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## Summer Concerts

### History.



The Grimaldi Princes were well known for their patronage of the arts and especially for music. Prince Honore II in the 16th century was an avid art collector. Prince Antoine I grew up in the French court of Versailles in the 17th century and became friends with Andre Cardinal of Touches, the Kings director of music. It was there he developed such a love for music and he kept an orchestra and an opera company.

Many of the music greats of the past, such as Couperain and de Lully, were friends of the Grimaldi Princes. Prince Rainier III has carried on these interests in the arts in modern day Monaco. In 1951, affirming the Principality's long heritage with music, the Prince names Maurice Besnard as the Director of the Monte-Carlo Opera and in 1953 added the name "National" to the old orchestra, then celebrating its 100 year anniversary. It thereafter became the National Orchestra of Monte-Carlo and eventually evolved into the Monte-Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra, the title of the renowned orchestra today.

Traditionally, the royal courtyard had been used mainly for official occasions and rarely open to the public. One of those public occasions was the accession to the throne of Prince Rainier III in 1947. But it was no surprise, given his dedication to music, when the Sovereign Prince decided to renew the tradition of the Palace Concerts in August 1959. However, before this could be done, many improvements and renovation had to be made to the venue. During the Revolution, the Palace had been turned into a poorhouse, the grand apartments into a military hospital and the throne room into a kitchen. For the concerts, the Prince ordered the royal courtyard to be repaved, and engaged the Louvre's School of Restoration experts to restore the 14th century frescoes that adorn the courtyard walls. During the jubilee celebrations for Prince Louis II, it was discovered that the royal courtyard had excellent acoustics because the walls formed a trapezoid and the lack of parallel walls eliminated stationary waves and undesirable echoes. This good fortune has enabled the Palace concerts to have an unusual clarity of sound.





The Prince's orders were precise during the renovations, there were to be no spotlights on the roof or windows, two scaffolds would be placed in the corners of the courtyard where spotlights would be permanently mounted during the concerts. The spotlights could be used to illuminate the entrance, exit and the intermission area. During the concerts the Hercule Gallery and the stained glass windows of the Palatine Chapel are lighted. Prince Rainier also decreed that the administrative service of the Palace would be put in charge of organizing and running the concerts. This includes placement of the orchestra, the boxes, chairs, lighting, box office, publicity, the music program, and the broadcast of the concerts on radio and television.

The first four concerts occurred August 19, 22, 25, and 29, 1959 and were conducted by Paul Paray with works by Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and Strauss. Critics from around Europe came to hear the Orchestra and unanimously claimed it to be one of the best symphonic organizations in Europe. The concerts, recordings and broadcasts brought recognition and notoriety of the orchestra beyond the borders of Monaco and the Princes efforts had paid off.

### **Here are some of the press reviews of the day reporting on the success of these first concerts:**

- **Parisien Libere, August 31, 1959**

"The orchestra that we heard today can be placed on the list with the best of European orchestras. I can't envision a more silky string ensemble, to pay honor to the Sovereign Prince and the Princess who watched the concert from the balcony of the Grand Appartments".

- **Combat, July 17, 1959**

"The National Opera Orchestra of Monte-Carlo has become an artistic reality".

- **Le Figaro, August 21, 1959**

"Renewed, revitalized, flawless, the Orchestra is dazzling and irreproachable it can be reviewed by the most severe critics it is a beautiful asset for the Principality".

- **Paris-Presse, August 25, 1959**

"The National Opera Orchestra of Monte-Carlo, enriched with new elements it has become one of the best symphonies in Europe. I first mentioned these rare qualities during the Festival in Aix-en-Provence where it was a huge success. We found it again last night in the stunning setting of the royal courtyard, where the acoustics were impeccable, their style at times noble yet also familiar, which suits this kind of concert".