



# BUNDESPRÄSIDENTIALAMT

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**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
at the presentation of the Knight Commander's Cross  
of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany  
to Sir Simon Rattle  
on 8 February 2022  
at Schloss Bellevue**

I'm delighted and honoured to be presenting this prestigious award of our country to you today, Sir Simon Rattle. I'm likewise delighted to be presenting it not only to such a richly deserving artist, but also to an exceptionally likeable representative of the world of music-making. You are a living ambassador for music, music that you bring to life with your orchestras. That alone makes you worthy of every honour.

In Berlin, you are, at any rate, not only a well-known fellow citizen, but also someone who is greeted warmly on the street, who is waved to and to whom a taxi driver sometimes calls out: "Simon, I think you're great!" Moreover, you have endeared yourself to people who perhaps have not made their way to the Philharmonie, but who may have attended a performance at the Waldbühne or watched a concert featuring you on television.

You have, in a special way, become "our" Simon – and this has also been the case for the orchestra, the Berlin Philharmonic, which you directed for 16 years. The orchestra was always part of Berlin, of course – but during your tenure as chief conductor, it opened up to the public in an entirely different way.

The Digital Concert Hall is part of this, as are the many events for families and children and the education programme. Musical education is intended to stretch the mind, to give rise to precision and discipline, but, above all, it is intended to impart the profound joy that the active and passive engagement with music can bring. Those who have watched the wonderful film "Rhythm Is It!" have understood this – and are unlikely to forget the message. Unadulterated fun making music – this is another thing that you stand for, Sir Simon.

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You have encouraged many of your musicians to take such “educational” initiatives in the positive sense of the word. Perhaps it’s only thanks to your encouragement that some have discovered that they, too, have the capacity to inspire others, thus becoming ambassadors for classical music themselves.

Music should be taken seriously, by all means. But it shouldn’t be stiff or staid. The Philharmonie is intended to be an open, inviting, barrier-free establishment in every sense of the word for anyone who has – or is in the process of discovering – a passion for music. Such tireless, inspiring and passionate promotion of your work has resulted in the Philharmonie not only being more highly appreciated and venerated than ever before, but, dare I say it, also loved.

Sarah Willis, who has played the horn for the Berlin Philharmonic for 20 years, once said the following: “We’re not robots. We play what we are, and we blow our soul into the horn.” And the violinists, cellists and double-bass players also bow their souls into the strings and the percussionists beat and drum their souls into the concert hall, along with everyone else.

Indeed, none of them is a robot that performs what he or she has been trained to play, devoid of emotion. They all play what they are. And you, Sir Simon, as the, more often than not, most visible part of the orchestra, dedicate your soul to conducting the whole. The audience feels and sees this, and it moves the listeners’ hearts. “Beseligt” (blessed) – this is such a beautiful, time-honoured and precious word in the German language. In the best moments, you and your musicians convey this atmosphere, which can be brought to life by the music. And the listeners are indeed “beseligt” – and feel blessed with great happiness.

But you didn’t simply put your programmes together along the lines of “give the people what they want”. It goes without saying that you have performed the great works of classical music, reimagining and interpreting them for the world of today. But you have also presented new music in addition to quite a number of commissioned works, which were composed specially for your programmes.

And like a good chef who shouldn’t confront his patrons with an entirely new menu all at once, you often served musical hors d’oeuvres, referring to them as “tapas” – little appetising tasters from a gastronomic realm hitherto unfamiliar to many listeners. Lo and behold, many got a taste for this and wanted more of these new and unfamiliar works, gladly following you on your expeditions.

Behind everything that, in the moment of the concert, appears so easy, there is, of course, alongside the great gift of talent, a lot of work, discipline and thought. Training, in a nutshell. You have done lots of training – and your musicians have been glad to follow you. They also

did this because, from the outset, you didn't stand before them as an all-dominating figure or as the archetypal dictatorial conductor, but have always perceived yourself as a team player, albeit one who plays a special role.

You have, and this is something that is quite well known, an – as we say these days – inclusive leadership style that takes each and every individual on board and, above all, takes them seriously. And this applies not only to the musicians – at the large institution that is the Philharmonie, you knew everyone by name: each and every janitor, driver and employee. Authority rooted in expertise and in a human touch. There are quite a number of people in this world who would benefit from taking a leaf out of your book.

One person to whom I'm sure this also applies has gone in the opposite direction and has something in common with you precisely for that reason. I'm not telling anyone here a secret when I point out that, as a Liverpudlian, you're a big football fan – and that you readily and knowledgeably hold forth when people ask you about the latest developments at Liverpool FC, glass of wine in hand, over a couple of tapas, as it were.

The fact that this great traditional English club has now been successfully managed for a number of years by a German coach, Jürgen Klopp, is certainly just as beneficial for the relations between our two countries as it was beneficial and appropriate for you, as an Englishman, to coach our great traditional musical club – so to speak – for so long and so successfully, leading it to unforgettable fixtures.

You have since taken German citizenship and continue to live here in Berlin. I cannot close, however, without referring once again to your Liverpudlian origins. When you hear the words "Liverpool" and "music", you naturally think of four other great musicians from this manifestly musical city. The Beatles likewise matured in Germany, in Hamburg, to be precise, into the world stars that they went on to become. And they, like you, were always interested in incorporating new ideas into their music, never satisfying themselves with what they had achieved.

One of their songs – and a beautiful story to boot – concerns you, Sir Simon, in particular, I believe. It's about a street in your native city, Penny Lane, and about a roundabout, long completely unfamiliar to the rest of the world, featuring a barber, a fireman and a pretty nurse: so nothing all that special. But this little song, which is a great work of art, immortalises all of this "in our ears and in our eyes" – and we find ourselves, time and again, "there beneath the blue suburban skies".

And the fact that you can hear that unmistakable piccolo trumpet in Penny Lane could almost be the result of an education programme. After all, while the Beatles were busy recording the piece, Paul McCartney was watching a concert broadcast on the BBC on the evening

of 11 January 1967. He saw and heard Johann Sebastian Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 2. He was so fascinated by these extremely high notes that, without further ado, he invited the very same trumpeter, David Mason, whom he had seen in concert with the English Chamber Orchestra, to come. Only six days later, the now world-famous trumpet passage for Penny Lane was recorded at Abbey Road Studios.

That's what can happen when fascinating classical music falls on receptive ears. And vice versa. Quite a few people may think when they hear Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 for the first time that it sounds like the trumpet in Penny Lane!

You never know what impact your actions will have. But you can always do your best to impart a passion for music. You've always done precisely that, Sir Simon, and that's what you will continue to do. And that's why what your four colleagues from Liverpool once added to the cover of "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" is true of your work and concerts: "A splendid time is guaranteed for all."

Thank you very much!