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# 1946 NZSO established MCH, 2011 Nation Dates FINAL

## A history of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra

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The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra (NZSO) is New Zealand's premier, and only professional full-size orchestra. It boasts a diverse programme ranging from classical to contemporary composers, and regularly performs to large audiences nationally and internationally.

The idea of a national orchestra was first mooted in 1925 after the Radio Broadcasting Company of New Zealand was founded. By the late 1920s broadcasting studio orchestras were formed in the main centres. In 1939 an orchestra was formed as part of the Centennial Exhibition but with the outbreak of war plans for this orchestra to become the country's first permanent national orchestra were shelved.

After the war's end, National Broadcasting Service director Prof. James Shelley, with the support of Prime Minister Peter Fraser, revived plans for a fulltime, professional national orchestra. In 1946 Andersen Tyrer was appointed conductor and auditions for players were held throughout the country.

The 65 person National Orchestra of New Zealand was launched in October 1946 and performed its first concert in March 1947 at the Wellington Town Hall. The national orchestra remained under the patronage of the various iterations of the national radio broadcasting service from its foundation until 1988 when the NZSO became a Crown-Owned Entity run by a five person board.

In 1948 the orchestra accompanied the NZBS opera production of Bizet's Carmen on a four month, 33 date tour of the main centres. The following year the orchestra completed its first major tour of provincial centres. At year's end, founding conductor Andersen Tyrer resigned to be replaced by Michael Bowles from Ireland.

In the early years of the orchestra the members returned to play with their respective regional orchestra around October each year. In 1951 the decision was made to force everyone in Wellington resulting in the resignation of a number of players from other cities.

1959 was a big year for the orchestra with the release of its first commercial recording, Festival Overtures on EMI; the formation of the National Youth Orchestra to act as a developing ground for future National Orchestra musicians; and a tour by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. The CPO tour was the first time many in the National Orchestra had seen another professional symphony orchestra play live.

In 1961 renowned composer Igor Stravinsky conducted the orchestra in two concerts of his own compositions. A year later the NZBC Concert Orchestra was founded to accompany NZ Opera and NZ Ballet companies. It lasted just 2 years and many players were absorbed into the Symphony Orchestra.

In 1974 the orchestra undertook its first overseas tour, a visit to Australia with soprano Kiri Te Kanawa and pianist Michael Houston. In 1975 the orchestra renamed itself the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

The first New Zealand International Festival of the Arts in 1986 saw the NZSO perform Andrew Lloyd Weber's Requiem with soprano Joan Sutherland and conductor Richard Bonyngge. The 1990s saw the NZSO play at Expo '92 in Seville, Spain, and accompany members of iconic New Zealand band Split Enz for a series of concerts called ENZSO.

The past few years has seen the orchestra play the BBC Proms in London, the World Expo at Aichi, Japan, and undertake a sold-out European tour. Today the NZSO boasts 90 musicians and performs over 100 shows a year.

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