

Media Release

Michael Haefliger to receive prestigious international award from the International Society for the Performing Arts (ISPA)

For his achievements in the international music and festival industry, the New York-based organization will honor Lucerne Festival's Executive and Artistic Director with the International Citation of Merit Award 2025

Lucerne, 23 April 2025. Michael Haefliger, Executive and Artistic Director of Lucerne Festival, has been awarded the 2025 International Citation of Merit. The prize will be presented on 12 June at the ISPA Congress in Lugano. With this honor, the ISPA recognizes Haefliger for his decades-long contribution to the international cultural sector. It is the highest distinction awarded by the organization.

The International Society for the Performing Arts (ISPA) is a global network of leaders in the performing arts. Founded in the United States in 1949, the organization now counts more than 500 members from over 50 countries. Its mission is to promote global exchange, networking, and the advancement of the cultural sphere. The ISPA serves as a platform for dialogue, innovation, and international cooperation.

The International Citation of Merit Award is presented to individuals who have played a transformative role behind the scenes in shaping the world of the performing arts. It honors a lifetime of work that has enriched the international cultural landscape through outstanding achievement. The award is granted only to a select few and is considered one of the most prestigious honors in the field of international cultural activities.

Michael Haefliger has served as Executive and Artistic Director of Lucerne Festival since 1999. During his tenure, he has led the Festival into a new era, establishing it as one of the world's foremost classical music festivals. He introduced innovative concert formats, prioritized contemporary music and the support of emerging talent, and broadened the Festival's appeal to new audiences.

Each Summer Festival has featured a thematic focus with artistic and sociopolitical resonance. In 2016, for example, the theme «PrimaDonna» sparked dialogue about the role of women in the music world; in 2019, the spotlight fell on «Power», in 2022 on the critical social theme of «Diversity», and in 2024 on «Curiosity», with an emphasis on contemporary music.

In 2003, Michael Haefliger founded the Lucerne Festival Orchestra with Claudio Abbado, followed in 2004 by the founding of the Lucerne Festival Academy with Pierre Boulez. Following the deaths of these two visionaries, he led these institutions into a new chapter in 2016, appointing Riccardo Chailly as Music Director of the Lucerne Festival Orchestra and Wolfgang Rihm as Artistic Director of the Lucerne Festival Academy.

In the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in Japan in the fall of 2011, Haefliger launched the Lucerne Festival Ark Nova, the world's first mobile, inflatable concert hall, in collaboration with Anish Kapoor, Masahide Kajimoto, and Arata Isozaki. Conceived as an innovative social project, the Ark Nova will make its European debut in September 2025, when it will be installed and activated in Lucerne during the Summer Festival – one of the most successful international ventures in the Festival's history.

In recent years, Michael Haefliger has launched three shorter satellite festivals alongside the Summer Festival: Lucerne Festival Forward, a platform for contemporary music held in November; the Spring Festival, a showcase for the Lucerne Festival Orchestra; and Piano Fest, a keyboard festival held in May and curated by pianist Igor Levit.

Haefliger has received numerous honors, including the European Culture and Innovation Award, the Central Switzerland Culture Prize, the City of Lucerne's «Needle of Honor», and an award from the

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Swiss Society of New York. In 2000, he was named a «Global Leader of Tomorrow» by the World Economic Forum (WEF). The International Citation of Merit from ISPA underscores the profound impact of Haeffliger's career on the global cultural landscape over the past decades.

Please find additional information at lucernefestival.ch and ispa.org.

Press photos available for download at lucernefestival.ch/en/press/photos

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