

Double anniversary for the Israeli-American maestro of the Ruhr region

Steven Sloane's projects and concerts in the 2019/20 season



General Music Director in Bochum for 25 years and the 100th birthday of his orchestra – 2019 is a very special year for Steven Sloane and his audience. The orchestra's anniversary year has been bookended at the start of the 19/20 season by a Ruhrtriennale production of a new music-theatre work by Kornél Mundruczó, and the regional capital of the Ruhr area also has some surprises in store in the symphonic realm. A second music-theatre highlight will follow in the spring with the first German performance of David Lang's "Prisoner of the State," of which Sloane will give more national premières in Rotterdam, Bruges, Barcelona and Malmö. At the Swedish opera house, he will also be in charge of

the new production of Puccini's "Tosca" from December as Principal Guest Conductor. In addition, as the Music Director Designate of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, Sloane will already be presenting three programmes with his new orchestra.

These days, you'd need to search for a long time to find a General Music Director who has held this position in the same location for a quarter of a century while instigating the kind of thoroughgoing changes that Steven Sloane has in Bochum, displaying a constant innovative energy both artistically and in the field of cultural policy. Since he took up his position in the heart of the Ruhr area in 1994, he has turned the **Bochumer Symphoniker** (BoSy for short) into one of the top German orchestras. Its concerts have become real crowd-pullers and it has already received several awards for having the "Best Concert Schedule of the Season". But that is not all. Steven Sloane was also the main person driving the vision of a special concert hall for the orchestra, a vision that was realised in 2016 as the **Anneliese Brost Musikforum Ruhr** in the centre of Bochum. Half of the financing for this building, unique both for its urban planning concept and its architecture, came from private donors. It is now "a house for everyone," Sloane says: "We have a large-scale educational programme that aims to actively involve young people instead of having them just as passive listeners [...]. Another important thing is being open to all kinds of music and new formats. Here, we want to be very flexible and always reinventing ourselves."

A look at the unusual season schedule of the BoSy – an ensemble that is, incidentally, also celebrating its 100th birthday in 2019 – shows that the Californian-born conductor stays true to his word. This became audible and visible right at the start of the season with the acclaimed Ruhrtriennale production "Evolution". The work by the Hungarian film and theatre director Kornél Mundruczó premièred here centres on Ligeti's "Requiem" and the history of three generations, and leaves a profound impression: a "sensuous, oppressive, outstanding evening of theatre," wrote the magazine *Deutsche Bühne*; "visually phenomenal, technically sophisticated and musically startling, piercing, accusatory," was the verdict of German public

radio station BR Klassik. It was the second collaboration between Sloane and Mundruczó (after “The Raft of the Medusa”, 2018).

Steven Sloane and his work with the orchestra in Bochum are characterised by a special kind of artistic freedom of spirit: “First of all, we are not afraid!” he once said in an interview. “We want to think creatively and discover new formats; we work a lot in project contexts and like to come up with dramatic or political concepts as well.” For example, in November, the BoSy’s schedule features a multimedia journey through the world of Charlie Chaplin: under the title “Chaplin’s Universe, Chaplin’s Smile” (16 Nov.), Sloane will set film sequences by this silent-film legend to music by Brahms, Debussy, Rachmaninov, Stravinsky and Gershwin. In February 2020, the BoSy will perform one of the major sacred compositions of the classical era, **Mozart’s C minor Mass KV 427 (20-22 Feb.)**, under its “honorary conductor for life”, together with the RIAS Kammerchor and a distinguished quartet of soloists. In April, the **BoSy-Mahler-Project** will be continued with the performance of the Symphony No. 3 in D minor (4 Apr.) – and music fans can already look forward to the issue of the entire Mahler cycle on CD, most of which has already been recorded, on the Avanti Classic label. It will be issued together with an accompanying film. Steven Sloane and his musicians will also, of course, make a crucial contribution to next year’s **Klavier-Festival Ruhr**, this time with a piano transcription by Ludwig van Beethoven of his own Violin Concerto in D major, op. 61a (10 May) – a special gesture of homage for the 250th anniversary of the composer’s birth.

