

Gstaad Festival Orchestra (GFO)

The Gstaad Festival Orchestra (GFO) brings together outstanding musicians from Switzerland's leading orchestras to form an ensemble of exceptional artistic calibre. Created from the vision of extending the artistic spirit of the Menuhin Festival Gstaad beyond the Festival season, the orchestra has, since its founding in 2010, become both an integral part of the Festival and an internationally acclaimed ensemble in its own right.

The German newspaper *Hamburger Abendblatt* captured the orchestra's artistic ambition perfectly: "This is what true world-class music-making sounds like."

The orchestra's members are drawn from Switzerland's foremost orchestras, including the Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, Philharmonia Zurich, Kammerorchester Basel, Basel Symphony Orchestra and the Bern Symphony Orchestra. Each year, they are joined by outstanding students from leading international conservatories. This unique combination of different orchestral traditions and musical backgrounds gives the ensemble its distinctive identity while fostering an inspiring exchange between experienced professionals and the next generation of musicians.

Since 2017, Jaap van Zweden has played a defining role in shaping the orchestra's artistic development. Music Director of the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra and incoming Music Director of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, he has signed a three-year contract as Chief Conductor of the Gstaad Festival Orchestra, leading the ensemble into a new artistic chapter.

In the summer of 2026, he conducts the Gstaad Festival Orchestra alongside soloists Bomsori Kim and Jing Zhao in Joseph Haydn's Cello Concerto No. 1 in C major, as well as works by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

In 2026, Alexander Shelley joins the Menuhin Festival Conducting Academy as a mentor for the first time. Artistic and Music Director of the Pacific Symphony in California, Artistic and Music Director of Artis—Naples, and Principal Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, he conducts the Gstaad Festival Orchestra in Edward Elgar's Violin Concerto, featuring Daniel Hope as soloist, alongside Beethoven's Symphony No. 5.

Another important milestone in the orchestra's development is its partnership with the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden. The collaboration began in 2023 with a concert performance of Puccini's *Tosca*, followed by further joint productions in 2024 and 2025. In 2027, the partnership continues with *La bohème*, conducted by Marco Armiliato and starring Benjamin Bernheim in the title role.

As Benedikt Stampa, Artistic Director of the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden, explains:

"Our collaboration with the Menuhin Festival Gstaad reflects our commitment to creating sustainable artistic productions at the highest international level."

Since its founding, the Gstaad Festival Orchestra has appeared at many of Europe's leading festivals and concert halls. Touring engagements have included the Rheingau Music Festival, Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, Grafenegg Festival, La Chaise-Dieu, Herrenchiemsee Festival, Merano Festival, Stresa Festival, as well as the Vienna Konzerthaus, Cologne Philharmonie, Festspielhaus Baden-Baden, Festspielhaus Bregenz, Dresden Frauenkirche, Tivoli Concert Hall in Copenhagen, Musikhuset Aarhus, the Gasteig Philharmonie in Munich and Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie.

The orchestra has collaborated with an impressive roster of internationally renowned soloists, including Sol Gabetta, Hélène Grimaud, Jonas Kaufmann, Sonya Yoncheva, Martin Grubinger, Seong-Jin Cho, Jan Lisiecki, Renaud Capuçon, Katia and Marielle Labèque, Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Khatia Buniatishvili, Fazıl Say, Janine Jansen, and Vilde Frang.

Alongside its core repertoire, the orchestra is committed to contemporary music, regularly giving world premieres of works by internationally acclaimed composers, including Fazıl Say, Daniel Schnyder, Dieter Ammann, Isabel Mundry, Georg Breinschmid, and Mark-Anthony Turnage.

The Gstaad Festival Orchestra also plays a central role within the Menuhin Festival Academy. Since 2014, it has served as Orchestra in Residence of the Conducting Academy. In the summer of 2026, ten emerging conductors from around the world will once again spend several weeks working intensively with a professional orchestra while conducting public performances. Under the artistic guidance of Jaap van Zweden, Johannes Schlaefli and Alexander Shelley, the Conducting Academy has established itself as one of Europe's leading training programmes for young conductors.

Press Reviews

"Surgical precision and clarity from every section of the orchestra, solid architectural structure, an unbroken sense of tension and release... One remains transfixed throughout the performance."

Le Temps, 22 August 2023

"Under Domingo Hindoyan's unpretentious, musical and meticulously precise direction, the Gstaad Festival Orchestra develops a remarkably vivid orchestral sound... The horn section is simply extraordinary."

Badische Neueste Nachrichten, 29 August 2023

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