

OAE Biography (2025/26)

In 1986, a group of inquisitive London musicians took a long hard look at that curious institution we call the Orchestra, and decided to start again from scratch. They began by throwing out the rulebook. Put a single conductor in charge? No way. Specialise in repertoire of a particular era? Too restricting. Perfect a work and then move on? Too lazy. The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment was born.

And as this distinctive ensemble playing on period-specific instruments began to get a foothold, it made a promise to itself. It vowed to keep questioning, adapting and inventing as long as it lived. Residencies at the Southbank Centre and the Glyndebourne Festival didn't numb its experimentalist bent. Record deals didn't iron out its quirks. Instead, the OAE examined musical notes with ever more freedom and resolve.

It has innovated with concert formats, in particular through its series The Night Shift (informal performances taking place in pubs and bars) and Bach, the Universe and Everything at Kings Place.

The OAE continues to tour the UK and internationally. In 2025/26 the OAE performs in Antwerp, Brno, Copenhagen, Dortmund, Frankfurt, Halle, Lucerne, Lugano, Prague and Udine.

The OAE has never had a music director. It enjoys many long term collaborations and the title of Principal Artist is currently held by John Butt, Sir Mark Elder, Adam Fischer, Iván Fischer, Vladimir Jurowski, Sir Simon Rattle and Sir András Schiff.

In 2020, the OAE became the resident orchestra of Acland Burghley School in Camden (London). The residency – a first for a British orchestra – allows the OAE to live, work and play amongst the students of the school.

Andrew Mellor
(with additions)