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“Family Matters”

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Daniel Hope

The forthcoming edition will be special for two reasons. First, it is an anniversary edition, the 70th in the festival’s history. It is worth recalling that the festival was founded in 1956 by the great violinist, conductor, and humanist Yehudi Menuhin, the son of a rabbi from Gomel, who was knighted in 1993 by Queen Elizabeth II. The festival came into being almost by chance. In the summer of 1956, shortly after his final move from the United States to Europe, Menuhin decided to spend some time in Gstaad with his family and friends. He liked everything about the place, except that it felt somewhat… dull. The local authorities did not hesitate and approached the distinguished guest with a proposal to organize a couple of concerts. “Of course, why not. Let us do it right now, in August,” the maestro readily replied. Thus, the festival was born, and Yehudi Menuhin remained its honorary president until his death in 1999. For the past twenty-five years the festival was directed by the Basel-born cellist Christoph Müller, who last November handed over the reins to the British violinist Daniel Hope, born in South Africa. Like his mentor Yehudi Menuhin, with whom he performed extensively around the world, Hope has decided to settle in Switzerland. The appointment of a new artistic director thus becomes the second distinctive feature of the 2026 edition.

Zubin Mehta in 2024 (Wikipedia)

I vividly remember the circumstances under which Daniel Hope made a deep and lasting impression on me for the first time. It was in the summer of 2012, when, thanks to his initiative, the Verbier Festival hosted an evening dedicated to Jewish composers who perished in the Theresienstadt concentration camp. The task was difficult both practically and emotionally: to trace the lives of the murdered composers and musicians, to reconstruct their scores, and to bring to life music that had been buried with them. Daniel Hope rose to the challenge brilliantly. During the concert, held in a packed church in Verbier, not a single person stirred, and even after the final chord had faded away, the audience remained seated in silence, stunned. It was not merely a concert, it was an act of remembrance. It is therefore not surprising that the war in Ukraine, too, has not left the musician indifferent. Together with the Ukrainian pianist Alexey Botvinov, he released an EP entitled *Music for Ukraine*, featuring works by Myroslav Skoryk and Valentyn Sylvestrov.

A graduate of Highgate School in London and the Royal Academy of Music, pupil of Zakhar Bron and Itzhak Rashkovsky, Daniel Hope plays a violin made by Guarneri del Gesù in 1742 and known as the “ex-Lipiński,” after the Polish virtuoso Karol Lipiński (1790–1861), who once owned the instrument. Daniel Hope held his first press conference as Artistic Director of the Gstaad Menuhin Festival on 15 December last year in Zurich, where he outlined the key elements of the programme.

The overarching theme of the upcoming festival is *Family Matters*. It can be understood both in a narrow and in a broader sense. In the narrow sense, because Daniel Hope has long been part of the Gstaad festival family. His mother, Eleanor, was Yehudi Menuhin’s manager, and from 1975 her son was first simply attending the festival, before making his debut there as a young violinist in 1992. In the broader sense, Hope refers to Menuhin’s vision of music as a force that unites people of different nationalities and generations into a single musical family.

Alexander Gilman

A look at the programme shows that almost every concert falls into one of several categories: Hope’s Choice, Menuhin’s Legacy, Living Legends, Family Matters, Ladies First, and Next Generation. The festival will open with a concert from the Hope’s Choice series. Its main participant will be Alexander Gilman, born in Germany in 1982 to a family of Jewish emigrants from the USSR. He studied at the Juilliard School in New York with Dorothy DeLay and attended masterclasses with Aaron Rosand, Itzhak Perlman, Igor Ozim, Mikhail Kopelman, Zakhar Bron, and others. In the summer of 2000, he continued his studies with the renowned Novosibirsk pedagogue Zakhar Bron at the Cologne University of Music, and later obtained a master’s degree from the Zurich University of the Arts, where he also served as Bron’s assistant. Gilman will perform with the LGT Young Soloists, the orchestra he founded in 2013, comprising talented musicians aged between twelve and thirty. It is also worth noting that Hope’s Choice includes, among others, the Russian musicians Daniil Trifonov and Sergei Dogadin.

The Living Legends category will feature truly legendary figures: Zubin Mehta, who plans to conduct two concerts in Gstaad to mark his 90th birthday; Iván Fischer with the Budapest Festival Orchestra; the Russian conductor Vasily Petrenko with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; the American baritone Thomas Hampson; the Israeli-American violinist Pinchas Zukerman; the British pianist of Hungarian origin Sir András Schiff; and the London-born

cellist Steven Isserlis, whose family were Jewish emigrants from Russia.

Ilva Eigus © Nicolas Lieber

In the Menuhin Legacy series, among others, Daniel Hope himself and Jeremy Menuhin, the maestro's son, will perform. Among the ladies artists invited to the festival, special attention should be paid to Khatia Buniatishvili and Julia Lezhneva. Among the representatives of the Next Generation, one should mention the violinist Ilva Eigus, already known to some of my readers, the 23-year-old pianist Maxim Lando, who in 2015 became the first American to win the international Nutcracker TV Competition in Moscow, and his colleague Dmitry Ishkhanov, born in the Russian capital, whom the newspaper *Luzerner Zeitung* has called the successor to Evgeny Kissin and Grigory Sokolov.

Opera lovers in general, and admirers of Benjamin Bernheim in particular, will certainly not miss *La Bohème*. In keeping with festival tradition, Puccini's opera will be presented in concert form, and the popular Franco-Swiss tenor will, of course, sing the role of Rodolfo. Another constant feature of the Menuhin Festival is its Academy, which gives young musicians the opportunity to study with masters of the profession. Yet the upcoming edition will also introduce new elements.

Dmitry Ishkhanov

A Summit to be held over the weekend of 24 to 26 July 2026, in cooperation with Forbes Swiss, will mark the first time that a classical music festival hosts a specialized forum devoted to discussing the future. After two days of panel discussions, the weekend will conclude with a unique charity concert presented by the German violinist David Garrett, who, for the occasion, will bring his Guarneri del Gesù Club to Gstaad.

The Discovery series will be expanded to include interactive formats, masterclasses, and behind-the-scenes encounters with festival life for both children and adults. A special event for families will be Sergei Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra with Daniel Hope as narrator.

Among the new initiatives are the President's Hikes, musical walks with the festival's president Richard Müller, as well as a new film series at the Ciné Theatre Gstaad during the festival period, dedicated to the history of Menuhin and to outstanding figures of the musical world.

As you can see, the choice is vast. It is therefore important to plan your time in advance, carefully study all the details of the festival programme and purchase tickets early, as sales are already open.

A historial photo of Yehudi Menuhin
music festivals in Switzerland
Russian music in Switzerland
Russian musicians in Switzerland

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