Press release

After four years in production, "la Caixa" Foundation announces the world premiere of this emotional experience delivered through virtual reality technology

**Symphony: a singular journey to the heart of music under the baton of Gustavo Dudamel**

- The *Symphony* project employs virtual reality (VR) technology to offer spectators a chance to experience and enjoy classical music as they have never done before, inviting them to feel like one of the musicians in the orchestra.

- Under the baton of Gustavo Dudamel and accompanied by the more than one hundred musicians that make up the internationally acclaimed Mahler Chamber Orchestra, audiences will have the opportunity to hear music in a way they have previously never been able to, and even travel through the interior of the instruments.

- The premiere of the two films that comprise this itinerant project - written and directed by Igor Cortadellas - will take place at CosmoCaixa, where they can be seen up to 8 October before beginning a tour which will last ten years and take in around a hundred towns and cities in Spain and Portugal.

- The main feature of this emotional journey guided by the celebrated Venezuelan conductor will be compositions by Ludwig van Beethoven, for whom 2020 marks the 250th anniversary of his birth, as well as Gustav Mahler and Leonard Bernstein.

- “With this extraordinary and captivating experience we want to contribute to disseminating classical music and make it available to the wider public, in a journey without precedent to the heart of the human soul”, said the deputy general director of the "la Caixa" Foundation, Elisa Durán.

**Symphony. A journey to the heart of music. Dates:** from 15 September to 8 October 2020. **Conception, direction and production:** "la Caixa" Foundation. **Original idea, script and artistic direction:** Igor Cortadellas. **Musical director:** Gustavo Dudamel. **Place:** CosmoCaixa (Calle Isaac Newton 26). **Further information and ticket reservations:** symphony.fundacionlacaixa.org

@FundlaCaixa #SymphonylaCaixa #DudamelFoundation
Barcelona, 15 September 2020. The deputy general director of "la Caixa" Foundation, Elisa Durán, the orchestra conductor Gustavo Dudamel, and the founder of Igor Studio and project director Igor Cortadellas, have today presented Symphony, a virtual journey to the heart of classical music.

For the first time ever, members of the audience will be able to place themselves amidst a symphony orchestra in this state-of-the-art immersive experience made possible by virtual reality technology, which will be premiered in CosmoCaixa. Subsequently, this singular project will begin a ten-year tour which will include a hundred towns and cities in Spain and Portugal. Santander, Valladolid and Madrid are among the first stops envisaged.

In production for more than four years, the project’s starting point was discussion of the emotional power of music from an informative perspective. From the outset, "la Caixa” Foundation opted for virtual reality as the best way to tell the story. This cutting-edge technology has enabled something that would otherwise not be possible: to sit among the violins in a magnificent symphony orchestra while they perform Beethoven. The idea is to seduce all types of audiences, including those who are already classical music connoisseurs.

Symphony comprises two mobile pop-up units which are assembled to make two cinemas, each covering a hundred square metres. The first of these screens a panoramic film which introduces the audience into this journey, guiding it on the basis of nothing more than sounds. The second unit is dedicated to living the virtual reality experience.
When members of the audience put on the glasses they see that suddenly their surroundings have changed. **They now find themselves seated in the Gran Teatro del Liceo, and maestro Gustavo Dudamel, the heart and soul of the Gustavo Dudamel Foundation, is welcoming them.** They are then surrounded by the musicians of a symphony orchestra, all in absolute silence, awaiting indications from the conductor who will energetically signal the beginning of Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony*. The famous first four notes of this symphony mark the beginning of the journey.

Spectators will see the orchestra distributed around the stage as usual by families of strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion. They will feel realistically close to the musicians and will live the full emotion of the conductor’s energy and gaze as he stands right in front of them. To enhance this musical experiment they will be able to turn their heads from side to side and up and down to gain new views and perspectives of a symphony orchestra and its instrumentalists.

