

Lucky 13: Philly O Heads Back to China

By Sarah Shay, *Musical America*
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Since its [1973 visit](#) to China, the Philadelphia Orchestra has returned to the country 11 times. On Oct. 31 will mark the launch of the 13th time, with an eight-concert tour extending until Nov. 10. [Difficulties around COVID protocols](#) in China scuppered plans for a 50th anniversary visit last year, although [a group of 14 Orchestra musicians did visit in 2023](#) to play in orchestras and lead master classes. Yannick Nézet-Séguin had been slated to lead the 2023 tour; this year [principal guest conductor Marin Alsop](#) will be on the podium, with pipa player Wu Man and pianist Haochen Zhang as featured soloists.

The tour begins in Beijing's National Centre for the Performing Arts with additional concerts scheduled for Beijing, Tianjin, and, for the first time, Chengdu

and Haikou. After the final concert, as many as eight of the orchestra's musicians will continue on in Shanghai, Wuxi, and Nanchang for residency activities.

While tensions between the U.S. and China have been running high in recent years, the leaders of both nations have acknowledged the power of cultural diplomacy. "Since we were last in China," Matías Tarnopolsky, president and CEO of the Philadelphia Orchestra and Kimmel Center tells *The Inquirer*, "we've received letters from Pres. Xi Jinping, Pres. Biden, and Sec. of State Antony Blinken encouraging the Philadelphia Orchestra's activities... investing in the power of music to bring people together."

[In an interview](#) with *The Inquirer* last year, U.S. ambassador to China R. Nicholas Burns emphasized the need for the people of the two nations to be connected, saying, "There's no better way to do that than through the arts and music." Tarnopolsky concurs. "It's always a difficult time [in U.S.-China relations]," he observes. But what works to make that relationship better, he continues, is "bringing beautiful music... to full concert halls all over China to enthusiastic audiences.... Is musicians sitting down with young Chinese musicians in schools, community settings, universities and civic centers and making music."

[Philadelphia Inquirer](#)

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