

# Vladimir Ashkenazy

## Conductor/Piano



HARRISON PARROTT

One of the few artists to combine a successful career as a pianist and conductor, Russian-born Vladimir Ashkenazy inherited his musical gift from both sides of his family; his father David Ashkenazy was a professional light music pianist and his mother Evstolia (née Plotnova) was daughter of a chorus master in the Russian Orthodox church. Ashkenazy first came to prominence on the world stage in the 1955 Chopin Competition in Warsaw and as first prize-winner of the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels in 1956. Since then he has built an extraordinary career, not only as one of the most outstanding pianists of the 20th century, but as an artist whose creative life encompasses a vast range of activities and continues to offer inspiration to music-lovers across the world.

Conducting has formed the larger part of Ashkenazy's activities for more than 35 years. He continues his longstanding relationship with the Philharmonia Orchestra, who appointed him Conductor Laureate in 2000. In addition to his performances with the orchestra in London and around the UK each season, Vladimir Ashkenazy joins the Philharmonia Orchestra on countless tours worldwide. In the past, Ashkenazy and the Philharmonia have developed landmark projects such as *Voices of Revolution: Russia 1917*, *Prokofiev and Shostakovich Under Stalin* (a project which he also took to Cologne, New York, Vienna and Moscow) and *Rachmaninoff Revisited* (which was also presented in Paris).

This summer, Vladimir Ashkenazy was named as the very first Conductor Laureate of Sydney Symphony Orchestra. This appointment has been made in recognition of his 50 year association with the Orchestra which began in 1969 and is an honour never before bestowed on any previous Sydney Symphony conductor. One of the most revered figures in classical music, the legendary pianist and veteran conductor accepts this position having entered his ninth decade. The young-at-heart musician who has a most impressive array of awards and recognitions to his name, as well as a vast discography both as a pianist and a conductor, Ashkenazy enjoys a career rich in achievement but remains, despite the prestige, a musician of the greatest dignity and unparalleled spiritual height. He has continued, for more than 60 years, to thrill audiences around the world and to shape profoundly many generations of musicians, maintaining an incredible level of trust and respect from them. A person of great warmth, humility and generosity, he has contributed immensely to the underprivileged and to humanity in general, reaching well beyond his contribution as a musician.

Ashkenazy is also Conductor Laureate of both the Iceland and NHK Symphony orchestras and Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana. He has recently stepped down from the Music Directorship of the EUYO, a post held with great satisfaction for 15 years. Previously he has held posts as Chief Conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and Music Director of NHK Symphony Orchestra. He maintains strong links with other major orchestras including The Cleveland Orchestra (where he was formerly Principal Guest Conductor) and Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin (Chief Conductor and Music Director 1988-96). He regularly makes guest appearances with many other major orchestras around the world.

Ashkenazy maintains his devotion to the piano, these days mostly in the recording studio where he continues to build his extraordinarily comprehensive recording catalogue. This includes the Grammy award-winning album of Shostakovich's *Preludes and Fugues*, Rautavaara's Piano Concerto No.3 (a work which he commissioned), Bach's *Wohltemperierte Klavier*, Rachmaninov's *Transcriptions* and Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*, 'Ashkenazy: 50 Years on Decca' - a 50-CD box-set celebrating his long-standing relationship with the label, a milestone collection of Ashkenazy's vast catalogue of Rachmaninov's piano music, which also includes all of his recordings as a conductor of the composer's orchestral music. 2017 sees the release of his latest album, Bach's *French Suites*, and two new box sets - Vladimir Ashkenazy's Complete Concerto recordings and a personal selection of solo and chamber works.

Beyond his performing schedule, Vladimir Ashkenazy has also been involved in many television projects, inspired by his passionate drive to ensure that serious music retains a platform in the mainstream media and is available to as broad an audience as possible. He has collaborated extensively with legendary documentary-maker Christopher Nupen, and has been involved in programmes such as *Music After Mao* (filmed in Shanghai in 1979), and *Ashkenazy in Moscow*, which followed his first return to Russia since leaving the USSR in the 1960s, and educational programmes with NHK TV including the 1999 *Superteachers*, working with inner-city London school children, and in 2003-4 a documentary based around his 'Prokofiev and Shostakovich Under Stalin' project.

2018/19 season only. Please contact HarrisonParrott if you wish to edit this biography.