

Media Release

The composer, clarinetist, and conductor Jörg Widmann will take over as Artistic Director of the Lucerne Festival Academy in 2026

Lucerne, 4 June 2025. Sebastian Nordmann, the designated Executive and Artistic Director of Lucerne Festival, has appointed the composer, clarinetist, conductor, and educator Jörg Widmann as the new Artistic Director of the Lucerne Festival Academy, effective January 2026. Widmann succeeds Wolfgang Rihm, who passed away last year. Nordmann himself will launch his directorship at the beginning of 2026 and will introduce the programming for the 2026 Festival year at the end of January. Nordmann will also be joined by Jörg Widmann to present the artistic programming for the Academy in 2026. Since its founding in 2004 by Pierre Boulez and Michael Haefliger, the Lucerne Festival Academy has been a central pillar of Lucerne Festival. As a master school in the field of contemporary music, it is a globally unique institution comprising a network of more than 1,500 instrumentalists, conductors, and composers. The Academy for the coming summer of 2025 was planned by Wolfgang Rihm together with the Lucerne Festival Academy team, with a focus on celebrating the 100th birthday of founder Pierre Boulez. Marco Stroppa will be composer-in-residence, the Composer Seminar will be led by Dieter Ammann and Unsuk Chin, while Baldur Brönnimann will direct the Contemporary Conducting-Program.

Jörg Widmann, who was born in Munich in 1973, is regarded as one of the most versatile artists of his generation and one of today's most sought-after composers. After studying clarinet in Munich and at the Juilliard School in New York, he pursued composition studies with Kay Westermann, Wilfried Hiller, Hans Werner Henze, Heiner Goebbels, and Wolfgang Rihm. His works are premiered and regularly performed by leading orchestras worldwide, including the Berliner Philharmoniker, the Vienna Philharmonic, the New York Philharmonic, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the Cleveland Orchestra. Conductors such as Daniel Barenboim, Kent Nagano, Christian Thielemann, Sir Simon Rattle, and Andris Nelsons bring his music to venues around the world.

In the 2023-24 season, Jörg Widmann was composer-in-residence with the Berliner Philharmoniker and conducted the orchestra in a concert featuring his own compositions alongside works by Felix Mendelssohn. This residency culminated in the highly acclaimed world premiere of his Horn Concerto, conducted by Sir Simon Rattle and featuring Stefan Dohr as the soloist. Widmann is increasingly active as a conductor, making recent appearances leading the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, the National Symphony Orchestra of Taiwan, and the NHK Symphony Orchestra, among others. He also serves as Principal Guest Conductor of the NDR Radiophilharmonie and Artistic Partner of the Sinfonietta Riga.

In addition to his work as a composer and conductor, Widmann continues to perform as a clarinetist, collaborating with such artists as Daniel Barenboim, Tabea Zimmermann, Sir Andrés Schiff, and Hélène Grimaud. Several contemporary composers have dedicated works to him, including clarinet concertos by Wolfgang Rihm, Aribert Reimann, and Mark Andre. From 2001 to 2015, Widmann taught clarinet and composition in Freiburg; since 2017 he has been Professor of Composition at the Barenboim-Said Academy in Berlin. His achievements have garnered numerous awards: most recently, the Bach Prize of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg and the Music Prize of the City of Munich. In recognition of his contributions to music, he was named a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music in June 2024.

LUCERNE FESTIVAL

In 2009, Jörg Widmann was featured as composer-in-residence at Lucerne Festival during the summer. Most recently, in the summer of 2023, the Festival premiered *The Last Rose of Summer*, a commissioned work for viola and chamber orchestra.

“To have the opportunity to carry forward the tradition of championing contemporary music at Lucerne Festival – established by Pierre Boulez and Wolfgang Rihm – is a significant responsibility and a great honor,” Widmann stated in reference to his new role at Lucerne Festival. “I look forward to embedding contemporary music even more deeply in our programming and to offering the best possible opportunities and performance conditions for emerging composers, instrumentalists, and conductors.”

“It brings me great joy that we have been able to appoint Jörg Widmann as Artistic Director and successor to Pierre Boulez and Wolfgang Rihm in Lucerne,” remarks Sebastian Nordmann. “His inspiring way of bridging tradition and modernity – in his compositions and in his programming alike – as well as his passionate ability to spark enthusiasm for classical music, especially contemporary music, make him our absolute dream candidate.”

The Lucerne Festival Academy was founded in 2004 by Pierre Boulez and Festival Executive and Artistic Director Michael Haefliger as a platform to promote contemporary music. Composer Wolfgang Rihm served as its Artistic Director since 2016. The Academy is aimed at instrumentalists, conductors, and composers. Each summer, more than 100 musicians from around 30 nations dedicate three weeks to immersing themselves in the repertoire of the 20th and 21st centuries. The Lucerne Festival Contemporary Orchestra (LFCO) comprises current and former participants of the Lucerne Festival Academy, whose international network has grown over the past two decades to encompass more than 1,500 instrumentalists, conductors, and composers. As such, the LFCO embodies Lucerne Festival’s long-standing commitment to contemporary music. Its repertoire ranges from early Modernism to the most recent compositions. The ensemble plays a central role in both large-scale and chamber music concert formats during the Academy at the Summer Festival and is active internationally, making appearances in recent years at Musikfest Berlin, the Donaueschingen Festival, and Hamburg’s Elbphilharmonie. In Lucerne, it serves as the resident orchestra of Lucerne Festival Forward, the festival devoted to contemporary music that was established in 2021.

Photos available for downloading at lucernefestival.ch/en/press/photos

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