

Kent Nagano  
Conductor

Kent Nagano is considered one of today’s outstanding conductors for both operatic and orchestral repertoire. Since September 2015, he has been General Music Director of the Hamburg State Opera and Chief Conductor of the Philharmonic State Orchestra Hamburg. In addition, he is committed as Artistic Director of the Ring project with Concerto Köln and the Dresden Festival Orchestra, and as patron of the Herrenchiemsee Festival. 2023 he was appointed Honorary Conductor of the Philharmonic State Orchestra, in 2021 of the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, in 2019 of the Concerto Köln, and in 2006 of the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin.

The 2023/2024 season in Hamburg begins with four concerts, performing with the Philharmonische Akademie at the Laeiszhalle, then with the Philharmonic State Orchestra at the Rathausmarkt Open Air and the Elbphilharmonie. This will be followed by a series of opera productions at the State Opera in September and October, with a premiere of Mussorgski’s Boris Godunow in a production by Frank Castorf and a premiere of Strauss’s Salome in a production by Dmitri Tcherniakov, as well as performances of Sciarrino’s Venere e Adone and Britten’s Peter Grimes. Furthermore, during the season Nagano will conduct symphonic concerts with the Philharmonic State Orchestra, including the New Year’s performance at the Elbphilharmonie.

His past years in Hamburg include opera productions such as Les Troyens, Lulu, Lady Macbeth von Mzensk, the world premiere of Stilles Meer and German premiere of Lessons in Love and Violence, the "Philharmonische Akademie" at St. Michaelis, open-air concerts at the Rathausmarkt and the world premiere of Pascal Dusapin's work Waves for organ and orchestra at the Elbphilharmonie. Orchestral tours with the Philharmonisches Staatsorchester Hamburg have taken Kent Nagano to Japan, Spain and South America.

Kent Nagano has worked with the world's leading international orchestras, including the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestre Philharmonique Radio France, the Orchestre de l’Opéra national in Paris, the Chicago and Detroit Symphony Orchestra, the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the Wiener Symphoniker. Special projects were productions of Wagner's Das Rheingold with Concerto Köln and the Bernstein opera A quiet place at the Paris Opera. His operatic work has included Dusapin‘s Il viaggio, Dante at the Festival d‘Aix-en-Provence, Hindemith's Cardillac and Poulenc's Dialogues des Carmélites at the Opéra National de Paris and Henze’s The Bassarids and the premiere of Saariaho's L’amour de loin at the Salzburg Festival. Other world premieres conducted by Nagano include Bernstein's A White House Cantata and the operas Alice in Wonderland by Unsuk Chin, Three Sisters by Peter Eötvös and The Death of Klinghoffer and El Niño by John Adams.

The 2023/24 season will see Kent Nagano make a wide variety of appearances at the Rosey Concert Hall in Rolle, the Konzerthaus Bozen, the Maison symphonique in Montréal, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Tonhalle in Zurich, the Philharmonie in Berlin, the Konzerthalle in Bamberg and the Kulturpalast in Dresden. In addition, he will conduct the Orchestre de l'Opera de Lyon and lead a new production of Ligeti’s Le Grand Macabre by Krzysztof Warlikowski at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich.

Under the artistic direction of Kent Nagano and the Intendant of the Dresdner Musikfestspiele Jan Vogler, Wagner's "Ring Tetralogy" will be performed in the artistic context of the period in which it was composed, based on the latest findings of research into Wagner and performance practice, and integrated into an extensive supporting program as part of the multi-year project "The Wagner Cycles" of the Dresdner Musikfestspiele from 2023 to 2026. The prelude was the performance of "Das Rheingold" at the Dresden Music Festival in 2023 and the tour to Cologne, Ravello and Lucerne under the musical direction of Kent Nagano. With "Die Walküre," the second work in the epochal narrative will follow in 2024.

Highlights of Kent Nagano's collaboration with the OSM as Music Director from 2006 to 2020 included the inauguration of the orchestra’s new concert hall La Maison Symphonique in September 2011, performances of the complete cycles of Beethoven and Mahler symphonies, Schoenberg's Gurrelieder, concert versions of Wagner's Tannhäuser, Tristan und Isolde and Das Rheingold, Honegger's Jeanne d'Arc au Bücher, and Messiaen's Saint François d'Assise. Tours have taken Nagano and the orchestra to Canada including the Northern Territories, Japan, South Korea, Europe (latest 2019), Latin America and the USA. In July 2018, Kent Nagano conducted Krzysztof Penderecki’s St. Luke Passion with the OSM at the Salzburg Festival opening concert.

His recordings with the OSM on Sony Classical/Analekta include Mahler’s Orchestral Songs with Christian Gerhaher in 2013 and a complete recording of all of Beethoven’s symphonies in 2015. Decca released a recording of the North American premiere of L'Aiglon, a rarely performed opera by Honegger and Ibert in 2016, conducted by Nagano in 2015. Further releases by Decca are Danse Macabre with works by Dukas, Saint-Saens, Ives and others in 2016 as well as a recording of Bernstein's A quiet place in 2018 on the occasion of the composer's 100th birthday. John Adams' Common tones in simple time & harmony (Decca) was released in 2019, the Lukas Passion by Penderecki (BIS) and works by Ginastera, Bernstein and Moussa (Analekta) in 2020.

