

## RUTHANNE LUM McCUNN

### Writer

*The author of numerous books about Chinese life in America, Ruthanne Lum McCunn is best known for her biographical novels of Chinese American pioneers, *Thousand Pieces of Gold* and *Wooden Fish Songs*. Her work has won critical acclaim and has been translated into thirteen languages and adapted for the stage and film.*

**Born:** February 21, 1946; San Francisco, California

**Full name:** Ruthanne Lum McCunn

**Birth name:** Ruthanne Drysdale

**Area of achievement:** Literature

### EARLY LIFE

Ruthanne Lum McCunn was born in San Francisco to a family of Chinese and Scottish ancestry. Her father was a merchant marine and seldom at home. When Ruthanne was one year old, her mother decided to return to live with her extended family in Hong Kong. McCunn thus grew up in the Chinese surroundings of her mother's family. Even though her blond hair made her stand out in her school, Ruthanne was accepted as Chinese until her father decided to transfer her to an English school when she was six years old. There, she was taunted for being a "Ching Chong Chinaman," while the Chinese children in her neighborhood excluded her as a "foreign devil." Her Chinese upbringing and experiences with racial prejudice in Hong Kong informed her character and hybrid identity and influenced her later work as a writer.

At the age of sixteen, Ruthanne returned to the San Francisco Bay Area to attend college, supporting herself as a janitor, short-order cook, and waitress. At nineteen, Ruthanne met and married Donald McCunn, who was in the US Navy. She earned a BA in English from the University of Texas in 1968 and got her teaching credentials from San Francisco State College a year later. From 1968 to 1973, Ruthanne was employed as a librarian and elementary school teacher in Santa Barbara. In 1974, McCunn and her husband moved to San Francisco, where she easily found employment as an English and bilingual education teacher in the secondary schools. With the encouragement of her husband, she quit teaching to pursue a career in writing about Chinese life in America.

### LIFE'S WORK

McCunn wrote her first book, *The Illustrated History of the Chinese in America* (1979), out of necessity—to

fill an information void in school textbooks and to challenge stereotypes of Chinese Americans in popular media. Two years later, she published her first novel, *Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1981), the story of a Chinese slave girl who won her freedom and became a legend in the Pacific Northwest. Based on extensive research, the biographical novel stays true to history while breaking the stereotype of Chinese women as passive and exotic. The book was twice selected by Book of the Month's Quality Paperback Book Club and was made into a film in 1991.

McCunn next wrote *Pie-Biter* (1983), a bilingual children's picture book that received the Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award in 1984. For her biography *Sole Survivor* (1985), McCunn spent many hours interviewing ship steward Poon Lim before writing her account of his 133-day survival at sea on a raft after his ship was torpedoed in World War II. The book garnered the Best Nonfiction Adventure book award from the Southwest Booksellers Association and was also selected in Book of the Month's Dolphin Book



Ruthanne Lum McCunn. (Don McCunn)

Club. In her research, McCunn had uncovered many stories of Chinese American heroes; she shared their stories in *Chinese American Portraits: Personal Histories, 1828–1988*, a collection of biographical profiles that was selected as an outstanding academic book by *Choice* magazine in 1990.

McCunn took a multicultural approach to writing *Wooden Fish Songs* (1995), a novel about horticultural pioneer Lue Gim Gong, told through the voices of his mother in China, his benefactor in Massachusetts, and an African American cook in Florida. The book won the Jeanne Farr McDonnell Award for Best Fiction from the Women's Heritage Museum in 1997. McCunn's historical novel *The Moon Pearl* (2000) is about three single and economically independent women in nineteenth-century China. Based on historical research and inspired by the women McCunn knew as a child in Hong Kong, the book was chosen as the "Best of the Best" from American University Presses by the American Library Association in 2002. Her next novel, *God of Luck* (2007), which explores themes of slavery and survival from the perspective of a Chinese couple separated by kidnapers, won the Chinese American Librarians Association's Best Adult Fiction award in 2008.

