Singapore Symphony Orchestra
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The formation of a national symphony orchestra marks a significant step in a country's journey toward artistic maturity. In Singapore's case, it also signalled a desire and a drive to make a mark on the world musical stage.

The idea of establishing a professional symphony orchestra in Singapore was envisaged by Dr. Goh Keng Swee during his term as Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore. In 1973, he expressed the view that it was a "scandal" that Singapore did not have its own orchestra. Five years later, on May 13, 1978, a government-backed private company called the Singapore Symphonia Company Ltd was set up.

The following year, on January 24, 1979, the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO) performed its inaugural concert at the Singapore Conference Hall. Led by music director and conductor Choo Hoey, the 41-member orchestra played a concert of works by Beethoven, Schubert, Rossini, and a traditional Chinese piece.

Under the leadership of Choo Hoey, the SSO built up a large performing repertoire, with a strong emphasis on 20th-century music. The orchestra toured regularly and soon established itself as one of Asia's leading orchestras. In 1994, the SSO performed at the Salle Pleyel in Paris and was hailed as one of the "top twenty orchestras in the world."

A full-time professional orchestra with 96 members, the SSO now calls the Esplanade Concert Hall its performing home. The orchestra also performs regularly at the Victoria Concert Hall and at other venues. Performing over 50 symphonic programmes a year, its repertoire ranges from all-time favourites and orchestral masterpieces to cutting-edge premieres. It also plays a number of free public concerts each year at venues such as the Botanic Gardens, as part of its outreach and audience development strategy. In support of Singapore talent, local musicians and composers feature prominently in each concert season.

Since its inception in 1979, the SSO has toured America, China, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Hungary, Italy, Japan, France, Spain, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. Choo Hoey, Music Director from 1979 to 1996, is credited for developing the Orchestra with his diverse programming, while Maestro Lan Shui, who assumed the position of Music Director in 1997, has raised the Orchestra's profile and standard, and is committed to the performance of new Asian works.

Among the SSO's recordings are a number of CDs which have earned international acclaim, including S*eascapes*, a recording of Claude Debussy's *La Mer*, which was awarded five stars – the maximum rating – given by *BBC Music Magazine*, and the first-ever complete cycle of Tcherepnin's six piano concertos and four symphonies. The SSO has also recorded the music of Chen Yi, Zhou Long, Bright Sheng, and Richard Yardumian, collaborating with great artistes

such as Evelyn Glennie, Cho-Liang Lin, Gil Shaham, Noriko Ogawa, Christian Lindberg, and Martin Frost.

Among the world-renowned names who have performed with the SSO are cellist Yo-Yo Ma; pianists Lang Lang and Emmanuel Ax; violinists Sarah Chang, Gil Shaham, Anne-Sophie Mutter, and Lin Cho Liang; sopranos Kiri Te Kanawa and Sumi Jo; and tenors Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo, and Jose Carreras.

The Singapore Symphony Chorus

In seeking to broaden its platform and give the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO) an added dimension of performance repertoire, it developed the Singapore Symphony Chorus (SSC) and the Singapore Symphony Children's Chorus (SSCC).

With the help of prominent members of the local choral scene such as Leong Yoon Pin, Lilian Choo, and Susan Ashton, and initiated by Maestro Choo Hoey, selected singers from church and university choirs and various choral societies came together to form the SSC.

The Chorus gave its first performance on 13 and 14 June 1980, performing Brahms' *A German Requiem*. In 1981, a young Singaporean bass-baritone and conductor, Lim Yau, was appointed Chorus Master upon his return from his studies in the United Kingdom. Under his guidance, the SSC established itself as one of the finest choirs in the region and one of the few symphony choruses in Southeast Asia. Bart Folse was Chorus Master from 1998 to 2000, and in 2001, Lim Yau returned as the Music Director of the Chorus. The SSC performs with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO), presenting an average of three programmes a year.

The earliest SSC concerts were conducted by Music Director Choo Hoey, who was said to have a checklist of "must-perform works". The Chorus quickly built up an impressive profile, which included Singapore premieres of Dvorak's *Stabat Mater*, Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*, Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*, and Janacek's *Glagolitic Mass*.

The Chorus has performed under the baton of Choo Hoey, Lan Shui, Lim Yau, Okko Kamu, Gilbert Kaplan, Andrea Quinn, Justin Brown, George Cleve, and Wang Jin. It has also worked with renowned specialists such as Peter Erdei (*Dvorak's Mass in D*), Eric Ericsson (Handel's *Messiah*), Laszlo Heltay (Mozart's *Great Mass in C minor*), and John Poole (Handel's *Messiah*). Vocal soloists who have appeared with the Chorus over the years included Sir Willard White, David Wilson Johnson, Michael George, Neil Mackie, and Susan Chilcott.

While the SSC was comfortable performing in the 883-seater Victoria Concert Hall, its current membership – just under 100-strong – was augmented in order to perform in the 1,800-seater Esplanade Concert Hall, which opened in late 2002. To this end, the SSC joined forces with local choruses such as the Singapore Bible College Chorale, Hallelujah Chorus and The Philharmonic Chamber Choir, and were able to give spectacular performances of Berlioz's *Messe Solennelle*, Mahler's *Second Symphony* and *Symphony of a Thousand*, grand choral works that SSC would have found difficult to present on its own otherwise.

DID YOU KNOW?
In 1992, the SSC recorded Poulenc's *Gloria* plus a selection of notable "live" performances. This CD briefly topped the classical charts in local music stores.

The Singapore Symphony Children's Chorus

The SSCC was formed in June 2006, marking another milestone in the history of the SSSO. To sustain and strengthen the orchestra into the future, the nurturing and development of young talent is critical.

Under the direction of the SSC Music Director Maestro Lim Yau, 113 children were selected from the initial auditions. Weekly training programmes began in July 2006 under voice specialists Quek Soo Hiang and Wong Lai Foon. After one year of training, the young trainees auditioned for placement in the SSCC. They then received training in the finer points of singing to perform classical masterworks with the SSSO.

The Children's Choir Training Programme provides young singers aged nine to 14 years with a comprehensive initiation into the art of good singing, which includes music literacy, musicianship and proper vocal training.

The SSCC, which is supported by the Florindon Foundation, gave its inaugural concert at the Victoria Concert Hall on April 20, 2008.

References

Singapore Symphony Orchestra website (http://www.sso.org.sg).

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