

For release: August 14, 2024

The Cleveland Orchestra announces \$5 million gift from Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation

CLEVELAND — The Cleveland Orchestra announced that it has received a \$5 million gift from The Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation in support of the Kelvin Smith Family Chair held by Music Director Franz Welser-Möst.

Over the next three years, The Cleveland Orchestra will celebrate its historic partnership with Welser-Möst, who will step down from the position when his contract ends in June 2027. At that time, he will become the longest-serving musical leader in the ensemble’s history.

“In 1979, my grandfather recognized and appreciated the artistic excellence of The Cleveland Orchestra and named the Music Director’s position with a generous gift. The Smith Foundation wishes to applaud Franz Welser-Möst’s impactful leadership with a meaningful gift honoring his longstanding commitment to Cleveland,” said Ellen Stirn Mavec, President and Chairman of the foundation and granddaughter of the late Kelvin and Eleanor Smith.

The Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation is a private family foundation that makes grants to nonprofit, charitable organizations in Cleveland. Its mission is to support nonprofits that adhere to excellence in their missions, creativity in approach, fiscal responsibility, and dynamic leadership in their service to the community, making a positive impact for the citizens of Cleveland.

“I want to express my gratitude to The Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation for this gift, which demonstrates a lasting commitment to The Cleveland Orchestra and to bringing world-class symphonic music to Greater Cleveland,” Welser-Möst said. “After 23 years of my partnership with The Cleveland Orchestra, I continue to be astounded by the breadth and depth of what we have accomplished together.”

“We are extremely grateful to Ellen Mavec and the Board of the Smith Foundation for their support of The Cleveland Orchestra and for this remarkable gift in recognition of Franz Welser-Möst and his lasting impact on both the Orchestra and the city,” said André Gremillet, the Orchestra’s President & CEO. “As we celebrate Franz’s storied career in Cleveland and benefit from his last three years as Music Director, we also honor the generous contributions of the Smith family to our institution.”

Welser-Möst leads The Cleveland Orchestra in two different programs this week at Severance Music Center ([August 15](#)) and Blossom Music Center ([August 17](#)). These performances provide a preview of the featured repertoire on the Orchestra’s upcoming [European tour](#), including Bruckner’s Fourth

Symphony, Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, and R. Schumann's Piano Concerto with pianist Víkingur Ólafsson.

About The Cleveland Orchestra

The Cleveland Orchestra, under the leadership of Music Director Franz Welser-Möst since 2002, is one of the most sought-after performing ensembles in the world. Year after year, the Orchestra exemplifies extraordinary artistic excellence, creative programming, and community engagement. *The New York Times* has called Cleveland "the best in America" for its virtuosity, elegance of sound, variety of color, and chamber-like musical cohesion.

Founded by Adella Prentiss Hughes, the Orchestra performed its inaugural concert in December 1918. By the middle of the century, decades of growth and sustained support made it one of the most admired globally. The past decade has seen an increasing number of young people attending concerts, bringing fresh attention to The Cleveland Orchestra's legendary sound and committed programming.

The 2024–25 season marks Welser-Möst's 23rd year as music director, a period in which The Cleveland Orchestra earned unprecedented acclaim around the world, including a series of residencies at the Musikverein in Vienna, the first of its kind by an American orchestra, and a number of acclaimed opera presentations.

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