McCunn also wrote an article about Chinese people in the US Civil War; it was published in *Chinese America: History and Perspectives* (1996), the annual journal of the Chinese Historical Society of America, which McCunn cofounded and coedited from 1985 to 2009. She has taught writing at the University of San Francisco, Cornell University, and the University of California, Santa Cruz, and has also served as a frequent speaker at

libraries, schools, and community organizations on the subject of writing Chinese American history.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

Committed to historical truth and democratic principles, McCunn has been steadfast in her mission to explain Chinese American life and culture and give voice to the misunderstood, marginalized, and silenced. Her biographical novels and realistic portrayals of Chinese Americans break new ground in the fields of American literature and Asian American studies, contributing to a better understanding and appreciation of Chinese Americans, multiculturalism, and the human condition.

*Judy Yung*

#### FURTHER READING

Gok, Forrest. "Ruthanne Lum McCunn: A Commitment to Historical Truth." *East Wind* 5.1 (1986): 26–27. Print. Explores how McCunn came to write about Chinese American pioneers, addressing the controversy surrounding the film based on her novel *Thousand Pieces of Gold*.

McCunn, Ruthanne Lum. "Reclaiming Chinese America: One Woman's Journey." *Amerasia Journal* 26.1 (2000): 163–80. Print. Discusses McCunn's motivation and approach to writing about Chinese American life.

Yun, Lisa. "Archives of Biography and History in the *God of Luck*: A Conversation with Ruthanne Lum McCunn." *Journal of Chinese Overseas* 5.1 (2009): 201–11. Print. Discusses the autobiographical underpinnings and ethical values that influenced McCunn's *God of Luck* and her other historical novels.

## AH QUON MCELRATH

### Activist and social reformer

*Ah Quon McElrath was a prominent union organizer and social worker. She is identified with the mid-twentieth-century campaign of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) to reform and democratize Hawaii's exploitative social, economic, and political system.*

**Born:** December 15, 1915; Iwilei, Hawaii

**Died:** December 11, 2008; Honolulu, Hawaii

**Birth name:** Ah Quon Leong

**Also known as:** AQ

**Areas of achievement:** Activism, social issues

#### EARLY LIFE

Ah Quon McElrath was born Ah Quon Leong on December 15, 1915, at Iwilei on the Hawaiian island of Oahu. Her parents were Chinese immigrants: Chew Leong, her father, came to Hawaii as a plantation laborer. Shee Wong Leong, her mother, was a picture bride. After her father died when she was five, McElrath, her mother, and her six siblings faced grim economic times. As a child, McElrath sold kiawe beans and dried bones to a local fertilizer company to help the family survive. When she was thirteen, she worked twelve-hour shifts in Hawaii's pineapple canneries.

### The Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance Is Established

In 1992, the Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance (APALA) held its founding convention in Washington, DC. The establishment of APALA was the culmination of several decades of Asian American unionization activity.

In planning for the convention, a committee put out a nationwide invitation for Asian American and Pacific Islander unionists, labor activists, and workers to gather in Washington, DC, to take on the responsibility for bridging the gap between the national labor movement and the Asian American and Pacific Islander community. At the May 1, 1992, convention, more than five hundred delegates participated in adopting a constitution for APALA and in setting up a governmental structure for the organization. The newly created organization drafted a document titled “Commitment to

Organizing, to Civil Rights, and to Economic Justice,” which called for the empowerment of all Asian and Pacific American workers through unionization on a national level. The document also called for the provision of national support for local unionization efforts.

During the convention, APALA organizers and delegates honored Asian Pacific American labor pioneers whose achievements had melded national and local unionization efforts and whose efforts were foundational to the APALA. Honorees included those who had made significant contributions toward heightening the recognition of Asian American laborers, such as Ah Quon McElrath of the Hawaiian Longshore Workers Union. As a result of McElrath’s efforts throughout the 1950s, sugar and pineapple plantation workers in Hawaii achieved greater workplace and community status.

McElrath’s first language was Chinese, but she learned to speak, read, and write English. She became her intermediate school’s newspaper editor and, in the mid-1930s, a student at the University of Hawaii. Attracted to movements for social and economic justice and to antifascist politics, she joined the progressive Inter-Professional Association. McElrath worked at numerous odd jobs while a university student before graduating in 1938 with a degree in sociology. She became interested in labor issues and aided labor union organizer Jack Hall in his efforts to support Hawaii’s exploited sugar and pineapple plantation workers in the late 1930s. A few years later, Hall would embark upon his 1944–69 career as the ILWU’s regional director. One of McElrath’s pre-World War II contributions to the union was helping Hall edit his newspaper, the *Voice of Labor*.

