



JAMES CONLON
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JAMES CONLON Ravinia Festival Music Director

Biography 2010

James Conlon began his tenure as music director of Ravinia Festival during the 2005 season of North America's oldest music festival. He has been a favorite guest conductor at Ravinia, making appearances since 1977. In 2007 Conlon's contract was extended through the 2011 season, when he will complete his multi-year traversal of the Mahler symphony cycle with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at Ravinia. Conlon is only the fourth music director in the festival's history.

One of today's preeminent conductors, Conlon has cultivated a vast symphonic, operatic and choral repertoire and developed enduring relationships with the world's most prestigious symphony orchestras and opera houses through 35 years of conducting.

Conlon is music director of Los Angeles Opera and music director of the Cincinnati May Festival, America's oldest choral festival, where he celebrated his 30th season in 2009. He has served as principal conductor of the Paris National Opera (1995-2004); general music director of the City of Cologne, Germany (1989-2002), where he was simultaneously music director of the Gürzenich Orchestra and the Cologne Opera; and music director of the Rotterdam Philharmonic (1983-1991).

Since his debut with the New York Philharmonic at the invitation of Pierre Boulez in 1974, Conlon has appeared with virtually every major North American and European orchestra and many of the world's major opera companies. Associated for more than 30 years with the Metropolitan Opera, where he made his debut in 1976, Conlon has conducted more than 250 performances there. He has conducted at Teatro alla Scala in Milan, the Royal Opera at Covent Garden in London, the Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino in Florence. Having held the longest tenure of any conductor since 1939 at the Paris Opera, Conlon concluded his nine-year directorship there in July 2004, after conducting 32 operas for a total of more than 357 performances.

Since beginning his tenure at L.A. Opera in September 2006, Conlon has sought to establish a Wagnerian tradition in Los Angeles, leading seven Wagner works over the span of four years. Renowned for his interpretations of the composer's repertoire in Europe, he conducts his first *Ring* Cycle in the United States at L.A. Opera in the summer of 2010 and during the 2010-11 season at L.A. Opera he will conduct Wagner's *Lohengrin*.

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FRESH NIGHTLY

Also during the 2010-11 season at L.A. Opera, Conlon conducts Verdi's *Rigoletto* and Rossini's *Il Turco in Italia*. He will also revive an earlier L.A. Opera tradition of performing works by Benjamin Britten and, beginning in 2011 with *The Turn of the Screw*, will embark on a four-year initiative celebrating the centenary of the composer's birth. Future seasons will include *Albert Herring*, *The Rape of Lucretia* and a major and rare Britten work to be performed during the centenary year.

Conlon's 2010-11 orchestral engagements include performances with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Symphonie de Montréal, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony and Toronto Symphony in North America and the Deutsche Sinfonie Orchester in Berlin, National Philharmonic of Russia in Moscow, NDR Sinfonie Orchester in Hamburg, Orchestra del Maggio Musicale in Florence and the Orchestre National de France. He will also conduct the Chicago Symphony Orchestra throughout the summer at Ravinia and he will conduct at the Aspen Music Festival and School in the summer of 2010.

In an effort to raise public consciousness to the significance of the lesser-known works of two generations of composers who were suppressed, forced to emigrate, or were executed by the Nazi regime, Conlon has devoted himself to extensive programming of this music in North America and Europe. This includes the works of such composers as Alexander Zemlinsky, Viktor Ullmann, Pavel Haas, Kurt Weill, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Karl-Amadeus Hartmann, Erwin Schulhoff and Ernest Krenek. As music director of the Ravinia Festival, Conlon has showcased composers from this group, beginning in 2005 with a production conceived by Conlon of Ullmann's *The Kaiser of Atlantis* (composed while interned in the concentration camp of Terezin). Since its first showing at The Juilliard School in New York, the work has been reprised at the Spoleto Festival in Italy, Ravinia Festival, and in cooperation with the New World Symphony, The Houston Grand Opera and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, where it was performed in 2004 at the Wilshire Boulevard Temple. At Ravinia Conlon has highlighted the works of Kurt Weill, Erwin Schulhoff, Alexander Zemlinsky and Franz Schreker. Conlon received the Crystal Globe Award from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in August 2007 at Ravinia for his efforts in championing works of these composers. In Los Angeles he initiated the "Recovered Voices" series—a multiyear project during which he brought the music of composers affected by the Nazi regime to the L.A. Opera stage. Since the series began, he has conducted the U.S. premiere and new production of Franz Schreker's *The Stigmatized*, Walter Braunfels' *The Birds* and a double bill of Zemlinsky's *The Dwarf* and Ullmann's *The Broken Jug*.

