

Fact Sheet on Lucerne Festival's History

- 1938 25 August: Establishment of the Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern (IMF, which will later be renamed Lucerne Festival) with the "Concert de Gala" in Tribschen. Arturo Toscanini conducts an "elite orchestra" comprising the finest musicians of the era and thus lays the cornerstone for an in-house Festival orchestra.
- 1943 Establishment of the Swiss Festival Orchestra
- 1966 Establishment of the Foundation "Freunde der Internationalen Musikfestwochen Luzern" ("Friends of the Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern")
- 1970 Establishment of the "Stiftung Internationale Musikfestwochen" ("Internationale Musikfestwochen Foundation")
Rudolf Baumgartner becomes Artistic Director
- 1980 Ulrich Meyer-Schoellkopf is named new Artistic Director (until 1991)
- 1988 50th anniversary of the IMF (Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern)
Establishment of the Easter Festival
- 1992 Matthias Bamert takes over leadership of the Internationale Musikfestwochen (until 1998). He establishes the Easter Festival as a second annual festival in addition to the Summer Festival.
- 1993 Breakup of the Swiss Festival Orchestra
- 1998 The new KKL Concert Hall opens with a program featuring Claudio Abbado and the Berlin Philharmonic and celebrating the 60th anniversary of the IMF (19 August)
Establishment of the Piano Festival
- 1999 Michael Haefliger takes on the position of Executive and Artistic Director of the Festival
- 2001 The Internationale Musikfestwochen is renamed Lucerne Festival
- 2002 Establishment of the American Friends of Lucerne Festival
- 2003 Claudio Abbado and Michael Haefliger found the Lucerne Festival Orchestra as an ensemble comprising internationally acclaimed principals, chamber musicians, music teachers, and members of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, thus establishing a link with Arturo Toscanini's storied "elite orchestra."
- 2004 Pierre Boulez and Michael Haefliger found the Lucerne Festival Academy as an internationally unique educational institution devoted to music of the 20th and 21st centuries.
- 2005 The Lucerne Festival Orchestra goes on its first foreign tour under Claudio Abbado, traveling to Rome. Later destinations are Tokyo (2006), New York (2007 with Boulez and David Robertson in lieu of Abbado), Vienna (2008), the London Proms, Paris, Madrid, Hamburg, Baden-Baden, Ferrara, Moscow, and Beijing.
- 2007 The Lucerne Festival Academy tours abroad (also in 2008, 2011, 2012, and, as of 2014, every year)
- 2009 Dr. Hubert Achermann becomes Chairman of the Lucerne Festival Foundation.