#### LIFE’S WORK

In August 1941, McElrath married Robert (“Bob”) McElrath, an associate of Hall’s who would succeed Hall as regional ILWU director in 1969. When union organizing was stifled by martial law in Hawaii after the United States entered World War II in December 1941, McElrath focused on working for the Hawaii Territorial Board of Public Welfare. In early 1943, she helped her husband organize the independent Marine, Engineering, and Dry Dock Workers Union of Hawaii.

During 1944 and 1945, martial law relaxed and the ILWU organized thousands of Filipinos, Japanese, and Hawaiians, along with other Asian, Hispanic, and

European sugar and pineapple workers, into a united, multiethnic aggregation. In 1945, the members of the smaller Marine Engineering and Dry Dock Workers Union voted to affiliate with the ILWU. Bob McElrath was appointed Hawaii’s ILWU information director. The McElraths’ courage in organizing their independent union despite martial law had set an important precedent for the ILWU’s spectacular late-war unionization drive across all of Hawaii.

In 1946, when the ILWU’s 26,000 sugar workers went on strike, McElrath volunteered countless hours to the union cause. She counseled members about their social and economic needs and helped establish a soup kitchen that fed thousands. McElrath continued volunteering to aid the union during a pineapple industry lockout in 1947 and a major Hawaii longshore workers’ strike in 1949. She served as office manager for the union’s legal defense operation during the anticommunist Red Scare of the early 1950s, when Hall was indicted on charges of subversive activities in a politically motivated effort to undermine the militant ILWU.

In 1954, McElrath became an official social worker for the ILWU’s chapter known as Local 142. In a career that lasted until her retirement in 1981, she ensured that thousands of union members received the medical, dental, pension, and other benefits guaranteed by Local 142’s collective bargaining agreements. She also taught classes for union members and counseled them about resolving social welfare and family problems beyond the union’s contract.

In the political arena, McElrath backed the movement for Hawaiian statehood that succeeded in expanding democratic rights when Hawaii entered the union in 1959. She also lobbied the state legislature for improvements in laws covering a range of human services and helped to make public housing available to Hawaii's low income and senior citizens. After her official retirement in 1981, McElrath continued to work vigorously for social and economic justice and for civil rights. She spent many more years lobbying the state legislature on behalf of the poor and elderly and helped found the ethnic studies program at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She also became an advocate for universal health care coverage and for physician-assisted suicide.

McElrath was appointed to the Board of Regents of the University of Hawaii in 1995, serving until 2003, and was recognized as one of the university's distinguished alumni in 2004. She was also a gifted public speaker, addressing ILWU conventions to thundering applause. McElrath passed away on December 11, 2008, shortly before her ninety-third birthday.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

A progressive unionist and social activist for seventy years, McElrath was an important contributor to the economic and political changes that transformed

Hawaii from a colonial outpost to a modern US state. In her later years, McElrath was revered by the ILWU as one of the union's honored elders and great pioneers. She won numerous honors for her lifetime of efforts to improve social conditions for all Hawaiians.

*Harvey Schwartz*

#### FURTHER READING

McElrath, Ah Quon. "Agriculture: Hawaii." *Solidarity Stories: An Oral History of the ILWU*. By Harvey Schwartz. Seattle: U of Washington P, 2009. McElrath's story in her own words.

---. "The Challenge Is Still There." *Rocking the Boat: Union Women's Voices, 1915-1975*. By Brigid O'Farrell and Joyce L. Kornbluh. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1996. Another McElrath oral history, featuring insights about women's issues and industrial relations.

---. "Foreword." *A Spark Is Struck! Jack Hall and the ILWU in Hawaii*. By Sanford Zalburg. Honolulu: Watermark, 2007. McElrath's introduction to the reprint of a useful 1979 history.

---. "Organized Labor." *Autobiography of Protest in Hawaii*. By Robert H. Mast and Anne B. Mast. Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1996. A helpful interview with McElrath that emphasizes political activism.

