



FESTIVAL D'AIX-EN-PROVENCE RECEIVES THE BIRGIT NILSSON PRIZE 2025 IN STOCKHOLM

A star-studded array of international guests and artists gathered in Stockholm yesterday to pay tribute to the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, the first festival to be awarded the prestigious Birgit Nilsson Prize.

At the official ceremony **His Majesty King Carl XVI Gustaf** presented the Prize to **Sophie Joissains**, Mayor of Aix-en-Provence and **Paul Hermelin**, Chairman of the Board of the Festival. The accompanying musical Gala was led by conductor **Susanna Mälkki** and featured the **Royal Swedish Philharmonic**, **Royal Swedish Opera Choir**, court singers **Peter Mattei** and **Daniel Johansson**, and young rising Swedish star soprano **Matilda Sterby**, recipient of last year's Birgit Nilsson Stipendium. The ceremony was streamed live from Konserthuset Stockholm and is available to watch worldwide on [Konserthuset Play](#) for 30 days.

The Festival d'Aix-en-Provence was honoured with the Birgit Nilsson Prize 2025 for its artistic achievements and commitment to developing new opera productions, with special recognition for the 2021 world premiere of *Innocence*, with music by Kaija Saariaho and original libretto by Sofi Oksanen.

For the celebrations **Sofi Oksanen** was joined by **Sir George Benjamin** and **Klaus Mäkelä** in a special press talk about the artists' individual experiences collaborating with the festival on premieres ranging from Kaija Saariaho's *Innocence*, Sir George Benjamin's *Written on Skin*, and *Picture a day like this* and Stravinsky's *Ballet Russes*.

In his laudatio at the Prize Ceremony, Sir George Benjamin paid a personal tribute to the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence *"To put it simply, the experience of collaborating with Aix is akin to operatic paradise. From the very first moment of inception until the world première itself - a period of potentially five to six years - I can recall nothing except the most wonderful support at every instant ... The venues in Aix also have a charm and originality all their own. Even the public has a special quality."*

Hosting the Prize Ceremony Susanne Rydén, President of the Birgit Nilsson Stiftelsen, said: *"Since the birth of opera, the artform has suffused humanity with extraordinary musical experiences, strong emotions and narratives reflecting reality as well as fiction, challenging both mind and society. The Birgit Nilsson Stiftelsen is convinced that opera has an important role to play in our time, adding new perspectives and inviting us to both personal and collective experiences. Throughout its 77-year-long existence, the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence has provided exactly this, creating experiences with strong impact on both artists and audiences."*

BIRGIT NILSSON PRIZE 2025

Tonight we celebrate the Festival's achievements and also pay tribute to General Director, Pierre Audi, whose sudden death earlier this year was a huge loss to the operatic world. Pierre would have been proud tonight - of the Festival and all the team that have made receiving this Prize possible."

In addition to the Prize, Birgit Nilsson's legacy also lives on through the Stipendium that she created for young Swedish singers and the Birgit Nilsson Festival founded in 2018, the anniversary of her birth. With a week of events in and around the farmhouse where she was born in South Sweden, next year's festival culminates on 8 August 2026 with a performance of Richard Wagner's opera *The Flying Dutchman*. Leading roles will be sung by **Christopher Maltman** (The Dutchman), **Elisabet Strid** (Senta), **Günther Groissböck** (Daland) and **Katarina Dalayman** (Mary). Conductor **Henrik Nánási** leads the **Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra** and a chorus of singers from across the region in an open-air performance at the Tennis Stadium in Båstad, with the nearby sea as an illusory backdrop.

Pierre Audi's successor has yet to be announced but his legacy lives on in the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence's 2026 programme, which will be revealed on 5 December.