

Michael Tilson Thomas named Judge Widney Professor

By Allison Engel

Michael Tilson Thomas, one of the world's most prominent musicians and a two-time alumnus of the USC Thornton School of Music '67 and MM '76, has been named a Judge Widney Professor of Music at USC.

The appointment, which takes effect in fall 2015, will give USC Thornton students the chance to work directly with Thomas through mentorship and other educational opportunities that will enhance their developing careers.

"Michael Tilson Thomas stands among USC's most distinguished alumni, and our students will benefit tremendously from his exceptional experience and expertise," said USC President C. L. Max Nikias. "Given his long-standing and illustrious career, he is a singular role model, particularly for our students at USC Thornton. In becoming a Judge Widney Professor, he joins a select group of distinguished individuals, including Frank Gehry, Dana Gioia and Gen. David Petraeus, all of whom have graciously agreed to serve as mentors for our talented students."

Robert A. Cutietta, dean of USC Thornton, said: "We are thrilled to welcome Michael Tilson Thomas back to campus. It is so meaningful that one of our outstanding alumni has such fond memories of his time at USC that he has decided to give back and impact today's students."

For his part, Thomas said: "I have always been honored to be a part of



Michael Tilson Thomas *Photo by Chris Wahlberg*

the USC family. My teachers at USC helped to mold and guide me, and I am grateful that I may be able to continue their tradition."

Thomas received the National Medal of Arts, the nation's highest award for artistic achievement, in 2010. In addition to being the longtime music director of the San Francisco Symphony, he also is the principal guest conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra and the founder and artistic director of the New World Symphony, America's orchestral academy. The New World Symphony, founded in 1987, is dedicated to the development of young musicians. Hundreds of New World Symphony alumni work in orchestras around the world.

Thomas is a Los Angeles native whose parents and grandparents had artistic careers. At USC, he studied piano with

John Crown and conducting and composition with Ingolf Dahl.

At age 19, he was named music director of the Young Musicians Foundation Debut Orchestra and worked with Igor Stravinsky, Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Aaron Copland on premieres of their compositions at Los Angeles' Monday Evening Concerts. During this time, he also was the pianist and conductor for Gregor Piatigorsky and Jascha Heifetz.

Prior to his appointment to the San Francisco Symphony 18 years ago, he had been the principal guest conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, music director of the Buffalo Philharmonic, principal guest conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra.

He has recorded more than 120 discs and led television broadcasts with the London Symphony Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic and the San Francisco Symphony.

He is a chevalier dans l'ordre des Arts et des Lettres of France, was Musical America's Musician of the Year and Conductor of the Year and *Gramophone* magazine's Artist of the Year. He has won 11 Grammy Awards as well as a Peabody Award for his radio series, *The MTT Files*.

The conductor's last performance on campus was in 2009, when he led the USC Thornton Symphony in a concert at Bovard Auditorium as part of USC Thornton's 125th anniversary celebration.

1 With violinist Jascha Heifetz in 1963. Michael Tilson Thomas was a pianist and conductor for Heifetz.



2 Conducting in 1970, three years after receiving his undergraduate degree from USC.



3 Conducting a rehearsal at the Hollywood Bowl. The cellist is Nathaniel Rosen, who also studied at USC Thornton.



4 With Eudice Shapiro, a world-renowned violinist who was on USC's faculty for five decades.



5 With composer Ira Gershwin.



6 At a Young People's Concert. These were television broadcasts with the New York Philharmonic from 1971 to 1977.



7 With singer Sarah Vaughn in 1980.

8 With actress Audrey Hepburn in 1989.

9 Conducting.

10 With Alice Schoenfeld, an internationally-known violinist on USC Thornton's faculty, in 2009.