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- 2011 Michael Haefliger, together with Anish Kapoor and Arata Isozaki, launches the project Lucerne Festival Ark Nova in response to the catastrophic earthquake in Japan. This is a mobile concert hall intended to contribute to cultural rebuilding in the affected regions. The Lucerne Festival Ark Nova is constructed for the first time in 2013 in Matsushima, Japan (in Sendai in 2014, in Fukushima in 2016, and in Tokyo in 2017).
The program offerings for children and young audiences are given the name “Young.”
- 2013 75th anniversary of Lucerne Festival - special jubilee day
Establishment of the new concert series “40min”
- 2014 The Lucerne Festival Alumni, an international network of former Academy students, is introduced to the public through concerts in New York, Beijing, Zurich, and Lucerne.
- 2016 Riccardo Chailly begins his tenure as Music Director of the Lucerne Festival Orchestra (succeeding the late Claudio Abbado, who died in January 2014).
Wolfgang Rihm becomes Artistic Director of the Lucerne Festival Academy (succeeding Pierre Boulez, who died in January 2016).
The Lucerne Festival Alumni guest perform with their own concert series, “Ligeti Forward,” at the “NY Phil Biennial” in New York (additional concerts in New York follow in 2018).
- 2017 Riccardo Chailly undertakes his first tour with the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, with stops in Japan, Korea, and China.
- 2018 Inaugural residency of the Lucerne Festival Orchestra under Riccardo Chailly in Shanghai, China
- 2019 The Piano Festival and Easter Festival are held for the last time.
Second residency of the Lucerne Festival Orchestra under Riccardo Chailly in Shanghai, China
- 2020 Due to the coronavirus pandemic, all three planned festivals are forced to cancel, including the two new short festivals in spring (with Teodor Currentzis) and fall (with Igor Levit and Patricia Kopatchinskaja), as well as the Summer Festival programmed around the theme “Joy.”
The ten-day-long short festival “Life is Live” successfully allows audiences to return to the live music experience in August, subject to strict protective measures.
- 2021 Because of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, the Spring Festival “András Schiff and Friends” has to be cancelled.
Lucerne Festival announces its new visual identity and strategy for assigning programs to one of three categories (“Symphony,” “Contemporary,” and “Music for Future”).
The new fall festival “Lucerne Festival Forward!” is to be held for the first time in November 2021, and a new short festival with the Lucerne Festival Orchestra starting in spring 2022 is also announced, as well as a piano festival curated by Igor Levit, which is to take place starting in May 2023. The Lucerne Festival Contemporary Orchestra (LFCO) is founded as the Festival's in-house orchestra for contemporary music.

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2022 At the Mendelssohn Festival, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Yulianna Avdeeva, and Kian Soltani perform with soloists from the Lucerne Festival Orchestra in a benefit concert for Ukraine, taking a stand against the Russian war of aggression.

The Summer Festival's theme of "Diversity" entails a plea for increased diversity in the world of classical music. The focus is specifically on women and Black composers and performers. Featured as the "artistes étoiles" are the soprano Golda Schultz and the multi-instrumentalist and composer Tyshawn Sorey.

2023 At the 2023 Mendelssohn Festival, the conductors Iván Fischer and Andrés Orozco-Estrada replace Music Director Riccardo Chailly in the two Lucerne Festival Orchestra concerts. Lucerne Festival also celebrates the 150th birthday of Sergei Rachmaninoff on 1 April with a new show by the comedy duo Igudesman & Joo featuring guest artist Yuja Wang.

In May, it is announced that Sebastian Nordmann will assume the role of Executive and Artistic Director of Lucerne Festival starting January 1, 2026, succeeding Michael Haefliger, who will step down at the end of 2025 after 26 highly successful years leading the festival.

2024 With the theme of "Curiosity," the Summer Festival focuses on contemporary music, with a major spotlight on the 20th anniversary of the Lucerne Festival Academy.

On 18 October, the Lucerne Festival Orchestra performs together with Music Director Riccardo Chailly and violinist Daniel Lozakovich at the Philharmonie in Paris, followed by the orchestra's debut at the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg on 19 October.

2025 In January, Lucerne Festival published a comprehensive impact study revealing the economic and societal value the festival brings to the Lucerne region. The study highlights, among other findings, that the festival generates an annual economic value of approximately 45 to 50 million CHF for the region and creates around 230 to 270 jobs.

The motto «Open End» shapes the artistic summer program and also marks the final festival summer under Artistic Director Michael Haefliger. The focus is on open-ended, unfinished, or cyclical works—with special emphasis on the «Boulez Cosmos» in celebration of the 100th birthday of the composer. Additionally, the mobile, inflatable concert hall Ark Nova will be on display in Switzerland for the first time, from September 4 to 14, and will be set up on the Lidowiese near the Swiss Museum of Transport in Lucerne.

Additional details about the Festival's history can be found at lucernefestival.ch/en/about-us/history

Contacts for Press and Public Relations

Nina Steinhart, Head of PR | n.steinhart@lucernefestival.ch | t +41 (0)41 226 44 43

Katharina Schillen | k.schillen@lucernefestival.ch | t +41 (0)41 226 44 59