At the Bayerische Staatsoper, where he was General Music Director from 2006 to 2013, Kent Nagano commissioned new operas such as Babylon by Jörg Widmann, Das Gehege by Wolfgang Rihm and Alice in Wonderland by Unsuk Chin. New productions included Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov and Khovanshchina, Strauss' Ariadne auf Naxos and Die Frau ohne Schatten, Poulenc's Dialogues des Carmelites, Messiaen’s Saint François d'Assise, Berg’s Wozzeck, George Benjamin's Written on skin and Wagner's Der Ring des Nibelungen. Tours took Nagano and the Bavarian State Orchestra through Europe and Japan. In addition to Bruckner's Symphonies Nos. 4 and 7 (Sony), Kent Nagano has released several opera performances with the Bavarian State Orchestra on DVD: Unsuk Chin's opera Alice in Wonderland (2008) and Mussorgsky's Chowanschtschina (2009) with unitel classica/medici arts, Dialogue des Carmélites with Bel Air Classiques (2011) and Lohengrin (2010) with Decca.

Another very important period in Nagano’s career was his time as Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin from 2000-2006. He performed Schönberg’s Moses und Aron with the orchestra (in collaboration with Los Angeles Opera) and took them to the Salzburg Festival to perform both Zemlinsky’s Der König Kandaules and Schreker’s Die Gezeichneten, as well as to the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden with Parsifal and Lohengrin in productions by Nikolaus Lehnhoff. Recordings with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin for Harmonia Mundi include repertoire as diverse as Bernstein’s Mass, Bruckner’s Symphonies Nos. 3 & 6, Beethoven’s Christus am Ölberge, Wolf’s Mörike-Lieder, Mahler’s Symphony No. 8, Schönberg’s Die Jakobsleiter and Friede auf Erden, as well as Brahms’s Symphony No. 4 and Schönberg’s Variationen für Orchester Op. 31. In June 2006, at the end of his tenure with the orchestra, Kent Nagano was given the title Honorary Conductor by members of the orchestra – only the second recipient of this honour in their 60-year history. To this day he maintains a close friendship with the orchestra.

In October 2019, Kent Nagano and Mari Kodama expanded their joint recordings of Beethoven's works for piano and orchestra with Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 0 E-flat Major WoO 4, a nearly unknown work from the composer’s youth, and his Rondo for Piano and Orchestra WoO 6 with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin. The complete edition of Beethoven’s piano concerti was released on the Berlin Classics label.

Nagano was awarded Grammys for his recordings of Busoni’s Doktor Faust with Opéra National de Lyon, Prokofjew’s Peter and the Wolf with the Russian National Orchestra and Saariaho’s L’amour de Loin with the Deutsches Symphonieorchester Berlin. He has worked with labels such as BIS, Decca, Sony Classical, FARAO Classics and Analekta for many years, and has also recorded CDs with Berlin Classics, Erato, Teldec, Pentatone, Deutsche Grammophon and Harmonia Mundi.

To celebrate Kent Nagano's 70th birthday in 2021, a 3-CD box set of works by Olivier Messiaen was released in October on the BR Klassik label. The release includes live recordings of the works Poèmes pour Mi, Chronochromie and La Transfiguration de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ from his concerts with the Symphonieorchester und Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks, demonstrating Nagano's close familiarity with Messiaen's musical language in a special way.

In September 2021, Kent Nagano published his second book with Berlin Verlag. In "10 Lessons of my Life", he recalls ten deeply personal encounters from which he learned important lessons, not only for his career but for his life more broadly. Among those experiences are encounters with the Icelandic pop artist Björk, Frank Zappa, Leonard Bernstein, Pierre Boulez and the Nobel Prize winner in physics Donald Glaser.

In 2015 Kent Nagano published "Erwarten Sie Wunder!" also in Berlin Verlag, a passionate appeal for the relevance of classical music in today's world. In 2019 the book was released in English by the Canadian McGill-Queen's University Press under the title ″Classical Music - Expect the Unexpected" and in 2015 under "Sonnez, merveilles!" in French by Éditions du Boréal.

Born in California, Nagano maintains close connections with his home state and was Music Director of the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra from 1978-2009. His first major successes came with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1984, when Messiaen appointed him assistant to conductor Seiji Ozawa for the premiere of his opera Saint François d'Assise. Nagano’s success in America led to European appointments: Music Director of Opéra National de Lyon (1988-1998) and Music Director of the Hallé Orchestra (1991-2000). Kent Nagano became the first Music Director of Los Angeles Opera in 2003 having already held the position of Principal Conductor for two years.

Kent Nagano was awarded an honorary doctorate from McGill University in Montréal in 2005, an honorary doctorate from the Université de Montréal in 2006, and an honorary doctorate from San Francisco State University in 2018. Since 2017, Kent Nagano has been a "Compagnon" of the "Ordre des arts et des lettres" of Québec and in the fall of 2023, Kent Nagano was also awarded the title of "Chevalier" in the "Ordre des art et des lettres" of France. In February 2024, Kent Nagano was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany by the Federal President.

Season 2023/24

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