## VED MEHTA

### Indian-born writer

*Ved Mehta's long career as a writer for the New Yorker, along with his books of autobiography, journalism, and intellectual reportage, have made him a prominent and admired writer. That he achieved all this after going completely blind at the age of four makes his story even more remarkable.*

**Born:** March 21, 1934; Lahore, British India (now Pakistan)

**Full name:** Ved Parkash Mehta

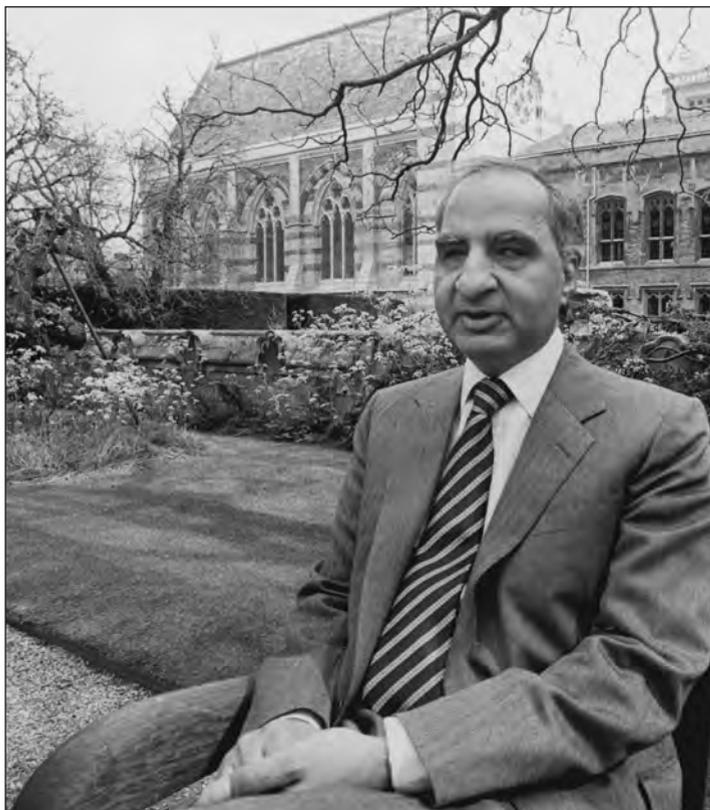
**Areas of achievement:** Journalism, literature

#### EARLY LIFE

Ved Parkash Mehta was born to Hindu parents in the Punjab. At around four years of age, he became blind after an attack of spinal meningitis. Given that he had seen during early childhood, he retained enough visual memories to understand how the world looked to

sighted people. His parents sent him to Bombay (now Mumbai) to attend the Dadar School for the Blind.

In 1949, Mehta moved to the United States in order to attend the Arkansas School for the Blind. This marked his entry to the Western world, which he has never left, although he has returned to India to visit. Not only did Mehta have to adapt to a new cultural context, continually adjusting to the limitations imposed on him by his blindness, but he was also confronted with racially segregated Southern culture in Arkansas during his time at the Arkansas School for the Blind. Mehta's academic talent was recognized at the school, and for his undergraduate and graduate studies he moved through a series of prominent institutions: Pomona College in California, Oxford University's Balliol College, and Harvard University. At Oxford, his special subject was the seventeenth century, and he studied with the noted historian Christopher Hill.



Ved Mehta. (Getty Images)

### LIFE'S WORK

Mehta's writing talent brought him recognition at Harvard, leading to the publication of his memoir *Face to Face* (1957). In his early twenties, Mehta began writing for the *New Yorker*. Mehta soon found himself being nurtured and supported by the magazine's longtime editor, William Shawn. Shawn favored long, idiosyncratic pieces in which the writer could deeply discuss the material. This was ideal for Mehta's mode of writing, which was neither dry analysis nor simply a line-up of facts, but a more nuanced, personal style of nonfiction narrative.

Although Mehta is most famous for his autobiographical works, his role as a journalist should not be overlooked. Historically, it has been difficult for general periodicals to cover professors and intellectual developments unless they have become politically embroiled or personally controversial. Mehta's early volumes *The Fly and the Fly-Bottle* (1962)—about the historians and philosophers he encountered while at Oxford—and *The New Theologian* (1966)—about the religious thinkers who were part of the existential theology and "Death of God" movements—discuss

complicated issues objectively, clearly, and with an understanding of serious intellectual debate.

But the primary contribution Mehta made to the literary world was through his autobiographies, highly observant accounts of his family, early life, and career. The most celebrated of these were *Daddyji* (1972), *Mamaji* (1979), and *Vedi* (1982). Eventually, Mehta gathered his autobiographical volumes under the title *Continents of Exile*. What is particularly notable about Mehta's writing is that he does not refer to his own blindness other than when it is the direct subject of a piece; his writing otherwise sounds as if he were sighted. This experimental method adds a fascinating technical difficulty to his work and makes it interesting to students of literary points of view, as well as anyone valuing literary discussions of disability, India, or international politics.