This itinerant project was conceived and developed by "la Caixa" Foundation. Using image and sound it offers an insight into how, from the simplicity of a piece of wood or rude metal, a universe can be built as sophisticated and beautiful as that of a symphony orchestra. In this way, *Symphony deconstructs the orchestra* to reveal its own simplicity, in stark contrast to the infinite range of resources it presents to composers to express their ideas and emotions. The experience provides audiences with **actively emotional listening:** by moving the camera position through 360° within the orchestra each spectator will hear and feel the music in a new and surprising way and know what it is like to be situated among the different families of instruments.
The deputy general director of the "la Caixa" Foundation, Elisa Durán, highlighted that: “With this extraordinary and captivating experience we want to contribute to disseminating classical music through symphonic compositions and make it available to the wider public, as well as to all music lovers who may feel its allure. Orchestra and conductor come together to offer a very special journey without precedent to the heart of classical music and the human soul through the emotions and notes of great composers.”

The director Gustavo Dudamel said this of the project: “When we sat down with my friends at the la Caixa Foundation to dream about what we wanted to accomplish with this project, it was clear from the start that we shared three core beliefs: that music can transcend our differences, encourage individual empowerment and promote social integration. This project is a perfect embodiment of those shared values, a mobile exhibition that will offer tens of thousands of people access to symphonic music, and - I hope - create a greater appreciation for this art form. I also hope that it will enrich and inspire the people who were involved in producing and performing in this marvellous, and somewhat crazy, production.”

“It was thrilling to see how new teams joined in, building partnerships, engaging, sharing the dream of completing such a huge project as this but which, in the end, is as fragile and delicate as a tiny music box. Symphony is an invitation to cross the threshold into the world of music, a gateway to an unlimited universe that contains the purest expression of the human spirit”, is how the creative director Igor Cortadellas described the production.

Immersive experience in two stages

This immersive experience lasts about forty minutes, divided into two stages. It begins with the screening of a panoramic film and continues with a leap into virtual reality that presents a 360º view of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Dudamel and recorded in Barcelona’s Gran Teatro del Liceo.

The event takes place in two mobile pop-up units, each covering a hundred square metres: the first of these is dedicated to the large-screen projection of a panoramic recording (12 minutes), while the second space is reserved for the virtual reality film (12 minutes). In the first unit, audiences are offered a sound and visual introduction of the virtual experience through a film without words in which sound and music tell the story. Its aim is to provide an opportunity to
become aware of the sound landscapes that surround us every day and everywhere.

Three young musicians from different parts of the world take centre stage in this introductory production, **filmed in Colombia, New York and on the Mediterranean coast.** This portrayal of the typical ambience of where they live allows us to understand how each of them is connected with the sounds and music of their environment. Through this mosaic of contrasts, audiences will discover how these random noises are converted, thanks to human ingenuity, into music, and thus connect diverse cultures.

Having seen this initial audiovisual, the audience will go on to the immersive musical experience delivered by virtual reality slides. After listening to **Beethoven's Fifth Symphony** and seeing Gustavo Dudamel first-hand from the front row their journey will take them to another space: a luthier’s workshop. They will hear the sound of wood being sculptured by the hands of the stringed-instrument craftsman prior to being fitted into the violin on which he is working. Following this, they will travel the interior of a trumpet.

Emphasising the emotional power of music, spectators will be accompanied by the opening melody of **Gustav Mahler's First Symphony**, embraced in an intimate, special setting. The journey will end with the orchestra once again, now performing the rollicking **Mambo** from **Leonard Bernstein's West Side Story**.
More than 250 people involved in the project

The original idea for the project arose four years ago in the Music Department of "la Caixa" Foundation, who commissioned the creator and musician Igor Cortadellas to be its artistic director. He set about writing the screenplay and seeking out the appropriate technology. The role of musical director fell to Gustavo Dudamel, who took charge of validating and perfecting this highly ambitious project. A competition to develop the technical aspects was then launched, which was won by Glassworks, specialists in postproduction, visual effects and digital animation, with studios in Barcelona, London and Amsterdam.

They joined the project and immediately set about finding a production company to complete the tasks related to virtual reality, appointing the London-based Visualise agency on the basis of their proven track record in the sector. Under the direction of Igor Cortadellas and his team at Igor Studio, both companies supervised production planning and created tools to enhance preproduction and production of the process. One of their main challenges was to decide where to position the 360º cameras when making the recording. To find the most natural, realistic view for a spectator within the orchestra, they developed a 3D software tool to ascertain beforehand in which part of the opera house they could place the camera and thus know what it would see.

