

JOHN AXELROD
Music Director and Principal Conductor, Swiss National Orchestra
Principal Conductor, Bucharest Symphony Orchestra

SEASON 2023-2024 BIOGRAPHY

“John Axelrod is a highly imaginative and dynamic musician, whose rich musicological background and historical insights combine with intellectual drive and charismatic enthusiasm for people and for life, to get probing, rigorous and richly characterized interpretations.”

-Remy Franck, Pizzicato

With over a quarter century of experience conducting nearly 200 orchestras worldwide, **John Axelrod** has established a visible profile as one of today's leading international conductors. His extraordinarily diverse repertoire, from core classics, both orchestral and operatic, to contemporary to crossover, his innovative programming themes, musical depth and charismatic performance style have been widely praised and recognised by both audiences and critics. In 2020, Maestro Axelrod received the Special Achievement Award from the International Classical Music Awards for his outstanding contributions and interpretations.

Season 2023-2024 began with two important events in his career trajectory: As a newly naturalized citizen of Switzerland, Maestro Axelrod has been elected in November 2023 the **Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Swiss National Orchestra**, with a national identity and mission statement committed to promoting the excellence of Swiss musicians and composers connected to Switzerland with tours, recordings, and special projects. And, in September 2023, an exceptionally special recording with the Bucharest Symphony Orchestra was released to critical acclaim on Orchid Classics and distributed by Naxos, featuring the two versions of Robert Schumann's Symphony 4, op. 120. Entitled **Schumann 41/51: Florestan and Eusebius**, Maestro Axelrod explores how Robert Schumann's bi-polar disorder influenced the original and revised versions of this beloved work which provides a compelling reason for the first time in recorded discography that both are released on the same recording, resulting in a 2023 International Classical Music Awards Best Orchestral Recording nomination.

Maestro Axelrod continued his over a decade long love story with Japan, returning in October through December 2023 to both the NHK Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony, The Tokyo College of Music Orchestra, the Orchestra Ensemble Kanazawa and the Hyogo Performing Arts Center Orchestra, and making his debut with the Sendai Philharmonic to perform “The Samurai of Seville,” a double concerto for Spanish guitar, Japanese Koto and narrator in both Japanese and Spanish, composed by José Maria Gallardo del Rey and based on the novel by John J. Healey, about the 1613 historical voyage of 12 Samurai from Sendai to Seville. Maestro Axelrod commissioned the work in 2019 and premiered it in 2021 with the City of Kyoto Symphony Orchestra, with whom he was Principal Guest Conductor. Mr. Axelrod will also teach a conducting masterclass at the Tokyo College of Music, continuing his absolute commitment to educating and developing the next generation of conductors and young musicians.

In 2020, during the pandemic, Maestro Axelrod created **CMO: Conductors Masterclass Online**, www.conductorsmasterclassonline.com, and will be presenting from September through December 2023 a **Great Maestros Masterclass Online Series**, featuring such great maestros as Leonard Slatkin and Frédéric Chaslin, with JoAnn Falletta, Carlo Rizzi and more confirmed for 2024. In July 2024, Maestro Axelrod will again serve for the 3rd time as President of the Jury of the Bucharest Music Institute International Masterclass and Competition for Conductors.

Maestro Axelrod also returns twice to open the 23-24 season of the Romanian Radio Orchestra with an all-Rachmaninov program and again in February with Brahms, and continues his long relationship with the Belgrade Philharmonic, also returning twice this season with Bartok and Korngold. Other upcoming season highlights include his annual returns to the Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano in January 2024, of which he was Principal Guest Conductor, with the full ballet of The Firebird by Stravinsky, and as the conductor of the RAI Pops with the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI in Torino in June. Other important engagements include his debut with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra in January 2024.

Among his many other titles, Maestro Axelrod was unanimously elected in 2022 as the Principal Conductor of the Bucharest Symphony Orchestra, with a unique open-ended contract. From 2018-2023, Maestro Axelrod became the Principal Guest Conductor of the City of Kyoto Symphony Orchestra. From 2014-2020, Maestro Axelrod was the Artistic and Musical Director of the Real Orquesta Sinfónica de Sevilla. Other titled positions included Principal Guest Conductor of Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano from 2011-2018, Principal Conductor of the Pacific Music Festival from 2016-2018, Music Director of the NHK Jazz at the Metropolitan Theater from 2014-2016, Music Director of the l'Orchestre National des Pays de la Loire from 2009-2013, Music Director of "Hollywood in Vienna" with the ORF Vienna Radio Orchestra from 2009-2011, Music Director and Chief Conductor of the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra and Theater from 2004-2009, as First Conductor of Sinfonietta Cracovia from 2001-2009 and as Founder and Artistic Director of his hometown Houston's OrchestraX from 1997-2003.

Among his many other relationships, invitations and recordings with orchestras include Berlin's Radio Symphony Orchestra, NDR Symphony Hamburg (ElbePhilharmonie), Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchester, Filarmonica della Scala, Teatro La Fenice Orchestra in Venice, Orchestre de Paris, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, Camerata Salzburg, Weimar Staatskapelle and the Mozarteum Orchester Salzburg, among others. In the USA, Mr. Axelrod has conducted the Chicago Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Philadelphia Orchestra among others. Maestro Axelrod debuted in 2018 to great acclaim with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and returned with the Philharmonia Orchestra UK in Teatro alla Scala for the MITO Festival 2022. Other important regular festival engagements include the Enescu, Salzburg, Lucerne, Montreux Jazz, Beethoven Easter and the Schleswig Holstein.

John Axelrod's important opera activity includes Bernstein's *Candide* at Théâtre du Châtelet, Teatro alla Scala and Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, *Eugene Onegin* at Teatro San Carlo in Naples, Kurt Weill's *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* at the Rome Opera, and Martinu's *Mirandolina* at Il Teatro la Fenice. For the Lucerne Festival, other operas conducted include *Rigoletto*, *The Rake's Progress*, *Don Giovanni*, the *Three Penny Opera*, *Falstaff* and *Idomeneo*. Maestro Axelrod conducted *Gianni Schicchi* to open the

2020 Puccini Festival and returned in 2021 to conduct a new production of *Turandot*, directed by Daniele Abbado.

Mr. Axelrod has recorded core and contemporary repertoire for Sony Classical, Warner Classics, Naxos, Ondine, Universal, Naïve, and Nimbus, and released a cycle of Brahms Symphonies and Clara Schumann lieder with the Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Giuseppe Verdi and vocalists Dame Felicity Lott, Nicole Cabell, Indra Thomas and Wolfgang Holzmair, entitled *Brahms Beloved* on Telarc, produced by Grammy winner Michael Fine.

Actively committed to working with young professional musicians for over three decades, Mr. Axelrod has toured with the Schleswig Holstein Festival Orchestra to the Salzburg Festival, the Santander Orchestra and the Sinfonia Iuventus in Poland, the Orchestra Giovanile Italiana in Italy, the Accademia della Scala to Muscat, the NordDeutsche Junge Philharmonie in Germany, and the Vienna Jeunesse Orchester in Austria.

Mr. Axelrod graduated in 1988 from Harvard University. Trained personally by Leonard Bernstein in 1982, he also studied at the St. Petersburg Conservatory with Ilya Musin in 1996 and was mentored by Christoph Eschenbach from 1997 until 2000 when he made his professional debut as assistant conductor for *Parsifal* at the Bayreuth Festival.



(photos by Istvan Kohan)