In 1983, Mehta married Linn Cary, the niece of a colleague of his at the *New Yorker* and a distant descendant of the American novelist James Fenimore Cooper. The Mehtas lived in New York on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, as well as in a summer house in Islesboro, Maine, which Mehta wrote about in *Dark Harbor* (2003). Mehta left the *New Yorker* after Tina Brown took over as editor in 1994; he wrote a long elegy for his more than three decades at the magazine in *Remembering Mr. Shawn's New Yorker* (1998). Since leaving the *New Yorker*, Mehta has continued to write frequently as a freelancer, also publishing several more books, including *A Ved Mehta Reader: The Craft of the Essay* (1998), *All for Love* (2001), and *The Red Letters* (2004).

### SIGNIFICANCE

Mehta's accomplishments as a multicultural, visually disabled writer are significant. More than that, however, his *Continents of Exile* series is one of the most comprehensive autobiographies attempted in literary history, sometimes compared to the works of French writer Marcel Proust. Mehta's legacy is also important because he was one of the first Indian literary voices introduced to twentieth-century US readers, paving the way for other Indian authors to become part of the US literary scene.

Nicholas Birns

### Ved Mehta's *The Stolen Light*

*The Stolen Light* (1989) is the sixth volume in the serial autobiography of Ved Mehta. In the first two volumes of the series, *Daddyji* (1972) and *Mamaji* (1979), Mehta sketched the character and family background of his father and mother; in subsequent volumes he relates his own remarkable story. *Sound-Shadows of the New World* (1985), the volume immediately preceding *The Stolen Light*, opens in 1949, with the fifteen-year-old Mehta coming to the United States to attend the Arkansas School for the Blind in Little Rock. The volume concludes with his graduation and departure for Pomona College, a liberal arts institution in Claremont, California, where he would spend his undergraduate years.

*The Stolen Light* picks up the narrative with Mehta's first day at Pomona College. In a prefatory note to this volume, Mehta introduces an "omnibus title" for the entire series—*Continents of Exile*—a title he long had in mind, and one which is particularly appropriate for this volume. Doubly exiled by the blindness with which he was stricken in childhood and by his departure from India as an adolescent in search of educational opportunities in the United States, Mehta documents his quest for independence and selfhood. His personal narrative is framed by a larger narrative of American culture in the 1950s as seen by an intelligent young outsider who longs desperately to be an insider.

#### FURTHER READING

- Bow, Leslie. *Partly Colored: Asian Americans and Racial Anomaly in the Segregated South*. New York: New York UP, 2010. Concentrates on Mehta's accounts of his Arkansas years.
- Kumar, Amitava. *Away: The Indian Writer's Life as an Expatriate*. London: Routledge, 2004. Surveys Mehta's sense of mixed dislocation and opportunity he experiences as an Indian writer living in the West.
- Philip, David Scott. *Perceiving India: Through the Works of Nirad C. Chaudhuri, R. K. Narayan, and Ved Mehta*. New York: Envoy, 1986. Puts Mehta

in dialogue with other Indian and Indian-expatriate writers.

- Rustomji-Kerns, Roshni. *Living in America: Poetry and Fiction by South Asian American Writers*. Boulder: Westview, 1995. Offers a general consideration of Mehta's status as an American author, along with a representative piece of his writing.
- Slatin, John M. "Blindness and Self-Perception: The Autobiographies of Ved Mehta." *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 19.4 (1986): 173–93. Concentrates on Mehta's visual disability and its implications for his writings.

## ZUBIN MEHTA

### Indian-born musician, conductor, educator

*Zubin Mehta is a conductor who has built an international reputation in the concert hall and the opera house. His professional activities in many European and Asian countries, the United States, and the Middle East have included positions with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, and Israel Philharmonic Orchestras.*

**Born:** April 29, 1936; Bombay, British India (now Mumbai, India)

**Full name:** Zubin Mehta (ZEW-bihn MAY-tuh)

**Area of achievement:** Music

#### EARLY LIFE

Zubin Mehta was born in Bombay, British India (now Mumbai, India) in 1936, the eldest son of Mehli Mehta and his wife, Tehmina. A year before Mehta's birth, his father had founded the Bombay Symphony Orchestra, where he served as concertmaster (1935–45) and then as conductor; Mehli Mehta also performed as first violinist of the Bombay String Quartet, which he established in 1940. Thus, Mehta and his brother Zarin (born 1938 in Bombay) grew up with daily exposure to Western music, which was little known in India at that time.



