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*The first photograph, actually a collage, of the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Georg Henschel, taken 1882*

## A Brief History of the BSO

Now in its 132nd season, the Boston Symphony Orchestra gave its inaugural concert in 1881, realizing the dream of founder Henry Lee Higginson, who envisioned a great and permanent orchestra in his hometown. Today the BSO reaches millions through radio, television, recordings, and tours. It commissions works from today's most important composers; its summer season at Tanglewood is among the world's most important music festivals; it helps develop future audiences through BSO Youth Concerts and programs involving the Boston community; and, during the Tanglewood season, it sponsors the Tanglewood Music Center, one of the most important training grounds for young professional-caliber musicians. The Boston Symphony Chamber Players, made up of BSO principals, is known worldwide, and the Boston Pops Orchestra sets an international standard for performances of lighter music.

The BSO played its inaugural concert on October 22, 1881, under Georg Henschel, who remained as conductor until 1884. For nearly twenty years Boston Symphony concerts were held in the Old Boston Music Hall; Symphony Hall, one of the world's most highly regarded concert halls, was opened on October 15, 1900. Henschel was succeeded by German-born and -trained conductors Wilhelm Gericke, Arthur Nikisch, Emil Paur, and Max Fiedler, culminating in the appointment of the legendary Karl Muck, who served two tenures, 1906-08 and 1912-18. Meanwhile, in July 1885, the musicians of the Boston Symphony Orchestra had given their first "Promenade" concert, offering both music and refreshments, and fulfilling Major Higginson's wish to give "concerts of a lighter kind of music." These concerts, soon to be given in the springtime and renamed first "Popular" and then "Pops," fast became a tradition.

In 1915 the orchestra made its first transcontinental trip, playing thirteen concerts at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. Henri Rabaud, engaged as conductor in 1918, was succeeded a year later by Pierre Monteux. These appointments



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*Rush ticket line at Symphony Hall,  
probably in the 1930s*

marked the beginning of a French tradition maintained, even during the Russian-born Serge Koussevitzky's tenure (1924-49), with the employment of many French-trained musicians.

In 1929 free Esplanade concerts were inaugurated by Arthur Fiedler, a member of the orchestra since 1915 and who in 1930 became eighteenth conductor of the Boston Pops. Fiedler was Pops conductor for half a century, being followed by John Williams in 1980 and Keith Lockhart in 1995.

It was in 1936 that Koussevitzky led the orchestra's first concerts in the Berkshires. A year later, he and the players took up annual summer residence at Tanglewood. Koussevitzky passionately shared Major Higginson's dream of "a good honest school for musicians," and in 1940 that dream was realized with the founding of the Berkshire Music Center (now called the Tanglewood Music Center).

Koussevitzky was succeeded in 1949 by Charles Munch, who continued supporting contemporary composers, introduced much French music to the repertoire, and led the BSO on its first international tours. Erich Leinsdorf began his term as music director in 1962, to be followed in 1969 by William Steinberg. Seiji Ozawa became the BSO's thirteenth music director in 1973. His historic twenty-nine-year tenure extended until 2002, when he was named Music Director Laureate. Bernard Haitink, named principal guest conductor in 1995 and Conductor Emeritus in 2004, has led the BSO in Boston, New York, at Tanglewood, and on tour in Europe, as well as recording with the orchestra.

The first American-born conductor to hold the position, James Levine was the BSO's music director from 2004 to 2011. Levine led the orchestra in wide-ranging programs that included works newly commissioned for the orchestra's 125th anniversary, particularly from significant American composers; issued a number of live concert performances on the orchestra's own label, BSO Classics; taught at the Tanglewood Music Center, and in summer 2007 led the BSO in an acclaimed tour of European music festivals.

Through its worldwide activities and more than 250 concerts annually, the Boston Symphony Orchestra continues to fulfill and expand upon the vision of its founder Henry Lee Higginson.