Final filming took place in the Gran Teatro del Liceo de Barcelona in August 2019 using a prototype Meta One camera specially created for the occasion. This enabled scenes to be shot in low light, with a dynamic range greater than any other 3D camera, due to its light weight and smaller size in comparison to the
rest. With this camera it was possible to film the orchestra more closely and in more personal moments.

The latest technology was employed to record the sound for Symphony. Network audio enabled cable lengths to be kept to a minimum, with just one being used to transport 84 channels of 24-bit 96 kHz audio. Configuration of the microphone used next-generation 3D recording techniques. All the instrumental groups were meticulously recorded with a mixture of high-quality digital and analog microphones to recreate all the little nuances of the orchestra and produce a 360º experience to accompany the spectator’s view.

In all, more than 250 people worked and collaborated to make this project a reality. Of these, around 100 made up the artistic area; from the luthier David Bagué to the 60 extraordinary mentors of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and the 41 young artists from the Gustavo Dudamel Foundation, the mission of which is to expand access to music and the arts for young people by providing tools and opportunities to shape their creative futures. These young musicians represent the citizens of 22 countries across five continents (coming from the United States, Hong Kong, Japan, Spain, Norway, Venezuela, Colombia, Korea, Sweden, France and Argentina). Together and under the baton of Gustavo Dudamel, mentors and mentees bring life masterpieces of the classical repertoire. In addition, more than 150 professionals were involved in the teams engaged in the creative, production and postproduction elements.
Technology at the service of creativity

The visual concept of this virtual reality experience combines live-action 360º real imagery with computer generated imagery (CGI) and visual effects created through VFX. These recreate dreamlike universes which also find inspiration in nature to complete their beauty.

The graphic sequences gain in complexity as the journey progresses and are fruit of the multiple layers and textures which overlap and adapt to changes in the score to bring out the most organic element of the experience.

Audiences and additional measures during the pandemic

The Symphony project is a pedagogical, cultural and recreational activity aimed at all audiences over the age of eight. It does not involve physical movement by audience members, as its main objective is to foster the listening of music. There are however certain restrictions due to the VR technology employed, such as the recommendations regarding those under eight years old and people with epilepsy or who suffer from dizziness or vertigo, among others.

The coronavirus pandemic significantly affected the final part of the project production and its preparation for the pop-up units, which meant the premiere had to be postponed until September. The organisation has taken all appropriate health measures to make this a safe event. Cleaning has been intensified and a photocatalytic disinfection (UV) system has been installed in both units. This system is effective both in ambient air and on all the surfaces of treated spaces, freeing them from contaminants and pathogens.

Biographies

Gustavo Dudamel

Gustavo Dudamel firmly believes that music has the power to transform lives, to inspire, and to change the world. Through his presence on the podium and his unflagging support for arts education, Dudamel has introduced classical music to new audiences around the world and has helped provide access to the arts for countless people in underserved communities.

In 2012, the musical experiences and mentors of Dudamel’s childhood moved him to create the Gustavo Dudamel Foundation, a registered charity with the goal
of promoting access to music as a human right and catalyst for learning, integration, and social change.

A lifelong advocate for music education and social development through art, Dudamel himself was shaped by his childhood involvement with El Sistema, an extraordinary programme of immersive music education initiated in 1975 by maestro José Antonio Abreu. Inspired by El Sistema, in 2007 Dudamel, the Los Angeles Philharmonic and its community partners founded YOLA (Youth Orchestra Los Angeles), a project which now serves more than 1,300 musicians, providing young people with free instruments, intensive music instruction, academic support and leadership training.

In the 2020/21 season, YOLA will have its own permanent facility, built specifically for the programme: the Judith and Thomas L. Beckmen YOLA Center in Inglewood, designed by the architect Frank Gehry.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has paralysed most live performances, Dudamel has devoted even more time and energy to his mission of taking music to children throughout the world, convinced that the arts play an essential role in the creation of a fairer, more peaceful and integrated society.

