

The Mahler Chamber Orchestra's residence in North Rhine-Westphalia will be inaugurated with Weber's Freischütz at the Konzerthaus Dortmund

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On 17 March 2009, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra's (MCO) residence in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), which begins in May, was officially announced by the state secretary for culture of the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia, Hans Heinrich Grosse-Brockhoff, the president of the Arts Foundation of NRW, Dr. Fritz Schaumann, as well as the directors of the three participating concert halls in Dortmund, Essen and Cologne, and the MCO. Together with the concert halls and the OrchesterzentrumNRW in Dortmund, high profile opera and concert performances as well as instructional and educational projects are planned for the next three years.

The first residency project will take place on 16 May at the KONZERTHAUS DORTMUND. Thomas Hengelbrock will conduct a concert performance of Weber's opera Der Freischütz. The main roles will be performed by singers including Klaus Kuttler, Steve Davislim, Rheinhard Dorn, Juliane Banse and Julia Kleiter. The Festspielhaus Baden-Baden is a partner in the project and will present a staged version of the opera, directed by Robert Wilson, at the end of May as part of its Whitsun Festival 2009. The concert version will be repeated at the end of August at the LUCERNE FESTIVAL, giving the MCO an additional important role as a cultural ambassador of the NRW arts scene as it presents the special trademark of the MCO'S NRW Residence to the world.

With Der Freischütz, Thomas Hengelbrock gives his debut with the MCO. The conductor is a regular guest of renowned orchestras such as the BR Symphonieorchester. With his own ensembles, the Balthasar Neumann Choir and the Balthasar Neumann Ensemble, the newly chosen chief conductor of the NDR Symphony Orchestra puts into effect his many ideas as a conductor and as a stage director.

The activities planned for the next three years of the MCO in NRW include a multi-faceted education program. This will consist most importantly of the collaboration with the OrchesterzentrumNRW in Dortmund. MCO musicians will hold individual workshops for student musicians, concerts will be performed involving the MCO Academy, and particularly talented students will be given the opportunity to take part in MCO projects beyond the NRW residence periods. During the rehearsal period in May, preparations in the form of student auditions will be made for the first academy project, a performance of Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring in October 2009. Workshops for double bass, flute, and oboe will take place under the leadership of MCO principal players.

In connection with the Freischütz production, an introduction to theatrical interpretation for adults will take place on 10 May, combined with attendance at the dress rehearsal. Before the performance, Prof. Dr. Michael Stegemann will give an introductory talk in the "Komponistenfoyer" of the Konzerthaus, admittance is free.

The next residence project in NRW will be a concert at the end of August under the direction of George Benjamin at the Kölner Philharmonie, which will include, among other pieces, the German premiere of Jörg Widmann's Oboe Concerto in honour of Heinz Holliger's 70th birthday. In addition, the MCO will take part with a public rehearsal and chamber music in the Kölner Philharmonie's "Open House" to start its 2009/10 season. In October, a concert version of the second act of Wagner's Tristan and Isolde in Dortmund and Cologne is planned. This programme will also be performed at the orchestra's Italian residence in Ferrara, as well as at the Alte Oper in Frankfurt and the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris.

The Mahler Chamber Orchestra (MCO), with its unusual structure, internationality and outstanding quality, is an ensemble unique to the present time. Its organisation and method of operation make it a model for the future of the European orchestral landscape. Composed of around 40 musicians from 20 different nations, and independent of external sponsorship, the MCO plays operas and concerts all over the world, in cities as well as at exclusive festivals from the North Pole to the Red Sea. The

orchestra was founded in 1997 by the musicians themselves and Claudio Abbado, and the two have been reaching milestones of European musical life together ever since.

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