all hist power, we are allowed to save." He is welcomed by one of the penitents, Gretchen, who loved him on earth and now, in eternity, has been transfigured into one of the wise. The blessed

boys announce that Faust's mission in heaven is to instruct those whose lives on earth were terminated before they could range through all the human experiences he has known. Finally, the Mater Gloriosa, symbol of the enthroned Virgin, ushers Faust into eternal happiness.

Instrumentation: 8 solo voices, double chorus and children's choir with orchestra comprising 5 flutes (1 doubling piccolo),
4 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 4 bassoons, contrabassoon, 8 horns, 8 trumpets (4 offstage), 7 trombones (3 offstage), tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tamtam, triangle, glockenspiel, chimes, 2 large bells, 2 harps, piano, celesta, organ, harmonium, mandolin and strings

Program note by Mary Ann Feldman.



The first American performance of Mahler's *Symphony of a Thousand* was given on March 2, 1916, by the Philadelphia Orchestra, choir and soloists under the direction of Leopold Stokowski. The Philadelphia Orchestra was later led from 1936 to 1980 by its longest-tenured music director Eugene Ormandy, who had been the Minnesota Orchestra's music director from 1931 to 1936 when it was known as the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra.