

The History of the Yamagata Symphony Orchestra-“Yamakyo”

1971

Conductor Chiaki Murakawa (currently Founding Honorary Conductor) from Murayama City, Yamagata Prefecture, began calling for the establishment of a Yamagata Symphony Orchestra in his hometown. As a result of his passion for bringing real music to the children of Yamagata, the founding meeting for the Yamagata Symphony Orchestra was held and the preparatory orchestra was organized.

1972

The Yamagata Symphony Orchestra was officially formed, becoming the 14th professional orchestra in Japan and the first in the Tohoku region. The Yamagata Symphony Association was established as the operating body. The orchestra focused its efforts on music classes in elementary, junior high, and high schools in the prefecture, and held its first subscription concert.



The first subscription concert

1978

Yamakyo received the Saito Mokichi Cultural Award, worthy of Yamagata Prefecture's Cultural Award.

1985

The Yamagata Symphony Orchestra Instrument Donation Society was established by 51 music fans. A contrabass, xylophone, snare drums, and cymbals were donated to the orchestra.

1987

The orchestra held its first Tokyo concert at Suntory Hall, which was completely sold out and a great success.

1988

The Yamakyo *Gakuyu* Chorus was established as the official amateur choir of the orchestra. The orchestra also held a Tokyo performance of the Symphonic Hymn “Yamagata” as its second Tokyo concert.



The Symphonic Hymn “Yamagata”

1989

In anticipation of the opening of the *Yamagata Shinkansen* the following year, the orchestra held a concert titled "Yamagata is Close" at Tokyo Station.

1991

The orchestra participated in its first overseas concert, the "Colorado Music Festival" in Colorado, USA, which is Yamagata's sister state. The orchestra performed a joint concert of Mahler's Symphony No. 2 in C minor "Resurrection," receiving rave reviews.



Colorado Music Festival

1992

To celebrate the orchestra's 20th anniversary and the 200th anniversary of Mozart's death, a three-night consecutive concert series "Mozart for Three Nights" was held.

1995

Under the direction of Chiaki Murakawa, the orchestra started to put on complete performances of Sibelius's symphonies from the 97th subscription concert. These were performed at the subscription concerts held in January, the coldest season of the year, for seven years until the 132nd subscription concert in 2001.

2001

The orchestra's community-based activities, e.g. school concerts, received the Suntory Regional Culture Award for their high regard. The Yamagata Terra, the main venue for regular performances, was completed.

2003

The first "Sakuranbo (Cherry) Concert" was held, bringing along Yamagata's specialty products and produce, such as cherries. The 18th National Cultural Festival Yamagata 2003 was held, and the piano concerto "Mogami," composed by Makoto Ozone, was performed in the presence of His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince and Her Imperial Highness the Crown Princess, currently Their Majesties the Emperor and Empress.

2004

Norichika Iimori became the Principal Conductor and began the practice of pre-concert talks before subscription concerts. The catchphrase "**The Orchestra from A Wonderland of Onsen and Gastronomy**" was established. The orchestra's logo was created following the result of a public vote, which consists of a "mountain", represented using the trajectory of a conductor's baton.

2005

As an encore for the 161st subscription concert, the orchestra performed "Finale" by Kagel, which was recorded and broadcast on the popular Japanese TV program "Trivia no Izumi."

2006

The orchestra launched its own label, "YSO-Live." The first CD released was "Haydn: Symphony No. 85 & Schumann: Symphony No. 4", conducted by Norichika Iimori.

2008

The orchestra appeared in the 81st Academy Awards foreign language film "Departures", which was released in 67 countries and regions worldwide. In the film, the protagonist, a cellist, is part of an orchestra which is represented by Yamakyo.

2009

The Yamakyo *Gakuyu* Chorus disbanded the previous year, and a new chorus, the Yamakyo Amadeus Choir, was formed. In 2009, they performed at the 7th "Journey to Amadeus" concert.



Yamakyo Amadeus Choir

2010

The "Affinis Summer Music Festival" was started in Yamagata. It was held alternately in Hiroshima and Yamagata from 2009 to 2018. The Yamagata Symphony Orchestra served as the host orchestra for the festival.

2011

During rehearsals for the Shonai subscription concert in Tsuruoka, the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred and the performance was cancelled. Afterward, the orchestra expanded its activities throughout the Tohoku region to support the victims of the disaster.

2012

To commemorate the 40th anniversary of its founding, the orchestra started the "Sakuranbo (Cherry) Concert" in Osaka.

2015

After eight years, the orchestra completed its performance of all of the Mozart's symphonies, which started in 2007 as "Voyage to Amadeus".

2017

The orchestra released the "Mozart : The Complete Symphonies" which recorded all 53 of Mozart's symphonies performed by a single conductor and orchestra. It was the first CD collection of its kind in Japan and received the Special Award for Planning and Production at the 55th Japan Record Academy Awards.



2018

With the aim of delivering music to the children of the Tohoku region, the orchestra conducted its first ever crowdfunding campaign, the "Yamagata Symphony Orchestra New Bus Project," raising 2.65 million yen. With cooperation from local companies, a new bus was purchased and used for school concerts and other activities.



2019

Norichika Iimori and Tetsuro Ban became the Artistic Director (Currently the Conductor Laureate) and Principal Conductor of the Yamagata Symphony Orchestra respectively. The Yamagin Kenmin Hall, which serves as an additional base for the orchestra's performances, was completed.

2020

Due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 283rd subscription concert on March 14th was held without an audience. A step ahead of a lot of other orchestras in Japan, the orchestra live-streamed the concert and was viewed by 300,000 people worldwide. After suspending concerts for a while, the orchestra resumed performances on July 7th with Principal Conductor Tetsuro Ban, starting the "Complete Beethoven Symphony Concert". The orchestra continues to reach the hearts of the public through DVD production and internet streaming.



The 283rd subscription concert

2022

The orchestra celebrated its 50th anniversary.