



verbierfestival

PRESS RELEASE

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VERBIER FESTIVAL ANNOUNCES 2021 PROGRAMME – Marking a bold return to music and live events, artists and audiences will be brought together again in the Swiss Alps this summer for a powerful 2021 edition

- The Verbier Festival returns for its 28th edition with a rich programme of inspired concerts
- Leading soloists return to the Festival, including András Schiff, Daniel Hope, Evgeny Kissin, Janine Jansen, Joshua Bell, and many more
- Public safety remains a priority with venue capacities and configurations, length of concerts and elimination of intermissions among enhancements to ensure this

The Verbier Festival is proud to announce the programme for its 28th edition, taking place once again in the stunning setting of the Swiss Alps. With an extraordinary programme, the Festival boldly presents a return to live events with enhancements and safety measures in place to ensure the safety of its entire community.

The 2021 edition offers more performances, a richer, more varied programme, and more ways to experience the Festival. Following guidance on safety, performances will last around 70 minutes and will be presented without intermission. Salle des Combins concerts will feature two performances most evenings, offering slightly different repertoire, and often different soloists, allowing audiences to attend two concerts under the tent or a second concert in the intimate setting of the Verbier Église the same evening.

“All of us in the music world—festivals, orchestras, concert halls, not to mention technicians and, of course, countless musicians—need the support of audiences now more than ever. It goes without saying that financial support is always needed. But this year it goes beyond that. After such a long period without live performance, we all need our enthusiastic audiences to return,” said Verbier Festival Founder & Director, Martin T:son Engstroem. “We’ve created a full scale Verbier Festival for 2021 with enhancements that are both artistically exciting and put the safety of our public, artists and Festival team at the forefront. We were among the first to see that it would not be possible to present a Festival in 2020 and now we are among the first to re-emerge stronger and ready to share our wonderful Festival once again.”

With world renowned artists returning to Verbier for this special edition of the Festival, performing alongside Academy musicians and alumni, the programme presents an imaginative offering of the highest caliber, designed with solutions for a safe Festival top of mind.

The Festival also welcomes back those artists who were celebrated in the 2020 Virtual Verbier Festival, including Mischa Maisky, Joshua Bell, András Schiff, Mikhail Pletnev, Evgeny Kissin, and Music Director Valery Gergiev. In partnership with medici.tv, Virtual Verbier Festival broadcasts were viewed nearly 1.5 million times during the summer of 2020.

Opening the Festival this year are two concerts featuring pianist Denis Matsuev performing with the Verbier Festival Orchestra (VFO) and its Music Director, Valery Gergiev [16 July]. **Pianists of the highest calibre** are presented in every edition of the Verbier Festival, adding fresh new talent and building on relationships from year to year. Festival favourite Evgeny Kissin will perform in a number of recitals and will also appear with Thomas Hampson for a special theatrical reading of Katherine Kressmann Taylor's *Address Unknown*. This short story was written as a series of letters between a Jewish art dealer, living in San Francisco, and his business partner, who had returned to Germany in 1932, and has been credited as alerting America to the rise of Naziism. Further pianists performing this summer include Fazil Say and Sergei Babayan, as well as Abisal Gergiev and Nobuyuki Tsujii, who both perform at the Festival for the first time. Canadian pianist, Chilly Gonzales, brings his latest release *Solo Piano III* to the Festival in what promises to be a particularly memorable debut at the Festival.

Japanese pianist Mao Fujita will make his debut on the Mainstage this summer with a focus on Mozart. Winner of the Clara Haskil Competition in 2017, alumnus of the 2018 Verbier Academy and Silver Medalist of the 2019 Tchaikovsky Competition, Fujita has already embarked on what Festival Director Engstroem foresees will be a brilliant career, performing with some of the world's top orchestras in breathtaking concerts since his first visit to the Festival. This summer, in addition to a performance of Mozart's K. 466 concerto with Gabór Takács-Nagy and the Verbier Festival Chamber Orchestra [VFCO], he presents all of Mozart's Piano Sonatas over five recitals—an event that is sure to be a musical statement and an audience favourite.

Another special highlight is **Maria João Pires' first appearance** at the Festival, where she will be performing works by Schumann, Debussy and Beethoven at the Verbier Église with Augustin Dumay.