For the finale of the season in Bochum, Steven Sloane, who describes his BoSy as having “very high aspirations to emotionality”, has put two audience favourites on the programme: Stravinsky’s “Le Sacre du Printemps” and the Violin Concerto No. 1 by Max Bruch, with the legendary South Korean violinist Chung Kyung-wha (11-13 Jun.).

Before that, in May 2020, the BoSy under Steven Sloane will present another spectacular musical highlight, performing the **German première of the opera “Prisoner of the State”** (23 May) by the Pulitzer Prize-winner David Lang as part of “#Freiheit” (#Liberty), one of the orchestra’s “Fokus” series. In this approx. 75-minute stage work, the American composer, who wrote his own libretto, moves Beethoven’s “Fidelio” to a present-day setting and “fearlessly explores the dark implications of this story,” as the New York Times put it after the world première in June 2019. It called Lang’s new opera a “dark, seething and engrossing work.” Opera Magazine wrote that “Lang’s music, conceived in an appealingly communicative and largely tonal style, responds to opportunities for dramatic tension.” In the production by Elkhanah Pulitzer, Claron MacFadden (soprano), Alan Oke (tenor), Jarrett Ott (baritone) and Davone Tines (bass-baritone) take on the solo parts. Two more performances of the work with the same cast will follow soon after on the stages of two co-production partners of this commissioned work: in Bruges (27 May, Belgian première) and Rotterdam (30 May, Dutch première). The other **national premières in continental Europe** will also be under Sloane’s musical direction: on 3 July he will be in charge of the first Spanish performance of the work with the Orquesta OBC in Barcelona, after having previously conducted the Swedish première with the Malmö Operaorkester at the Malmö Opera.

He has already been working in Malmö as Principal Guest Conductor and Artistic Advisor since last year. In the 2019/20 season, he will also conduct **a new production of Giacomo Puccini’s “Tosca”** there (première 20 Dec.) – with Sofia Jupither as director – taking to the rostrum altogether 11 times.

Even though Steven Sloane has become a Bochumer with heart and soul, as a musician he is, and always was, a citizen of the world. A former pupil of Eugene Ormandy, Franco Ferrara and Gary Bertini, he has already been chief conductor of the American Composers Orchestra and the Stavanger Symphony Orchestra. And now, he will be the **new Music Director of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra** from the 2020/21 season: “For me, this position feels like coming “nach Hause” after a long journey.” The post does indeed mean a return to Israel for Steven Sloane, who had once before moved there from the USA in the 1980s, conducting the country's major orchestras and heading the Music Festival in Tel Aviv as music director. He will already conduct three symphony concerts with his future orchestra in the current season. Sloane, who will leave his position as Bochum's General Music Director in 2021, will introduce himself to the Jerusalem public in the season's opening concert with a programme that includes not only Stravinsky's Firebird Suite and two classical symphonies, but also the première of the work “**Ode to Jerusalem**” by **Aviya Kopelman** (30 Oct.) In spring, he will perform another very special work there (23 Apr.): **Noam Sheriff's** 1987 composition “**Mechaye Hametim**” for orchestra, choir and cantor is closely associated with Israeli history and is among the “milestones of classic Israeli music” (Tagesspiegel). Sheriff, a composer, conductor and professor, died in 2018. For many decades, he was the most important mentor for Israeli conductors of upcoming generations – as he was for Sloane, who met him in Tel Aviv in 1981 and was given the chance by him to set up a youth choir.

Sloane's special commitment to young musicians and educational projects has remained and will lead this passionate musician to undertake a short tour in mid-November with the **Symphony Orchestra of Berlin University of the Arts**. He himself has taught as a professor at the university since 2013 and initiated the **International Conducting Academy Berlin (ICAB)** there. Under Sloane's direction, the young musicians will perform Blacher's “Concertante Musik” op. 10, Bruch's Violin Concerto in G minor op. 26 (soloist: Mayu Nihei) and Tchaikovsky's “Pathétique” Symphony No. 6 in B minor op. 74 in Berlin (8 Nov.), Bochum (9 Nov.) Rotterdam (10 Nov.) and London (12 Nov.).

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