*Zubin Mehta. (WireImage)*

Mehta's early studies were devoted to medicine for two years; however, making the decision to focus on music, he went to Vienna, Austria, in 1954 and studied for two years with the conductor Hans Swarowsky at the Akademie für Musik. He also studied double bass with Otto Rühm. For a brief period he even sang in the bass section of the Wiener Singverein, the chorus of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde. After completing his education in Vienna, Mehta won the 1958 Liverpool International Conducting Competition, which was followed by a year's work with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of conductor John Pritchard; he also won an award during his studies at the Tanglewood Music Center in Massachusetts in the summer of 1958. With the assistance of the composer and conductor Lukas Foss, Mehta was introduced to Siegfried Hearst, who became his agent; Hearst was of material help in the process by which Mehta obtained his first permanent position, with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, which he directed from 1961 to 1967.

#### **LIFE'S WORK**

In 1962, having just taken over the directorship of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, Mehta was invited by

Dorothy Chandler to become associate conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. As a result of staffing changes shortly afterward, Mehta was also offered the position of music director. He was music director of this orchestra from 1962 to 1978, while also continuing his commitment in Montreal for the five seasons between 1962 and 1967. Mehta was appointed music director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra beginning in the 1978 season. He occupied this position until 1991.

Mehta first conducted the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in 1961, returning frequently for subsequent engagements, including an emergency visit during the Six-Day War. In 1969, the orchestra offered him the first music director position since its founding in 1936. His contract with the Los Angeles Philharmonic precluded his acceptance, but he was appointed music adviser and, approaching the end of his tenure in Los Angeles, he became music director of the Israel Philharmonic in 1977, a position he was still holding as of 2012. In 2006, he was appointed chief conductor of the Festival del Mediterrani, held each year in Valencia, Spain.

Mehta has conducted in the major opera venues of North America and Europe, in cities such as Montreal, New York, Vienna, Berlin, London, and Chicago. However, his only permanent opera house positions have been at the Bavarian State Opera (1998–2006) and the Teatro del Maggio Musicale Fiorentino in Florence, Italy (since 1985). He has been a frequent guest conductor in cities including Vienna, Berlin, Salzburg, and London, and he has undertaken many international tours with orchestras from Montreal, Los Angeles, New York City, and Israel.

Mehta's recording contracts have been largely related to his permanent positions listed above. His most frequent distributors have been Sony, Deutsche Grammophon, EMI, RCA, and Decca.

Mehta married his first wife, the soprano Carmen Lasky, in 1958. They were divorced in 1964 after having two children, Zarina and Mervon; Carmen married Zubin's brother, Zarin, in 1966. Mehta married his second wife, actress Nancy Kovack, in 1969. He has two other children, born outside his marriages: Alexandra (born 1967) and Ori (born 1990). His closest professional and personal associates have included conductors and musicians Pinchas Zukerman, Itzhak Perlman, Isaac Stern, Daniel Barenboim, and Jacqueline du Pré.

Among many professional honors, Mehta has received honorary conductorships of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra (2001) and Munich Philharmonic

### Zubin Mehta as Music Director of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra

When Leonard Bernstein announced in 1967 that he would conclude his tenure with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, there were reports that the music director position had been offered to Zubin Mehta. Denying these rumors to the New York press, Mehta made controversial statements that alienated him from members of the orchestra and the musicians' union. The rift was not repaired until Mehta guest-conducted the orchestra in 1974. In 1976, the New York Philharmonic offered the music directorship to Mehta, who accepted effective the season 1978–79. He held the position for thirteen years.

Mehta has often been considered a specialist in romantic and postromantic repertoire, although he has stated that this characterization is flawed due to the programming choices of recording companies for economic reasons. He risked controversy by programming modernist music, especially the works of Bartok, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and Messiaen. He devoted little attention to music before Beethoven, apart from a considerable corpus of Mozart works.