Audiences returning to the Swiss Alps this summer can expect more of the magical and **legendary Rencontres Inédites** that are a trademark of the Verbier Festival. For an evening of Strauss and Schnittke, Augustin Hadelich and Alban Gerhardt, who appear this year for the first time at the Festival, perform with Alexander Sitkovetsky, Antoine Tamesit and Denis Matsuev [21 July]. The majestic Tchaikovsky Trio brings together Janine Jansen, Mischa Maisky and Mikhail Pletnev [22 July], whilst Michael Barenboim, Lawrence Power and Sheku-Kanneh-Mason perform Brahms with Joshua Bell and Lahav Shani [28 July].

One eagerly awaited evening will be **Daniel Hope's *Escape to Paradise*** [30 July]. The concert is centred around Hope's extensive research into Jewish composers—among them Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Miklós Rózsa, Hanns Eisler and Franz Waxman to name a few—who fled fascist persecution to relocate to Los Angeles where they penned some of the 20th century's most iconic film scores. Lawrence Power, Sheku Kanneh-Mason, Thomas Hampson and Julien Quentin bring this exciting project to life following the success of the initial program of "Berlin 1938" which the Festival presented in 2019.

The **Verbier Festival Orchestra** [VFO] takes to the stage eight times during the Festival under the baton of esteemed conductors from across the globe, including its Music Director, Valery Gergiev [16 and 20 July], Daniele Gatti [23 July], Antonio Pappano [26 July], Daniel Harding [29 July], plus Iván Fischer who will lead the orchestra in the finale concert with András Schiff [1 August]. Meanwhile leading soloists will join the **Verbier Festival Chamber Orchestra** [VFCO] throughout the Festival, including Pamela Frank [17 July], Janine Jansen [21 July], Sergei Babayan [21 July], Augustin Hadelich [24 July], Marc Bouchkov [24 July], Daniel Lozakovich [27 July], and Matthias Goerne [31 July].

Alongside the concerts and recitals, audiences will be entranced in the worlds of dance and opera. The Sukhishvili Georgian National Ballet tells a story about the battles, suffering and heroism of the Georgian people, portraying the history and soul of Georgia through folkloric dance. The Verbier Festival Orchestra and Daniele Gatti present the second act of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* with Nine Stemme (Isolde), Stuart Skelton (Tristan), René Pape (König Marke) and Okka von der Damerau (Brangäne). Elsewhere, the VFO performs Puccini favourite, *La fanciulla del West*, with Valery Gergiev, Maria Bayankina (Minnie), Ambrogio Maestri (Dick Johnson/Ramerraz), Brandon Jovanovich (Jack Rance), and the Oberwalliser Vokalensemble with recent alumni from the Verbier Festival Academy.

In the first year of his new position as Music Director of the **Verbier Festival Junior Orchestra** [VFJO], James Gaffigan will lead the orchestra and Verbier Festival Academy singers in

Puccini's *La Bohème*. Leading up to the ten-year anniversary of the VFJO, Gaffigan's position of Music Director highlights the important investment and continued efforts to nurture and train young musicians of tomorrow.

As in previous years, the Verbier Festival continues to nurture the next generation of musicians through its VFO, VFJO, Conducting Programme, Atelier Lyrique and Soloists & Chamber Music Programme, working with young musicians from around the world between the ages of 15 and 35. The Verbier Festival Orchestra has become a rite of passage for today's exceptional young orchestral musicians and the Academy's programmes for soloists, chamber musicians and singers has an impressive list of alumni from over 60 countries who have been engaged by the world's leading concert presenters and orchestras since their time in Verbier. In addition to Mao Fujita, ten of the Mainstage soloists in 2021 have come up through the Verbier Festival Academy, including Roman Borisov, Tom Borrow, Johan Dalene, Anastasia Kobekina, Denis Kozhukhin, Daniel Lozakovich, Lawrence Power, Connie Shih and Kian Soltani. 2017 alumnus Sheku Kanneh-Mason will perform alongside his sister, pianist Isata Kanneh-Mason, following his record-breaking album release in 2020 [30 July].

