

GEWANDHAUSORCHESTER USA TOUR

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PEACEFUL REVOLUTION

On November 3–10, 2014, the Gewandhausorchester, under the direction of Gewandhauskapellmeister Riccardo Chailly, tours the United States. The tour is dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the fabled Peaceful Revolution of October 9, 1989. The Revolution—the culmination of many weeks of “Monday Demonstrations” in Leipzig—ultimately led to the fall of the Berlin Wall one month later on November 9. In addition, the tour marks 40 years of regular guest appearances of the Gewandhausorchester in the United States.

In addition to tonight’s performance in Houston, the Gewandhausorchester will perform in Washington, Boston, Newark and New York (two concerts). Joining the Orchestra as soloist is violinist Nikolaj Znaider. The concert programs comprise works by Bach, Mendelssohn, Beethoven and Bruckner. Mendelssohn was Gewandhauskapellmeister (Chief Conductor and Music Director) for 12 years; his Violin Concerto was premiered by the Gewandhausorchester, as was Bruckner’s 7th Symphony, both of which are featured in the tour’s concerts.

Twenty-five years after the sweeping political upheaval resulting from the Leipzig Peaceful Revolution, and 40 years after the Gewandhausorchester’s first tour of the United States, the current Gewandhauskapellmeister, Riccardo Chailly, will conduct six concerts on the East Coast, one of which—in New York on November 9, 2014—directly marks the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Forty years ago (in October and November 1974), the Gewandhausorchester embarked upon its first-ever tour of the United States. Houston, Boston, Washington and New York were the ports of call. Tonight is the Orchestra’s second visit to Houston. Newark played host to the Orchestra for the first time in 2004.

The USA Tour also centers around the 9th day of November, a date of profound significance in German history. Its importance in the nation’s recent history is unparalleled: On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall and, thus, the physical division of East and West Germany, came to a spectacular end. This epoch-making development had ramifications for the entire continent and beyond. It was a direct result of the persistent demonstrations in Leipzig and the final, apocalyptic “Peaceful Revolution” on October 9 in the city which brought the GDR regime to its knees, forcing the opening of the borders to the West a few short weeks later.

The course of action employed by the GDR security forces against the Leipzig demonstrators prompted Gewandhauskapellmeister, Kurt Masur, to state in an interview

broadcast on West German television, “I am ashamed.” In a public statement issued on October 5, 1989, the musicians of the Gewandhausorchester supported their Music Director in his call “for a sensible, meaningful dialogue.” The statement was not published in the city’s local paper, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, until October 10. The day before, however—the fateful day of October 9—developments on the streets and in the corridors of power were to assume dimensions and worldwide significance of quite monumental proportions. The Monday Demonstration took place, as ever, only on this occasion with 100,000 anti-regime protesters filling the streets. With the ever-growing tension between the demonstrators and the authorities threatening to boil over with inevitable catastrophic results, Gewandhauskapellmeister Kurt Masur and five other local personalities issued a joint statement broadcast on Leipzig local radio shortly before the evening’s Gewandhaus concert. In the statement, they pleaded with both sides to retain their composure in order to avoid a fatal escalation of the situation, as well as pledged to assert their influence in order to persuade the authorities to enter into a dialogue with the protesters. The feared violent intervention of the police and military forces was thus avoided. The Gewandhaus was opened spontaneously on many occasions during the following weeks, hosting numerous public discussions and forums.

One month after the fateful evening in Leipzig, on November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, catalyzing the end of divided Germany.

November 9 is, however, not associated exclusively with positive events in German history. On this day in 1938, the Nazis commenced the most concerted phase of their program against the German Jews with the Kristallnacht. Two years previously, also on November 9, Leipzig’s Nazis destroyed the statue of the Jewish composer and revered former Gewandhauskapellmeister, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, that stood in front of the Gewandhaus. The memorial was reconstructed in 2008 and is now situated in front of the West Door of the Thomaskirche (St. Thomas’ Church).



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