Estonian Festival Orchestra

The Estonian Festival Orchestra was founded by Paavo Järvi in 2011 and made it’s debut at the newly inaugurated Pärnu Music Festival as the resident summer orchestra.

The long dreamed of ambition by Järvi to create a hand picked orchestra, bringing together the best of Estonian talent and leading musicians from around the world, has resulted in performances which The Arts Desk reviewed as “begging comparison with the elasticity of Abbado’s concerts with the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, which is as good as it can get“. The BBC Music Magazine added “There isn’t a hint of a hothouse environment on stage – these are simply musicians having the time of their lives, no small thanks to the inspiring Paavo Järvi himself. “

These reviews encapsulate Paavo Järvi’s goals in bringing colleagues and friends together to create a new orchestra which could grow out of the festival spirit. “An important component in creating the orchestra was to ‘match-make’ the players in a professional way but within the festival atmosphere” says Järvi. “If you are a young player in Estonia, it doesn’t matter how good you are, it’s often hard to make contact with a top player in the west. Now we can give these young musicians the advantage to both play with top colleagues from around Europe and get to know them as new friends. This spirit is what drives the orchestra and makes me particularly proud as its mentor.“

The Estonian Festival Orchestra made its debut tour in 2017 to neighbouring Baltic countries (Latvia, Finland, Denmark, and Sweden) and celebrated the 100th Anniversary of Estonian Independence in February 2018 with its first major European tour, including performances at the Berlin Philharmonie and Wien Konzerthaus. In August 2018 the orchestra made its Hamburg Elbphilharmonie debut and was the first ever Estonian orchestral ensemble to perform at the Proms. The London concert, which sold out within days of going on sale, was broadcast on both BBC Radio 3 and TV.

2019 followed with the Estonian Festival Orchestra’s debut tour of Japan in April. With sell-out concerts in Hamamatsu, Fukui, Nagoya, Osaka, Hiroshima and Tokyo’s Suntory Hall, the orchestra was joined on stage by soloist, Midori. Japan’s leading classical music magazine, Ongaku no Tomo, featured Paavo Järvi on its front cover to celebrate the arrival of his orchestra in the country and the huge success of the tour resulted in immediate invitations to return. As always with the Estonian Festival Orchestra, the concerts were high on both energy and authenticity, performing repertoire that is specific to this ensemble – the music of the North – including works by Sibelius, Prokofiev, Tchaikovsky and Estonia’s very own Arvo Pärt and Erkki-Sven Tüür.

In the Autumn of 2022 the Estonian Festival Orchestra returned to Asia for its first tour of Korea, with performances in Seoul, Tongyeong and Gyeonggi-do. Reviewing the Seoul concert Yonhap News Agency wrote “the Estonian Festival Orchestra delivered an outstanding performance … and showed what it was like to be a conductor and an orchestra who completely trust each other from beginning to end.“

The Estonian Festival Orchestra has released three albums on Alpha Classics: Shostakovich Symphony No. 6 and Sinfonietta (2018), Mythos, dedicated to the music Erkki-Sven Tüür in celebration of his 60th birthday (2019) and Estonian Premieres (2022) featuring the music of Tõnu Kõrvits, Ülo Krigul, Helena Tulve, Tauno Aints and Lepo Sumera.