Mehta's pronounced political opinions influenced his interest in musical outreach. During his tenure in New York, he held performances in Central Park and Harlem. The orchestra also went on international tours to Eastern Europe and Israel. In 1985, Mehta conducted a joint concert of the New York Philharmonic and the Israel Philharmonic, confronting the problem of concurrent commitments that occasioned opposition in New York.

Orchestra (2004), Kennedy Center Honors (2006), and the Praemium Imperiale from the Japanese imperial family (2008). He has also been named an honorary citizen of Florence, Italy and Tel Aviv, Israel.

Mehta has been involved with the education of young musicians at the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation (Mumbai), Escuela Superior de Música Reina Sofía (Madrid), Buchmann-Mehta School of Music (Tel Aviv), and a program by which members of the Israel Philharmonic mentor Arab music students in Shwaram and Nazareth.

### SIGNIFICANCE

As the first internationally known conductor from India specializing in Western music, Mehta is considered a pioneer. The fact that he has held positions in many countries also puts him in the top rank of conductors in his generation. He has experienced poverty, racial discrimination, political upheaval, and professional controversy, but he continues to offer music to audiences of varied socioeconomic backgrounds. He is known for using his influence to assist other musicians, including members of his orchestras. He remains an Indian national in spite of permanent residence in the United States and other countries necessitated by his professional commitments.

Mehta's involvement in the education of young musicians in his native India, Spain, and the Middle East is considered his legacy, and it has influenced other musicians, including his friend and fellow conductor, Daniel Barenboim, to mount similar endeavors. He undertook such projects in the same spirit of political cooperation that informs his many international tours, several of which were undertaken with greatly reduced or nonexistent compensation. His long tenure with the Israel Philharmonic has been marked by his support of that country and its people.

*Susan M. Filler*

### FURTHER READING

- Bookspan, Martin, and Ross Yockey. *Zubin: The Zubin Mehta Story*. New York: Harper, 1978. The most reliable biography of Mehta's first twenty years as a conductor.
- Hart, Philip. *Conductors: A New Generation*. New York: Scribner's, 1979. Places Mehta among other conductors of the postwar generation, up to the beginning of his tenure with the New York Philharmonic.
- Lavezzoli, Peter. "Mumbai Maestro: Zubin Mehta." *The Dawn of Indian Music in the West: Bhairavi*. New York: Continuum, 2006. 220–30. A study of music in India covering both indigenous and Western music, including information on famous musicians such as Mehta.
- Mehta, Zubin. *Zubin Mehta: The Score of My Life*. New York: Amadeus, 2009. Mehta's autobiography, best read in conjunction with Bookspan and Yockey as a source of updated information.

sixteen to pursue his chosen career. After breaking two of his fingers playing rugby, he sought a different career path within the world of music. In 1951, Ozawa heard Leonid Kreutzer conduct and play Ludwig van Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5 with the Japan Symphony Orchestra (now NHK Symphony Orchestra). Inspired by this performance, Ozawa decided to become a conductor. He studied under Hideo Saito, a renowned cellist and conductor, at the Toho School and gained experience at the NHK Symphony as well as the Japan Philharmonic. In 1955, Ozawa advanced to the college division of the Toho School.

After graduating in 1959, Ozawa planned to study abroad. He supported himself by selling Japanese motor scooters. In June, Ozawa heard about the Ninth International Competition for Young Conductors in Besançon, France. Although he could not complete the application by the deadline, he entered the competition with the help of the American Embassy and won the first prize in September 1959.

Charles Münch, a judge for the competition and conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO), advised Ozawa to attend the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood in western Massachusetts the next summer. There, he won the Koussevitzky Prize for outstanding student conductor. In the fall of 1960, Ozawa became a student of Herbert von Karajan of the Berlin Philharmonic. In Berlin, Ozawa caught the attention of Leonard Bernstein, who appointed Ozawa assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic for the 1961–62 season.