Speaking about the **Academy**, Director Stephen McHolm said, "It was a huge disappointment for the 220 young musicians accepted to the Academy's orchestral, conducting, soloist, chamber music and voice programmes to learn that they could not be with us last summer. One silver lining was that they would all be re-invited in 2021," he confirms. "So much of our world turned 'digital' in 2020, including music education. And while online learning is a worthwhile stopgap, it can't replace the inspiration found by collaborating with colleagues, meeting great masters and attending incredible concerts in person—all of which are unique to our Festival. 2020 taught musicians to be resilient; 2021 will be a time to celebrate young talent once again in Verbier."

As part of its response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Verbier Festival set up an emergency relief fund available to freelance, self-employed and newly unemployed Verbier Festival Academy alumni, granting over CHF 811,000 to 338 alumni since April.

Unlimited, the Verbier Festival's programme of free and accessible activities for all ages, returns in 2021 to stimulate curiosity for arts and culture, through performances that push boundaries of classical music expectations, informative talks and workshops and activities for nature-lovers and children. Its popular series of Secret Concerts—performances where the identity of artists is kept under wraps until they take the stage—returns for three evenings. A new series called *Drôles d'oiseaux* will feature vocal concerts with a quirky twist [24-26 July], including a tribute

to Cole Porter for his 130th birthday, while the new *Electrify* series brings jazz, soul, electronic and contemporary classical music to the valley below Verbier at Espace Saint-Marc in Le Châble [28, 29, 30 July]. A highlight of this series is the world premiere of composer Gabriel Prokofiev's new work commissioned by the Verbier Festival Academy for string sextet in response to Beethoven's *Pastorale Symphony* [29 July]. Unlimited also presents the annual Verbier Festival Philanthropy Forum, which this year features an afternoon discussion on how philanthropy can be mobilised for the good of our planet. The panel, moderated by Swiss Philanthropy Foundation's Etienne Eichenberger, features Hansjörg Wyss, a champion of philanthropic causes relating to environmental protection [17 July].

As part of its effort to make music available and accessible to audiences not physically present in Verbier, the Festival continues its collaboration with medici.tv to video-stream more than 30 live and on demand performances, and welcomes Mezzo as a new broadcast partner. Swiss radio RTS Espace 2 will again offer live and rebroadcast concerts throughout the Festival too. Official audio streaming partner IDAGIO will stream playlists and exclusive concerts.

The Festival's **health and safety protocols** aim to ensure a safe environment for performers, audience members, staff and volunteers, whilst maintaining the warmth and spirit of the Festival at its heart. Together with Unisanté, the University Centre for General Medicine and Public Health in Lausanne, the Festival has been developing a wide-ranging public health protocol since September 2020. The majority of concerts have been programmed to last around 70 minutes each, presented without intermission, with pre-concert chats only available online to stream before the performances. As of today, the protocol prescribes that masks must be worn at all times inside venues, including during performances, and physical distancing will be enforced through reduced venue capacities and adapted seating plans. Health and safety protocols will evolve during the lead-up to the Festival. Up-to-date details can be found on the Festival's website at verbierfestival.com.

This 28th edition of the Verbier Festival is made possible with the support of many philanthropic, corporate and public funders, notably Madame Aline Foriel-Destezet, The Friends of the Verbier Festival, the Festival's major donors, including its Chairman's Circle, the Commune de Val de Bagnes, Loterie Romande, Canton du Valais, and its loyal Principal Sponsors Bank Julius Baer and Neva Foundation.

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Julius Bär

CONTACT

VERBIER FESTIVAL

Ségolène Rouillet-Solignac

+41 (0)77 415 71 62

presse@verbierfestival.com

STUDIO ESSECI (IT)

Roberta Barbaro

+39 (0)49 66 34 99

gestione3@studioesseci.net

THE PUBLICISTS (FR/BE/LU)

Thierry Messonnier

+33 (0)6 84 67 84 30

thierry@thepublicists.fr

WILDKAT PR (CH-D/DE/AT)

Laure Ugolini

+49 (0)305 490 5906

laure@wildkatpr.com

PREMIER (UK/US/CA)

Rebecca Johns

+44 (0)20 7292 7336 / +44 (0)7715 205 196

rebecca.johns@premiercomms.com

PHOTOS

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