While quarantining in Los Angeles, he hosted a new radio programme from his living room entitled “At Home with Gustavo”, sharing personal stories and musical selections as a way to bring people together during this time of isolation. The programme was broadcast locally as well as internationally in both English and Spanish, with guest co-hosts including his wife the actress Maria Valverde and the composer John Williams, among others.

Dudamel also took part in Global Goal: Unite For Our Future, a TV fundraising special produced by Global Citizen, giving a socially-distanced performance from the Hollywood Bowl with the LA Philharmonic and YOLA. The event, also featuring guest artists Shakira, Coldplay, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Usher and many others, was viewed by millions of people worldwide and raised 6.9 billion dollars to provide COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines to the world’s poorest and most marginalised communities.

His latest projects include a virtual version of the YOLA National Festival (alongside numerous other national and international educational actions with YOLA). From August 2020, Dudamel will present a TV series on the PBS station KCET entitled “In Concert at the Hollywood Bowl”, featuring key moments from performances of the LA Philharmonic over the last decade in its historic summer venue. The programme will be broadcast by PBS across the entire United States in early 2021.

Dudamel anticipates performances with the Vienna Philharmonic at the Salzburg and Grafenegg Festivals, a United States tour later in the season with the Vienna Philharmonic including three performances at Carnegie Hall, and the creation of
two new teaching projects with his Foundation during the 2020-21 season, in collaboration with the “Escuela de Música Reina Sofía” in Madrid.

**Mahler Chamber Orchestra (MCO)**

The Mahler Chamber Orchestra (MCO) was founded in 1997 with the shared vision of being a free and international ensemble dedicated to creating and sharing exceptional experiences in classical music. With 45 members spanning 20 different countries at its core, the MCO works as a nomadic collective of passionate musicians uniting for specific tours in Europe and across the world. The orchestra is constantly on the move: to date, it has performed in over 40 countries of five continents. It is governed collectively by its management team and orchestra board; decisions are made democratically with the participation of all musicians.

The MCO’s sound is characterized by the chamber music style of ensemble playing among its distinct musical personalities. Its core repertoire, ranging from Viennese classics and early Romantic periods to contemporary works and world premieres, reflects the agility of the MCO in crossing musical boundaries.

**Igor Cortadellas**

Following his music training and graduation as an oboist at the Conservatory of Music in Zurich, Igor Cortadellas (Barcelona 1976) began a professional career as a performer and teacher of that instrument. In parallel to his music studies he trained as a photographer and took a master’s degree in scriptwriting and digital video at the Pompeu Fabra University (UPF) in Barcelona.

In 2008 he founded the creative agency Igor Studio. The double paths of his training, music and image, came together in the field of creativity applied to image and audiovisual. From that moment on he specialised in global campaigns around the world to help connect institutions with their audiences. Igor Studio is a creative agency that builds inspiring, effective visual concepts that are true to the music and its artists.

Igor Studio has earned the confidence of Cecilia Bartoli, Martha Argerich, Valeri Gergiev, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Rundfunk Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra Dallas, Gran Teatro del Liceo and Auditorio de Barcelona, Ópera de Tenerife, Adda Sinfónica, Deutsche Grammophon, Harmonia Mundi, Sony, Decca, Warner and Universal, among others. Its work
has been recognised with numerous prizes. One of the most outstanding of these is the LUX Award in the category of Advertising, for the campaign with Adda Sinfónica, the Symphony Orchestra of the Auditorium of Alicante Provincial Council (ADDA).

**List of the music featured in Symphony**

Music featured in the panoramic film:
- “Pièce en forme de Habanera” for cello and piano by Maurice Ravel
- Take Five by Paul Desmond
- El Pájaro Amarillo by Rafael Campo Miranda
- First movement of the *Fifth Symphony* by Ludwig van Beethoven.

Music featured in the virtual reality (VR) experience:
- First movement of the *Fifth Symphony* by Ludwig van Beethoven
- Second movement of the *Seventh Symphony* by Ludwig van Beethoven
- First movement of the *First Symphony* by Gustav Mahler
- *Mambo* from the film *West Side Story*, by Leonard Bernstein.