

## Interview

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# Meeting Prof. Dr. Stefan Willich

Another renowned international orchestra visiting in February is the “World Doctors Orchestra”, which was founded in 2007 by Prof. Dr. Stefan Willich. It is not just their fine music that is famous, but their global medical responsibility, following the founder’s vision of bringing the fields of music and medicine together. Remarkably, not long after the announcement by the founder was out in the medical journals, immediately 100 doctors signed up to play. Furthermore, it is now fulfilling its mission to raise some funds for medical aid projects. It is a privilege for Thai people to have a chance to experience this astonishing music by these physicians who have put away their white coats to perform for you these marvelous pieces. Therefore, this event cannot be missed. The concerts will be held on February 26th at Siriraj Hospital and 27th at Prince Mahidol Hall. Now let’s get to know the brilliant founder and conductor of the World Doctors Orchestra, Prof. Dr.

Stefan Willich, as an appetizer for the forthcoming concerts.

**Music Journal:** Please tell us a little about the purpose of the “World Doctors Orchestra”.

**Dr. Willich:** The World Doctors Orchestra was founded and developed to use music as a means for supporting medical projects. What we do is we give concerts all over the world and with the proceeds of the concerts, we support health care-related projects.

**Music Journal:** How long have you been conducting the “World Doctors Orchestra”?

**Dr. Willich:** I founded it 8 years ago, and ever since this orchestra has grown and I have conducted it over 8 years now. By now we have 1,000 members from 50 countries, so it has truly become a global organization.

**Music Journal:** What makes you interested in donating the funds from the concert here for Music Therapy in Thailand?

**Dr. Willich:** Usually, the local organizers will decide what the best or most suitable project is and we love the idea to support music therapy because after seeing music therapy, music and medicine meet very closely. And I think music as a therapeutic agent is underestimated. There are a lot of health related-values in music therapy, which is increasing the different conditions you can demonstrate that.

**Music Journal:** Could you please tell us about your first encounter with music?

**Dr. Willich:** I grew up in musical family, my father played cello, not professionally. My mother sings chorus. And very early on I was included in chorus singing. I learned violin and so all my family all came down to music.

**Music Journal:** When did you decide to pursue conducting as a career?

**Dr. Willich:** I started it very early; when I was 20 I already had an orchestra. But still for the most time of

my professional life, medicine was my main focus. Since about 10 years ago, I would say one 1/3 is music and 2/3 is medicine.

**Music Journal:** According to your spectacular background of education and experience, what do you think makes a great conductor?

**Dr. Willich:** I think a good conductor needs three different abilities. First of all, there is a technical ability you need to know, how to give direction to people, to different instruments, how to give the right beats at the right time and indicate right articulation and dynamics. Secondly, I think you need to know the pieces very well, need to analyse the work and need to know exactly what you want and how you like to interpret. Thirdly, and that makes it quite fascinating of course, you need to motivate 100 musicians to follow your ideas or share your ideas and still also be enable them to flourish individually. I think it is also a managerial challenge, if you have 100 players or so, to get the best of them as a team.

**Music Journal:** What has been your best experience so far as a conductor?

**Dr. Willich:** Usually, my best experience is the concert I am working on right now, so have I look forward a lot to playing. We have a fantastic program with Rimsky-Korsakov and with Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 3

with a Thai soloist and with a suite by the King of Thailand. There is a wonderful program and we are all very motivated, so I think what I am currently doing is always my best experience.

**Music Journal:** What has been your worst experience so far as a conductor?

**Dr. Willich:** It has not been really bad. You know, sometimes, it is more exciting with an orchestra, sometimes maybe more business as usual. But I have not had a really bad experience, fortunately.

**Music Journal:** The “World Doctors Orchestra” consists of hundreds of musicians from all around the world. How do you work with them as a team? Does it need communication that’s far beyond language?

**Dr. Willich:** Well, first of all it requires organization, so we announce what concerts we will play long in advance so people can indicate whether they could take time off because all the members take time off (take vacation) to practice for the pieces (get prepared). So we organize well in advance, that we put together the ensemble according to what is needed and according to the abilities, and then people get the sheet music many weeks before the session so they all practice quite hard at home and prepare individually, and when we get together then the actual work as

a team starts. Then it is usually very enjoyable because in the World Doctors Orchestra we obviously share music, but also medicine, as a background so we know how to communicate and how to effectively work together. That makes it very rewarding and easy.

**Music Journal:** Is there any particular piece you are looking forward to share with the audience on this coming concert on February 27th?

**Dr. Willich:** Well of course the pieces composed by the King of Thailand is a particularly challenging beauty for us. It is remarkable that you have such a culturally active king. So we are very enthusiastic about that. However, as I said before the entire program is just wonderful and very enjoyable.

**Music Journal:** Is there anything you would like to tell us or your audience?

**Dr. Willich:** Well, I think many people have experienced what healing power music can have. It is pleasant, but beyond that it also so powerful, and that is something we would like to offer and we hope that people in the audience can not only enjoy that but keep that in their memory and spirit. I think that is what we always hope, that the audience is inspired and take such a music experience into the future.

