



RICHARD PONTZIUS

Founder / Artistic Director and Conductor
Asian Youth Orchestra

Richard Pontzius founded Hong Kong's Asian Youth Orchestra in 1987 with the distinguished violinist, conductor and humanitarian Yehudi Menuhin.

The idea for the creation of an orchestra in Hong Kong that would unite the region and celebrate the talents of East Asia's brightest young musicians came as the result of Mr. Pontzius' work as conductor, writer, teacher and mentor in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan. Critics have called AYO "astonishing" (Seattle Post Intelligencer) and the "finest among youth orchestras around the world" (San Francisco Chronicle). In 2010 the Orchestra was awarded Japan's Praemium Imperiale Grant for Young Artists, a global arts prize, and just this year Mr. Pontzius was named an Honorary Fellow of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts.

Mr. Pontzius' work with the Asian Youth Orchestra has led to extraordinary collaborations with Yehudi Menuhin, Sergiu Comissiona, James Judd, Wang Jian, Yo-Yo Ma, Alisa Weilerstein, Elmar Oliveira, Gidon Kremer, Elly Ameling, Cho-Liang Lin, Gil Shaham, Young Uck Kim, Stefan Jackiw, Jean Luis Steurman and Alicia de Larrocha. He was appointed Artistic Director and Conductor of the Asian Youth Orchestra in 2002, at the urging of Sergiu Comissiona.

Recent tours with AYO have included live television and radio broadcasts from the Hong Kong Cultural Centre as well as sellout performances in Beijing's National Centre for Performing Arts, Shanghai's Oriental Arts Centre, the Xian Concert Hall, Kuala Lumpur's Dewan Petronas Filharmonik, Singapore's Esplanade Concert Hall, Hanoi's historic Opera House, marking its 100th anniversary, Taipei's National Concert Hall and Tokyo's Opera City Concert Hall. His concert celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Asian Youth Orchestra drew 5,000 concertgoers to the Hong Kong Coliseum.

Since its inaugural performances in 1990, the award-winning Orchestra has played some 351 concerts in Asia, Europe, the US and Australia to an audience of more than one million concertgoers. Millions more have seen and heard the orchestra around the world on CNN, CNBC, NHK and Radio and Television Hong Kong.

A staggering 22,000 musicians, ranging in age from 15 to 27, have auditioned for AYO. Those selected for the full scholarship program study with an exceptional artist-faculty of principals from the Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Minnesota and San Francisco symphony orchestras, the Bergamo Festival Orchestra (Italy), Milan's La Scala Opera, Brussels' Monnaie Opera, the Triple Helix Trio, Harvard, and the Boston and Peabody music conservatories.

As a result of Mr. Pontzious' determination the Asian Youth Orchestra has played more concerts in more cities in China than any other orchestra based outside of the mainland. AYO was the first international orchestra in 50 years to perform in Vietnam, premiered Tan Dun's *Symphony 1997* with cellist Yo-Yo Ma marking the territory's reunification with China, has performed in the White House and at the United Nations, in New York's Avery Fisher Hall, the Hollywood Bowl, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Berlin's Schauspielhaus, Sydney's Opera House, and every major concert hall across Japan and Southeast Asia.

The first overseas musician to be invited to live for an extended time in China after the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution, Mr. Pontzious served as conductor-in-residence at the prestigious Shanghai Conservatory of Music in the early 1980s, toured with the Conservatory orchestra, and conducted the orchestras of Nanjing, Hangzhou, Fuzhou, and Harbin, where he is credited with reviving that city's Summer Arts Festival. He recently returned to the Conservatory to conduct a program that included the Chinese premiere of Martinu's Rhapsody for Viola and Orchestra with San Francisco Symphony associate principal violist Jay Liu, a Conservatory graduate.

A student of American composer Lou Harrison and conductors Sergiu Comissiona, Ferdinand Leitner and Josef Krips, Mr. Pontzious was awarded Hong Kong's Bronze Bauhinia Star and Silver Bauhinia Star in 2000 and 2016 respectively for his contribution to music and the arts. In 2000, at age 56, he received his private pilot's license. Five years later he piloted a single engine Piper Archer across the United States in the company of AYO general manager Keith Lau, who served as navigator for the trip.

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