Kent Nagano
Conductor

Kent Nagano is considered one of the outstanding conductors for both operatic and orchestral repertoire. He has been General Music Director of the Hamburg State Opera and Chief Conductor of the Philharmonisches Staatsorchester Hamburg since September 2015. From 2006 to 2020, he was Music Director of the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal and was appointed Conductor Emeritus in February 2021. In 2006 he was appointed Honorary Conductor of the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin and in 2019 of Concerto Köln, the Baroque orchestra which he is working together with in the project Wagner Readings.

The upcoming 2021/22 season in Hamburg began for Kent Nagano with two open air concerts at the Rathausmarkt as well as the official season opening of the Hamburg State Opera with Jacques Offenbach's opera Les Contes d'Hoffmann in a new production by Daniele Finzi Pasca Daniele Finzi Pasca and a revival of Schumann’s Szenen aus Goethes Faust in concert. In addition to symphony concerts with the Philharmonisches Staatsorchester Hamburg throughout the season, Kent Nagano leads the musical direction of the premiere of Strauss' Elektra in November 2021 in a production by Dmitri Tcherniakov. Further on in the season, he conducts performances of John Neumeier’s Beethoven Project II at the Hamburg Ballet.As part of the 5th anniversary of the Elbphilharmonie, the originally planned performance of Jörg Widmann’s oratorio ARCHE, of which Kent Nagano conducted the world premiere at the Elbphilharmonie in January 2017, was substituted with a program of works by Widmann and Beethoven due to the current pandemic situation.

Kent Nagano's past years in Hamburg include opera productions such as Les Troyens, Lulu, the world premiere of Stilles Meer and German premiere of Lessons in Love and Violence, the "Philharmonische Akademie" with 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 in the past years have taken Kent Nagano to Japan, Spain and South America. In September 2020, the Hamburg State Opera presented the premiere of molto agitato under the then current Corona regulations, a musical theater evening staged by Frank Castorf, which combined works by György Ligeti, Johannes Brahms, Georg Friedrich Händel and Kurt Weill, conducted by Kent Nagano.

As a much sought-after guest conductor, Kent Nagano has worked with the world's leading international orchestras, including the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestre Philharmonique Radio France, the Orchestra dell’Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome, the Chicago and Detroit Symphony Orchestra, the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Wiener Symphoniker.

His operatic work has included Shostakovich's The Nose at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden Berlin, Rimsky-Korsakoff's The Golden Cockerel at the Châtelet in Paris, 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 he has conducted include Bernstein's A White House Cantata and the operas Three Sisters by Peter Eötvös and The Death of Klinghoffer and El Niño by John Adams. Other special projects included productions of Mozart's Idomeneo with Concerto Köln and the Bernstein opera A quiet place with the Ensemble Modern in a new version premiered in Berlin in November 2013.

Appearances in 2021/22 include the Tonhalle Zurich with Britten's War Reqiuem, the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin with the world premiere of Rodolphe Bruneau-Boulmier's piano concerto Terra Nostra and Strauss's suite Der Bürger als Edelmann, and the Munich Philharmonic with Messiaen's Turangalila Symphony at the new Munich Isarphilharmonie. Further, he is conducting Beethoven's Missa Solemnis in Cologne Cathedral and two performances of Das Rheingold in Cologne and Amsterdam with Concerto Köln. At the Opera de Paris, Kent Nagano will lead the new production of Bernstein's A Quiet Place in a staging by Krzysztof Warlikowski, and at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam he will conduct the Dutch premiere of Abrahamsen's Snow Queen with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra.

A highlight 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), South America and the USA. In July 2018, Kent Nagano conducted Krzysztof Penderecki’s St. Luke Passion with the OSM on the occasion of 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 and 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 youthful work by the composer, 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 has worked with labels such as BIS, Decca, Sony Classical, FARAO Classics and Analekta for many years, but he has also recorded CDs with Berlin Classics, Erato, Teldec, Pentatone, Deutsche Grammophon and Harmonia Mundi. He 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.

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 concerts with Kent Nagano and 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 very personal encounters in his life from which he learned important lessons, not only for his career. Among them are 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 published 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.