

Media Release

Lucerne Festival Reports Strong Results for the Summer Concert Season, with a High Overall Attendance Rate of 89 Percent

More than 85 works were performed at Lucerne Festival for the first time in 2026

Lucerne, 11 September 2026. This Sunday, 13 September, the first summer season under Lucerne Festival's new Executive and Artistic Director, Sebastian Nordmann, comes to a close with very positive results. The 25 large-scale symphonic concerts had an attendance rate of 93 percent, with 15 sold out. The Festival's overall attendance rate was 89 percent. Despite a slightly reduced program of events compared with 2025 – 53 ticketed events compared with 64 – the 32-day Festival, centered on the theme "American Dreams," attracted a total of 81,000 visitors. Of these, 54,000 attended ticketed events, while a further 27,000 took advantage of the free offerings.

Among the sold-out performances were concerts by the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra with Daniel Barenboim, the Lucerne Festival Orchestra with Anne-Sophie Mutter, and both concerts by the Berliner Philharmoniker. The Festival finale this coming Sunday, Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, is also already sold out.

The theme was reflected throughout the artistic program in many different ways. American stars including Joyce DiDonato, Hilary Hahn, Doreen Ketchens, and Mark and Maggie O'Connor made their Lucerne Festival debuts, while Yo-Yo Ma returned after an eleven-year absence. More than 50 works by American composers were performed, ranging from chamber music by Amy Beach and Steve Reich to orchestral works by Samuel Barber and Charles Ives, as well as Frank Zappa's *The Yellow Shark*. More than 85 works were performed at Lucerne Festival for the first time. In addition, numerous rising stars – including Frank Dupree, Alexandre Kantorow, Yunchan Lim, and Hayato Sumino – made their Lucerne Festival debuts.

"I am thrilled by how strongly the special Festival atmosphere could be felt throughout Lucerne over the past month – whether at the new 'Classical Music for All: Open Air' on Europaplatz, at 'In the Streets: City Stage,' or in the acoustically superb KKL Luzern Concert Hall," says Executive and Artistic Director Sebastian Nordmann. "One unforgettable highlight for me was the triumphant debut of our new Academy Director Jörg Widmann with Wolfgang Rihm's *Tutuguri*. Other highlights that will stay with me include the concerts by our Lucerne Festival Orchestra, Anne-Sophie Mutter's appearances marking the 50th anniversary of her stage debut, and the many memorable moments inspired by our 'American Dreams' theme."

Through innovative formats and events, Sebastian Nordmann opened the Festival to new audiences: 4,500 people attended "Classical Music for All: Open Air" on Europaplatz, 1,830 attended "Overture" in the KKL Luzern Concert Hall, the new pre-opening on 13 August; 6,100 came to the newly reimagined "In the Streets: City Stage." 1,250 guests attended "Lakeside Symphony" at Inseli Park. The expanded "Look, Listen, Enjoy" offer, which allows concertgoers to bring a child or teenager to a concert for CHF 10, was very well received. The new "Fan Zone" subscription, offering an attractive package of tickets to four Lucerne Festival Orchestra concerts, sold out almost immediately.

The Festival reached a total of 4,200 school-age children through initiatives including school concerts with the Berliner Philharmoniker and Munich Philharmonic, the new "Klassikzimmer" format, the "Dream Oasis" sustainability project, and "Debuts at School."

A Grand Finale This Weekend

In keeping with the theme, several of the Festival's final concerts this weekend also have an American focus. Tonight, on the 25th anniversary of 9/11, the American poet Amanda Gorman will appear with cellist Jan Vogler. Saturday features an organ recital by Thomas Ospital, who will perform variations on two American national anthems; that evening, the marching band MEUTE will bring its brass-driven techno sound to the KKL Luzern, performing entirely on acoustic instruments. Sunday begins with the matinee "Trance," performed by Ensemble Helix, the Studio for Contemporary Music at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts – Music, and conducted by Gregory Charette. Then, on Sunday afternoon, George Gershwin's classic American opera *Porgy and Bess* brings the Festival to a close in a performance by the Chineke! Orchestra and Cape Town Opera, conducted by Enrique Mazzola.