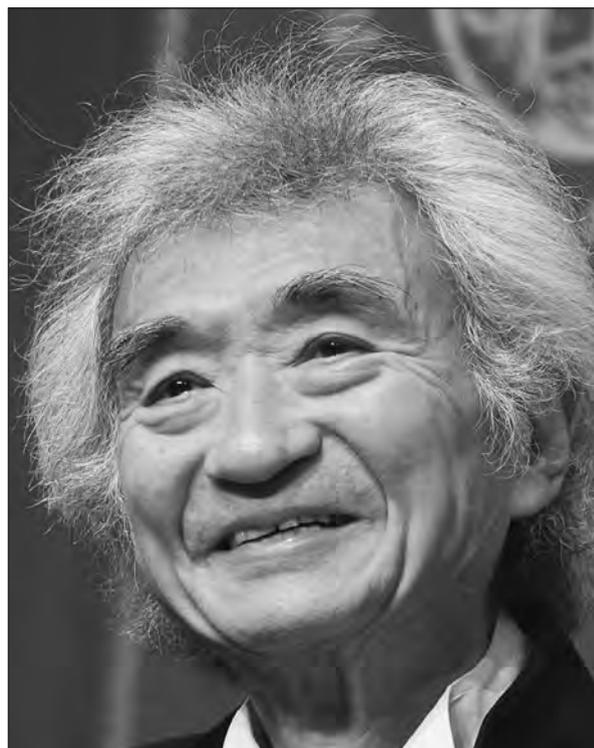
#### LIFE'S WORK

On April 14, 1961, Ozawa made his professional debut with the New York Philharmonic. That same year he became conductor of the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo, but his relationship with the company did not work out. He returned to New York in 1963.

In the summer of 1963, Ozawa appeared at the Ravinia Festival, the summer residence of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, as a last-minute replacement for conductor Georges Prêtre. After hearing Ozawa's first rehearsal, Earle Ludgin, the chairman of the festival association, offered him the position of Ravinia's first music director. This appointment lasted from 1964 to 1968. In 1965, Ozawa became music director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, where he stayed until 1969. In the summer of 1969, he made his operatic debut at the Salzburg Festival in Austria, with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*. From 1970 to 1976, he served as music director of the San Francisco Symphony.

In 1970, Ozawa was appointed co-artistic director at Tanglewood. In 1972, he became music advisor for the BSO. The next year, he became the orchestra's director and held that position for the next twenty-nine years. In the early 1980s, he began appearing at major opera houses, including the world premiere of Olivier Messiaen's *Saint François d'Assise* at the Paris Opera in 1983. By the 1990s, Ozawa had appeared as a guest conductor of major European orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, and the Orchestre de Paris. Ozawa made numerous recordings of various composers, ranging from Beethoven's symphonies to Toru Takemitsu's *November Steps*.

In 2002, Ozawa was invited to conduct the New Year Concert of the Vienna Philharmonic. In the same year, he became principal conductor of the Vienna State Opera. In January 2010, six months before the expiration of his contract with the opera house, Ozawa announced that he had been diagnosed with esophageal cancer. He canceled all engagements to receive surgery and chemotherapy treatment. He came back to the podium in September 2010, conducting the Saito Kinen Orchestra in Matsumoto, Japan, and appeared with the same orchestra at Carnegie Hall in New York in December 2010.



Seiji Ozawa. (Sankei via Getty Images)

**SIGNIFICANCE**

Ozawa became a conductor in both North America and Europe when there were no Asian conductors for major orchestras, and achieved great success. In addition to his many achievements in the Western world, he has made contributions to the musical culture of his native China and Japan, as well. He made a concert tour in China with the BSO in March 1979, and after this historic event, he visited China frequently to conduct orchestras and give master classes. On the tenth anniversary of Saito's death in 1984, Ozawa organized memorial concerts in Tokyo and Osaka, Japan. For this occasion, more than one hundred of Saito's former students gathered to perform, and these concerts became the beginning of the Saito Kinen Orchestra. With this ensemble as the resident orchestra, Ozawa launched the Saito Kinen Festival in Matsumoto, Japan, in September 1992.

*Fusako Hamao*

**FURTHER READING**

- Hart, Philip. *Conductors: A New Generation*. New York: Scribner's, 1979. Print. Includes a chapter on Ozawa offering a detailed biography up to 1979, including his early education in Japan and his relationship with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.
- Jampol, Joshua. "Seiji Ozawa, or the Art of Managing the Orchestra." *Living Opera*. New York: Oxford UP, 2010. 245–60. Print. An interview in which Ozawa talks about his early education with Hideo Saito, his encounters with Karajan and Bernstein, and his view on opera.
- Sharpe, Roderick L., and Jeanne Koekkoek Stierman. *Maestros in America: Conductors in the Twenty-First Century*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2008. Print. Features an essay on Ozawa with concise biographical information, a list of further reading, and selected discography.