



BY ROBIN ANDERS



The Philadelphia Sound

The innovative and iconic Philadelphia Orchestra celebrates its 112th season.

At 38 years old, Yannick Nézet-Séguin has been hailed by the media as a young, up-and-coming superstar. But according to Katherine Blodgett, vice president of public relations and communications

for the Philadelphia Orchestra, the label “up and coming” doesn’t quite sound the right note. “He may be young, but he’s actually quite a seasoned conductor,” she says.

Nézet-Séguin’s list of accolades includes music director of the Rotterdam Philharmonic, principal guest conductor of the London Philharmonic, and artistic director and principal conductor of Montreal’s Orchestre Métropolitain. And in September of this year, Nézet-Séguin’s title will officially change from director designate at The Philadelphia Orchestra to director. Nézet-Séguin will be just the eighth conductor in the group’s 112-year history.

“In his past two years as director designate, Yanic has been selling out concerts,” Blodgett says. “He brings a passion and an energy to the

concert hall that people feel, and he really connects with his audiences and our musicians.”

Symphony 5.0

This month, The Philadelphia Orchestra will celebrate its future and honor its past with The Stokowski Celebration, a series that highlights the parallels between Nézet-Séguin and Leopold Stokowski, the Orchestra’s third director who assumed his position 100 years ago, in 1912.

Nézet-Séguin’s innovative approach echoes Stokowski’s legacy. “Back in 1912, Stokowski was ahead of the curve,” says Blodgett, adding that Stokowski launched The Philadelphia Orchestra’s reputation as an orchestra of firsts (see “First Chair” sidebar, page 108). “Under his leadership, we were the first orchestra to make an electronic recording. We were the first [to do a] live radio broadcast, and the first to partner with Disney to produce an animated film.”

“It is so moving for me to realize that 100 years ago Leopold Stokowski became the musical director of the orchestra,” says Nézet-Séguin. “Today, by being daring, by wanting to expand the repertoire of the orchestra, having more collaboration with different groups, and adding more visual aspects in our concerts, I am paying tribute to our very own past.”



Conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and, left, applause for the Philadelphia Orchestra

The Stokowski Celebration will introduce Symphony 5.0, which Vice President of Marketing Janice Hay describes as a theatrical experience. “Stokowski was known for painting the orchestra shell a different color,” Hay says. “We’re taking that spirit to heart through a light installation in the concert hall. Performances

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will also incorporate vintage images and footage of Stokowski.”

The celebration will also include a Saturday morning family concert of *Fantasia*, the famous collaboration between Stokowski, the orchestra, and Disney. “We’ll project the film on a big screen while the orchestra plays the soundtrack live,” Hay says.

First Chair

The Philadelphia Orchestra has a reputation for being an orchestra of “firsts.” Here are just a few of the Orchestra’s leading roles:

1916 Leopold Stokowski and The Philadelphia Orchestra make music history by presenting the American premiere of Mahler’s *Eighth Symphony* (“Symphony of a Thousand”).

1925 Stokowski and The Philadelphia Orchestra become pioneers in electrical recording, supplanting the previous acoustical method and becoming the first orchestra recorded electrically.

1939 The Philadelphia Orchestra makes movie history by playing the soundtrack to Disney’s innovative animated film *Fantasia*.

1948 The Philadelphia Orchestra is the first orchestra to appear on nationwide television on CBS, edging out Arturo Toscanini and the NBC Symphony by 90 minutes.

1973 The Philadelphia Orchestra becomes the first American orchestra to perform in the People’s Republic of China.

1997 The Philadelphia Orchestra becomes the first major American orchestra to give a live cybercast of a concert on the internet; people from more than 40 nations log on to hear the concert as the Orchestra introduces its website, philorch.org.

2007 The Philadelphia Orchestra becomes the first major orchestra to multi-cast a concert to large-screen venues through the Internet2 network.



The Philadelphia Sound

Many of the big orchestras around the world are known for a certain sound, says Blodgett. “For example, when you say the Chicago Orchestra, people think ‘brass.’ The Philadelphia Orchestra is known for its string sound.”