Lineup of Leading International Orchestras and Soloists

As is customary, the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, led by Music Director Riccardo Chailly, opened the Festival with two days of concerts. In all, it gave six concerts and two editions of "Classical Music for All: 40min," featuring appearances with Riccardo Chailly, Klaus Mäkelä, Anne-Sophie Mutter, and Jakub Hrůša. Twenty symphony orchestras appeared at the Summer Festival, including the Berliner Philharmoniker with Kirill Petrenko, the Vienna Philharmonic with Tugan Sokhiev, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra with Santtu-Matias Rouvali, The Met Orchestra with Yannick Nézet-Séguin, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra with Manfred Honeck, and the Konzerthausorchester Berlin, which made its Festival debut under Duncan Ward.

As this year's "artiste étoile," Augustin Hadelich appeared in four very different settings: "Fiddle Night", a recital, a performance with the Lucerne Festival Orchestra under Klaus Mäkelä, and Beethoven's Violin Concerto with the Berliner Philharmoniker. The Festival also featured a host of other prominent artists, among them Martha Argerich, Cecilia Bartoli, Isabelle Faust, Elisabeth Leonskaja, and Víkingur Ólafsson. Violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter celebrated the 50th anniversary of her stage debut as well as her 50th appearance at the Festival in a wide variety of concert formats, with repertoire ranging from Mozart to Penderecki as well as the Swiss premiere of *Likoo* by Iranian composer Aftab Darvishi.

Successful Start for the Lucerne Festival Academy under Jörg Widmann

Jörg Widmann led the Lucerne Festival Academy for the first time in 2026 as its new Artistic Director. He launched the Academy on the Festival's opening weekend by conducting the Lucerne Festival Contemporary Orchestra (LFCO) in Wolfgang Rihm's monumental *Tutuguri*. The LFCO gave six concerts in all. Other highlights of the Contemporary program included the Composer Seminar for orchestral works, led by Dieter Ammann and Unsuk Chin, and a total of 12 world premieres. Clarinetists from the LFCO and the Lucerne Festival Orchestra performed together at both the pre-opening and the Opening Concert, while four conductors took part in the Contemporary-Conducting Program under the direction of Baldur Brönnimann. The LFCO also performed *Tutuguri* on 2 September at Berlin's Philharmonie as part of Musikfest Berlin and on 6 September at the Isarphilharmonie in Munich as part of Bavarian Radio's musica viva concert series.

"In the Streets: City Stage" brought seven projects to central Lucerne, three curated by guerillaclassics, with several of them engaging directly with the Summer Festival theme "American Dreams." LFCO musicians performed with clarinetist Doreen Ketchens, among others, while Joseph Sieber conducted the LFCO in a "Symphonic Jukebox."

Mark Andre served as composer-in-residence. The Festival presented his orchestral triptych *Im Entschwinden – Im Entfalten – Im Entsiegeln 1* as well as his Clarinet Concerto *über*, written for

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Jörg Widmann, who was the soloist. Other contemporary highlights included Hans Werner Henze's *Sinfonia N. 9*, performed as part of the *räsonanz* Donor Concert in partnership with the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation; the world premiere of Liza Lim's *Tongue of the Land*, this year's "Roche Commissions" work, conducted by Peter Rundel; Frank Zappa's *The Yellow Shark*; and *Endangered Dreams* by Jalalu-Kalvert Nelson. Peter Maxwell Davies's music-theater work *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and the world premiere of the opera *Medeas Monolog* by British composer Bushra El-Turk were presented as part of this year's collaboration with the Luzerner Theater; tickets are still available for additional performances in the coming weeks.

Lucerne Festival Summer

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Contact for Press and Public Relations

Nina Steinhart, Press Spokesperson | n.steinhart@lucernefestival.ch | T +41 (0)41 226 44 43
www.lucernefestival.ch