

BIRGIT NILSSON PRIZE

Press release May 17 2022

YO-YO MA TO RECEIVE THE 2022 BIRGIT NILSSON PRIZE

Birgit Nilsson Foundation President, Susanne Rydén, announced today that the 2022 Birgit Nilsson Prize will be awarded to cellist, Yo-Yo Ma. At one million US dollars, the Prize is the largest in classical music, awarded to artists and institutions who have contributed an important chapter to music history. Yo-Yo Ma is the first instrumentalist to receive the Prize, which will be presented to him by His Majesty King Carl XVI Gustaf at the Prize Ceremony on October 18 at the Stockholm Concert Hall.



Announcing this year's Prize from the Birgit Nilsson Museum in Sweden, **Susanne Rydén** said: "In today's challenging and ever-evolving world, when classical music is too easily marginalized, Yo-Yo Ma embodies everything that Birgit Nilsson wished for in a fellow-artist when she created this Prize. Through exceptional musicianship, passion and dedication, Yo-Yo Ma's commitment to music helps us to imagine and build a stronger society and better future. His support and engagement continuously inspires new generations of musicians as they embark on their own musical lives. Yo-Yo Ma has contributed an important chapter to music history and we are delighted to welcome him to Sweden this Autumn to receive the Birgit Nilsson Prize."

On receiving the news, **Yo-Yo Ma** said: "I wish I could have met Birgit Nilsson in person. Yet, she is alive for me through the recordings of her legendary voice and the legacy of her great generosity, her sense of humor and a lifetime grounded in cultural values. It is a great privilege to receive this honor and to play a small part in the legacy of one of our great musical role models, an artist whose attention was directed outward, toward young people and music's role in creating a better world."

The October 18 Prize Ceremony will be an occasion to celebrate with Yo-Yo Ma and introduce a new generation of artists. In a musical celebration accompanied by the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra and Swedish Radio Choir, centre-stage will also be given to young Swedish artists, including Amalie Stalheim (cello) and Birgit Nilsson Stipendium recipients, Johanna Wallroth (soprano) and Emma Sventelius (mezzo-soprano). Tickets go on sale from May 18 via konserthuset.se.

During his visit to Sweden Yo-Yo Ma will also perform in concert with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra and conductor Alan Gilbert on October 16.

www.birgitnilsson.com

International press: Lucy Maxwell-Stewart • +46 70 38 80 255

Swedish press: Torbjörn Eriksson • +46 706 34 43 53

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BIRGIT NILSSON'S LEGACY

The Birgit Nilsson Prize is awarded approximately every three years and was first presented in 2009 to **Plácido Domingo**, chosen by Birgit Nilsson herself. Successive recipients have been proposed by an international Advisory Panel of experts and voted on by the Board of the Birgit Nilsson Foundation. **Riccardo Muti** was the Prize recipient in 2011, followed by the **Vienna Philharmonic** in 2014 and in 2018, the year which celebrated the 100th anniversary of Birgit Nilsson's birth, the Prize was awarded to Swedish dramatic soprano, **Nina Stemme**.



Throughout her lifetime, Birgit Nilsson never lost sight of who she was and how she achieved it. As an aspiring young artist, she encountered many difficulties and it was her candid approach and strength of mind that helped her to steer away from the pitfalls that many of her colleagues fell into – in particular, failing to resist the temptation of accepting unsuitable roles too early. Even when she had reached the peak of her career she never forgot the principle she learnt from an early age: "I've always tried to remember what my mother used to tell me" she said. "Stay close to the earth. Then when you fall down, it won't hurt so much."

By emphasising the importance of planning, sustaining and reaching the full potential over the long term, Birgit Nilsson hoped to generate an incentive for artists at the beginning of their careers. In 1969 she created a Stipendium for talented young singers in Sweden and from 1981-1991 gave annual masterclasses at the Manhattan School of Music, where she also established a Scholarship. Towards the end of her long and distinguished career she then conceived the idea for an international Prize, honouring established artists and institutions for their important contributions to music.

When the Foundation was established in 1989, the original criteria stipulated that the Prize be awarded to a currently active singer, conductor or institution. Following the transfer of the Prize to Sweden in 2019, in accordance with Birgit Nilsson's wishes the statutes were extended to include instrumentalists.

The criteria for the Prize include impeccable musicianship and expressiveness, interpretive prowess, an exceptional performance record, preferably over two decades or more as well as a distinctive performance style. It is also desirable to have an active interest in young artists as well as a humanitarian engagement. Political considerations of any kind, the candidate's gender, nationality, ethnicity or creed are not admissible in the selection process.

In 2022 the Birgit Nilsson Foundation and Birgit Nilsson Museum have joined forces to bring Birgit Nilsson's legacy together for the first time, with events planned throughout the year, both in and around the farm where she grew up in South Sweden and in Stockholm where her career took flight.

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