Conlon is committed to working with young pre-professional musicians. He recently completed a two-year artist residency at The Juilliard School in which he worked with the school's

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young artists in its three divisions—dance, drama and music—in a cross-genre educational project consisting of performances, symposia, master classes and coaching, meant to promote growth and historical curiosity in students and audience members alike. He has devoted his time to teaching at the Aspen Music Festival and School and Tanglewood Music Center. He is actively involved in Ravinia's Steans Institute for Young Artists as well as the festival's REACH*TEACH*PLAY education programs and plans to help lead and expand educational projects during his tenure at Los Angeles Opera. Conlon has been active since 1997 with the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, where he not only conducts the final round of the competition, but also initiated a program through which he leads master classes and coaches finalists. His work in several competitions was taped and aired in a special series on PBS, the most recent of which premiered in spring 2006.

Conlon has recorded extensively for the EMI, Erato, Capriccio and Sony Classical labels. In 2009 he won two Grammy Awards, Best Classical Recording and Best Opera Album, for conducting L.A. Opera's production of Kurt Weill's *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, released on DVD on the EuroArts label. In January 2004 he conducted the world-premiere recording of Franz Liszt's *St. Stanislaus* oratorio, his first recording for Telarc. A champion of the works of Alexander Zemlinsky, Conlon has made nine recordings of the composer's operas and orchestral works with the Gürzenich Orchestra-Cologne Philharmonic for EMI. Several of these recordings individually have earned prestigious international awards, and in October 2002 the series was awarded the ECHO Classic Award for "Editorial Achievement of the Year." Conlon has also inaugurated a series of 20th-century works for Capriccio, including a CD of works by Erwin Schulhoff with the Bayerischer Rundfunk, and a CD/DVD of the works of Viktor Ullmann with the Gürzenich Orchestra that won the Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik (German Record Critics Award for Excellence). His other Capriccio recordings include the works of Karl Amadeus Hartmann and Dmitri Shostakovich with violinist Vladimir Spivakov and the Cologne Philharmonic. His most recent recording is a CD of works by Bohoslav Martinů with the Bayerischer Rundfunk on Capriccio.

In 2008 PBS aired *Shadows in Paradise*, a documentary hosted and narrated by Conlon that tells the stories of German and Austrian composers and writers who fled the Nazi regime, hoping to make a living in Hollywood and the movie industry during the 1930s and 1940s. Also during the spring of 2006 PBS aired a series of six shows hosted by Conlon entitled *Encore*, part of an ongoing series of documentaries on his work with the finalists of the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, which have also included *Playing on the Edge* and *Hearing Ear to Ear with James Conlon*.

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Among his other recent television appearances on PBS are *Concerto*, six half-hour shows hosted by Conlon; and *Cincinnati May Festival 2000*.

In 2009 Conlon received the Music Institute of Chicago's Dushkin Award in recognition of his artistry and passion as a performer, educator and mentor. He was awarded the Medal of the American Liszt Society in recognition of his distinctive performances of the composer's works, and Italy's Premio Galileo 2000 Award for his significant contribution to music, art and peace in Florence in 2008. He is one of five first recipients of the annual *Opera News Awards*, presented in 2005 in recognition of his distinguished achievement in opera. He has been honored by The New York Public Library as a "Library Lion," an annual award given to individuals in recognition of their contributions through their work and was awarded an honorary doctor of music degree by The Juilliard School in 2004, an honorary doctor of arts *honoris causa* by Chapman University in 2009 and an honorary doctor of humane letters from Brandeis University, also in 2009. In 1999 Conlon received the Zemlinsky Prize, awarded only once before, for his efforts in bringing the composer's music to international attention. He was named an Officier de L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Government in 1996 and in September 2004 he was promoted to Commander—the highest honor awarded by the Ministry of Culture in France. In September 2002 James Conlon received France's highest distinction from the President of the French Republic, Jacques Chirac—the Légion d'Honneur.

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