Blodgett doesn’t claim to be a trained musician — as a child, she never heard the orchestra live. “I only heard recordings — The Philadelphia Orchestra recorded tons and tons of records in the ’60s — but I knew them for that distinct sound.” Many fans came to know the orchestra in the same way that Blodgett did: by listening to their records as children. “In 1962, The Philadelphia Orchestra produced a best-selling album called *The Glorious Sounds of Christmas*. Everywhere we go, people tell us they grew up with that album.”

Perhaps surprisingly, The Philadelphia Orchestra is especially popular in



China. “If you say Philadelphia to someone in China, the first thing they say is The Philadelphia Orchestra — not the Liberty Bell,” Blodgett says. “We were the first American orchestra invited to go into China after [President] Richard Nixon helped open diplomatic relations in 1973.”

This month, the orchestra will return to China for a 10-day tour. The trip is part of a larger residency where the orchestra will work with music students and participate in community outreach. After they leave Shanghai, the orchestra will continue on to San Francisco. Other stops on their summer schedule include Vail, Colorado, and Sarasota Springs, New York.

No Place Like Home

Most of the orchestra’s hometown performances take place in Verizon Hall, the 2,500-seat concert space at the Kimmel Center in the heart of Philadelphia. But it also performs at the Academy of Music, the oldest grand opera house in the United States still used for its original purpose, and the Mann Center for the

Take the Sound All Around program, designed for children ages 3 to 5. Through the program, children listen to stories with music, sing songs, move to the music, and examine instruments up close.

Performing Arts, home of the orchestra’s summer concert series.

And if Philadelphia residents think they hear the sound of strings floating into their living room this summer, they may be right. Since 2000, the orchestra has been performing free outdoor concerts in neighborhoods around the Philadelphia region. “It’s part of our Free Neighborhood Concert Series,” Blodgett says. “The program also includes small-ensemble community concerts, visits to schools, and volunteer work in a neighborhood where the orchestra has the potential to make a significant contribution to the revitalization of the community.”



Clockwise from left, caption info t/k in China, children experience the Sound All Around program, getting up close with musicians and instruments and the Mann Center for Performing Arts

Blodgett says the orchestra wants to reach out to its youngest listeners. Take the Sound All Around program, designed for children ages 3 to 5. Through the program, children listen to stories with music, sing songs, move to the music, pretend to play an instrument, and examine real

instruments up close. Each concert introduces children to a member of the string, woodwind, brass, or percussion family, and the final concert features all of the musicians from the season playing together in an ensemble.

Educational outreach continues through secondary education, as well. For \$25 a year, college students can attend an unlimited number of concerts for the entire season. “We have about 2,000 college student subscribers,” says Blodgett. “It’s a great opportunity for us to encourage them to stay connected with the orchestra.” The program is called “eZseatU,” and it gives students access to exclusive events like post-concert College Night parties.

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A Lasting Legacy

Education and outreach are vital to the long-term sustainability and continued success of The Philadelphia Orchestra, Blodgett says. “National research shows that when people play an instrument as a child, they remember that experience and come back to music many years later.”

In fact, Nézet-Séguin’s childhood love of music fostered an instant connection between him and the orchestra’s members.

“Yannick told the orchestra a story about when he was a child, and his parents had an album of The Philadelphia Orchestra,” says Blodgett. “On the cover of the album was a picture of the ceiling of the Academy of Music. Yannick remembered listening to a particular Stokowski piece and looking at that album. And now, many years later, he was standing in the orchestra about to conduct that same piece.” It was a magical moment both for the orchestra and Yannick, she says. “We invited him back the following season, of course.”

That intense appreciation for the music one cherished as a child also helps explain the strong ties between The Philadelphia Orchestra and its fans — both in the United States and abroad.

Conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and, right, at home at the Kimmel Center



2012 – 2013 Guest Artists

TOP ROW: Joshua Bell, Lang Lang and Barbara Hannigan
MIDDLE ROW: Hilary Hahn, Simon Rattle and Gil Shaham
BOTTOM ROW: André Watts, Rolando Villazon and Renée Fleming

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