Osmo Vänskä

Conductor

Music Director of the Minnesota Orchestra for 15 years, Osmo Vänskä has led the Orchestra on five major European tours, as well as an historic trip to Cuba in May 2015, at the invitation of the Cuban Ministry of Culture – the first visit by an American orchestra since the two countries announced steps to re-establish diplomatic relations. In 2018 he returned with the orchestra to the BBC Proms performing works by Bernstein, Gershwin and Ives before embarking on a five-city tour to South Africa as part of the world-wide celebration of Nelson Mandela’s Centenary. The tour, which marked the first by an American orchestra to the country, drew together South African and American performers featuring musical expressions of peace, freedom and reconciliation.

Other key highlights of his tenure with the Minnesota Orchestra include 17 album recordings (winning a Grammy Award in 2014 for *‘Best Orchestral Performance’* for their second Sibelius album and being nominated in 2018 with the recording of Mahler’s Symphony No.5), initiating and conducting the annual Future Classics concert, and various educational and outreach projects, in Minneapolis and other cities.

In great demand as a guest conductor, 2018/19 includes re-invitations to the Chicago and New World symphony and Seoul Philharmonic orchestras, and a return to China to work with Shanghai Symphony, and China, Hangzhou and Hong Kong philharmonic orchestras. In Europe he makes one of his regular appearances with Helsinki Philharmonic and conducts the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, London Philharmonic and Iceland Symphony orchestras.

Last season Vänskä made his debuts with Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, SWR Sinfonieorchester, Toronto and National Taiwan symphony orchestras, and returned to Orchestre de Paris, San Francisco and Pittsburgh symphony, and Seoul and Helsinki philharmonic orchestras. In Minnesota he led concerts marking the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, Finland’s centennial, the 50th anniversary of Minnesota Public Radio and 15th anniversary of the Minnesota Orchestra Composer Institute – while also presenting world premieres of music by Jeff Beal, Sebastian Currier and James Stephenson.

Previously, he worked in the US with National Symphony, The Cleveland, Philadelphia and Los Angeles Philharmonic orchestras; in Europe with London, City of Birmingham and Vienna symphony orchestras, as well as Orchestre National de Lyon and Orchestre de la Suisse Romande (including a tour to Europe, China and India); and in Asia with Israel Philharmonic and Yomiuri Nippon Symphony orchestras, amongst others.

Alongside his musical directorship with Minnesota Orchestra, he has been Principal Guest Conductor with Iceland Symphony Orchestra since 2014 – having previously served as Chief Conductor from 1993 to 1996. Concurrently he is Conductor Laureate of the Lahti Symphony Orchestra (having previously been its Music Director), and also held the position of Chief Conductor of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, in Glasgow, Scotland.

A distinguished recording artist, primarily for the BIS label, his most recent recordings are of Mahler’s Symphonies No. 5 & 6, with the Minnesota Orchestra, to be followed later this year by Symphonies No. 2 and 1, continuing the cycle dedicated to the composer. With Minnesota he has recorded the complete Beethoven and Sibelius symphony cycles, also for BIS, to rave international reviews – while recordings of Beethoven’s piano concertos with Yevgeny Sudbin, have also garnered worldwide praise, including Grammy and Gramophone award nominations.

Vänskä studied conducting at Finland’s Sibelius Academy and was awarded first prize in the 1982 Besançon Competition. He began his career as a clarinetist, occupying, amongst others, the co-principal chair of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra. In recent years he has enjoyed a return to the instrument, including regular chamber music performances and a recording of Kalevi Aho’s chamber works, in 2012.

Vänskä is the recipient of a Royal Philharmonic Society Award, the Finlandia Foundation’s Arts and Letters award, and the 2010 Ditson Award from Columbia University. He holds honorary doctorates from the universities of Glasgow and Minnesota and was named Musical America’s 2005 Conductor of the Year. In 2013 he received the Annual Award from the German Record Critics' Award Association for his involvement in BIS’s recordings of the complete works by Sibelius.