

ROBERTSON'S 10TH

BY EDDIE SILVA

IN HIS 10TH SEASON IN ST. LOUIS, DAVID ROBERTSON
CONTINUES TO BUILD MUSICAL BRIDGES.



DILIP VISHWANAT

David Robertson: "[The St. Louis Symphony is] a constant source of inspiration."

Who stays at a job for 10 years anymore? According to various surveys, the average length of time a U.S. worker remains with one company is less than five years. Spending most of one's working life in one place is about as common as a baseball player staying with one team throughout a career. We're all free-agents in the 21st century.

In the rarified atmosphere of conductors, only a few maestros come to mind who are beyond the 10-year mark with major American orchestras: Robert Spano in Atlanta (13 years), Franz Welser-Möst in Cleveland (12), and the *eminence grise*, Michael Tilson Thomas, celebrating his 20th season with the San Francisco Symphony this year.

Ten years, then, is a long time for the times in which we live. As David Robertson begins his 10th season as St. Louis Symphony Music Director in September, the longevity alone is remarkable. But even more remarkable has

been what has occurred over those 10 seasons. Robertson hasn't just been showing up.

Anyone who has witnessed Robertson and the St. Louis Symphony during these years has his or her own personal highlights. It might be the transparency that Robertson and the ensemble brought to Sibelius's Symphony No. 7, or the extreme tempos given to Shostakovich's 10th, or the unique collaboration that has been evident between Robertson and almost every soloist with whom he has shared the stage. Moments large and small may remain in the mind like a musical dream. There have been the high impact tours—*Turangalila* and *Peter Grimes* at Carnegie Hall; *Doctor Atomic* Symphony in San Francisco; a knockout concert at the BBC Proms. Or more intimate programs at the Pulitzer Arts Foundation (*Black Angels, Thirty Pieces for Five Orchestras*), or the incorporation of images in performance (the impressionism of Monet matched with the impressionism Debussy, the

THE WORD “SYMPHONY,” ROBERTSON WILL OFTEN REMIND PEOPLE, MEANS “TOGETHER.”

laughter and tears of Charlie Chaplin's Tramp with live score, the hushed tones of Morton Feldman's *Coptic Light* accompanied by the projection of an ancient tapestry hovering ghostly over the stage). Or it might be the magic found in Robertson's programming, such as the discovery of how phenomenally the music of Steve Reich, Bela Bartók, and Josef Haydn all worked together in a single concert.

For one of the consistent themes to be found in Robertson's 10 seasons has been his insistence on making connections. In his programming he connects seemingly diverse works to each other—Sibelius, John Adams, and Prokofiev, for example, in the second week of this subscription season. Intellectually, sensually, and most especially musically, connections become evident to the attentive audience. Robertson reveals a core humanity in Debussy, James MacMillan, and Dvořák—another example from the 2014-15 season—which reacquaints us with our common humanity.

The word “symphony,” Robertson will often remind people, means “together.” “Music is a kind of place,” Robertson said in 2004, “where everybody's free to meet regardless of what their background is, regardless of their heritage, or regardless of their personal preoccupations. It's this sort of open space. It's an open form, where you can come and be involved with what it means to be part of the human community.”

For Robertson, then, a symphony orchestra, and more specifically the St. Louis Symphony, represents the best of what human beings can be and do together. It is “a constant source of inspiration,” he has said.

Moving into the 10th season of representing the best of which people are capable, here are selected David Robertson quotations—each a source of inspiration in its own way—always eloquent, always insightful, always connecting.

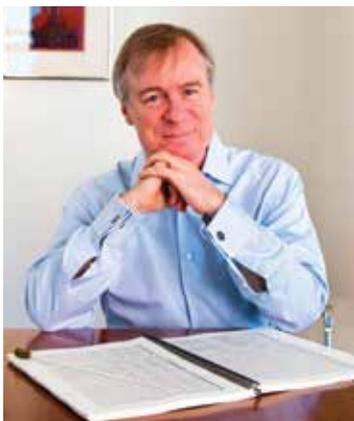
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ON MUSIC-MAKING

“We play the music with the type of emotional understanding that few other orchestras match. So while we’re trying to come as close to technical perfection as human beings can, what we’re really working on is trying to get the *raison d’être*, the reason for being, of that music.”

ON THE MUSICAL EXPERIENCE

“In the end, the reason this music is interesting to us is that there’s a human expression that comes from one human being and can go over to another human being. And how it affects each person individually is what makes the musical experience so fascinating.”



KEITH SAUNDERS

The 2014-15 season is Robertson's 10th as St. Louis Symphony Music Director.

ON PROGRAMMING

“We build on our experiences of music of the past with the things that we bring from the present.”

“...the DNA all music shares allows listeners to make connections between familiar and unfamiliar works, opening their minds to a powerful and joyous part of the human experience: simply put, our universal, innate ability for surprise.”

ON CONDUCTING

“One of the nice things about being a conductor is that you have to shut up and listen a lot.”

“The distance between the sound that’s coming out of the orchestra and what you do with your hands disappears. Rather than moving in air and gravity you actually feel as though you are moving sound around.”

IN REHEARSAL, A SEQUENCE OF METAPHORS

“Come in something like a huge ogre.... The fortes are young baby chick fortes, gentle, to handle carefully.... It’s the feeling of having too many valiums.... The sound is like old Marlon Brando, like there’s no voice left after 40 years of chain smoking.... Play like you’re carrying something precious with each note.”

Eddie Silva is the External Affairs and Publications Manager for the St. Louis Symphony.