

MUSIC DIRECTORS

Sir Georg Solti

Born October 21, 1912, Budapest, Hungary.

Died September 5, 1997, Antibes, France.

MUSIC DIRECTOR (1969-1991)

MUSIC DIRECTOR LAUREATE (1991-1997)



Sir Georg Solti was born in Budapest in 1912 and studied piano, composition, and conducting with Bartók, Dohnányi, Kodály, and Leo Weiner. Although he made his concert debut as a pianist, the Budapest Opera soon engaged him as a conductor. In 1937 Toscanini selected him as his assistant at the Salzburg Festival. Before the outbreak of World War II, Solti went to Switzerland as a refugee, turning again to the piano for his livelihood, and in 1942 he won first prize in the Concours International in Geneva.

Following the war in 1946, he was invited by the American military government to conduct Beethoven's *Fidelio* in Munich. The success of this performance led to his appointment as music director of the Bavarian State Opera, whose quality and reputation he firmly reestablished over the next six years. During his tenure in Munich, the Salzburg Festival was revived, and Solti appeared there, as well as in Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Rome, Florence, and Buenos Aires.

In 1952 Solti accepted the post of artistic and music director of the Frankfurt City Opera, where he remained for nine years. From 1961 until 1971, he was music director of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and in 1992 was named music director laureate. During his tenure there he achieved international fame for his performances of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, the British premiere of *Moses and Aron*, and Wagner's *Ring* cycle. He recorded the entire *Ring* with the Vienna Philharmonic, a historic undertaking which required seven years to complete and was the first complete studio recording.

Solti's remarkable partnership with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra began in 1954, when he first led the Orchestra at the Ravinia Festival. He returned to Chicago for guest engagements with the Lyric Opera in 1956, conducting *Die Walküre*, *Salome*, and *La forza del destino*. His Orchestra Hall debut took place on December 9, 1965, and his first concerts as music director were in November 1969. Solti served as music director for twenty-two years and is credited with greatly extending and enhancing the Orchestra's worldwide reputation; its first overseas tour in 1971 was under his direction. As music director laureate, he continued his association with the Orchestra several weeks each year in concerts and recordings until his death on September 5, 1997.

For his outstanding contribution to music, he received a knighthood from Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain in 1972. From 1979 to 1984, he served as principal conductor and artistic director of the London Philharmonic Orchestra and subsequently as conductor emeritus.

Honored with a lifetime achievement award in 1996 from the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, Solti made his first recordings for Decca in 1947, as a pianist with Kulenkampff and as a conductor with the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra. During his forty-nine-year association with London/Decca, he recorded over forty operas and over 250 discs, chiefly with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (over one hundred discs), the Vienna Philharmonic, the London Philharmonic, and the London Symphony orchestras. He won thirty-one Grammy® awards (more than any other classical or popular recording artist.)

Sir Georg Solti received honorary doctor of music degrees from Oxford University, the University of London, and the universities of Durham, Leeds, and Surrey; and in the United States from Roosevelt and DePaul universities in Chicago, Yale and Harvard universities, and the Eastman School of Music. He also received an honorary doctor of humanities degree from Furman University in South Carolina and an honorary degree “in the disciplines of art, music, and drama” from the University of Bologna.



Solti leading the Orchestra, Chorus, and soloists in a performance of Schoenberg's Moses and Aron at Orchestra Hall in November 1971.

His major awards were numerous. In 1989, Solti received the Gold Medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society, Great Britain's highest musical honor, and he was an honorary fellow of the Royal College of Music in London. In 1985, he was given the title of Professor Honoris Causa by the Minister-President of Baden-Württemberg in Germany.

He also received the Knight Commander's Cross (with badge and star) of the Order of Merit from the Federal Republic of Germany and the 1987 Loyola-Mellon Humanities Award. That year, on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday, Solti received the Medal of Merit, Chicago's highest award, and was honored with the dedication of a bronze bust of his likeness in Lincoln Park.

He also received the Order of the Flag of the Republic of Hungary and was named “Musician of the Year” by *Musical America*. He received the 1988 Edward Moss Martin Award from the Union League Civic and Arts Foundation in Chicago and the 1992 Leonie Sonning Music Prize from Denmark. In 1993, he received the Middle Cross of the Order of Merit with Star from the Republic of Hungary and the highest German decoration, the Grosses Verdienstskreuz mit Stern und Schulterband. That same year, to mark his eightieth birthday and a collaboration of over forty years, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra struck and presented to Sir Georg as its first recipient the Hans Richter Medal.

In 1993 he was awarded the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra's Von Bülow Medal, the Kennedy Center Honors, and the Belgium title of Commandeur de l'Ordre de Leopold. In 1994, he received the Orden Militar De Santiago De Espada,

Portugal's highest civilian honor. He held the French Légion d'Honneur and in 1995 received the Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. In 1996, he was given the honor Knight Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Italy and the Académie du Disque Lyrique in Paris established the Solti Prize, to be awarded annually to an outstanding young singer.

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