

ParentMap 2017 Superhero Ludovic Morlot: The Conductor

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A Q&A with the music director of the Seattle Symphony

BY GEMMA ALEXANDER

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On Feb. 12, Ludovic Morlot went from a morning of press interviews to conducting a concerto with a world-renowned violinist to winning a



Grammy. It's all in a day's work for the music director of the [Seattle Symphony](#).



Ludovic Morlot. Photo credit: Will Austin

This most recent Grammy was one of two nominations the symphony received for an album of Henri Dutilleux's music released by Seattle Symphony Media — a recording label that Morlot launched in 2014. It's the symphony's third Grammy in as many years. The first was for a contemporary orchestral composition commissioned by the symphony titled "Become Ocean." That also won a Pulitzer.

Morlot's full of plans about how to build on the momentum of all this success.

"I want to continue to refine our artistic excellence — that's a path that cannot be exhausted — and to keep coming up with new initiatives, to invite the best guest artists we can afford and to start touring," he says.

Morlot became the music director of the Seattle Symphony in 2011, after several guest performances with Seattle and a stint with the [Boston Symphony Orchestra](#). Despite the Seattle Symphony's increasing star power — including [a \\$50,000 gift from pop star Taylor Swift](#) after she heard "Become Ocean" — Morlot is interested in more than renown.

"In the 1980s, our art form was made very exclusive, and we're naving the price now " he says "If you want a more diverse

paying the price now," he says. "If you want a more diverse audience, you have to offer a wider range of repertoire, like a restaurant offering à la carte."

Take, for example, the symphony's regular free performances in prisons and community centers, partnerships with local musicians and daytime family-centric interactive concerts — all in addition to the symphony's more traditional evening performances.

"I don't believe there's a right or wrong way to experience music," he says of such ventures. "There is no bad music in terms of taste."

Most recently, the symphony performed a free concert titled "Music Beyond Borders: Voices from the Seven," which featured music from the seven countries listed in President Donald Trump's Jan. 27 executive order on immigration. The idea came from performers in the symphony, a quarter of whom are immigrants, says Morlot.

"We focused on what can come out artistically from opening our hearts," he says of "Music Beyond Borders." "A lot of our community members walked into a concert hall for the first time that day. It was one more opportunity to communicate the power of music."

That, he says, is the ultimate goal: "Everybody should feel the urgency of live music."

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 What did you want to be when you grew



I wanted to be many things: a musician for sure, also an architect. I wasn't built to be an athlete, but it was a dream. I wanted to be creative, with the aspect of adrenaline and performance, and I love beautiful things. Music was the vocabulary that lets me do all of these things most convincingly.

Q What's the most misunderstood part of your job?

The study. Conducting is not unlike playing an instrument. But moving your arms around — people don't think it requires as much preparation.

Q What book saved you or changed your life?

It's always evolving. Everything I read affects my thinking. I recently read a book by Ed Catmull, the CEO of Pixar, that deals with leadership and how to engage people to make them feel creative. Goethe's *Faust* is forever a book that transformed me. Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* I go back to constantly. It's on my desk.

Q If you could have one superhero power, what would it be and why?

I travel a lot, and I don't really like it for the obvious reasons that it's so time-consuming, and jet lag. So maybe teleportation would be a good superpower.

Q On a rainy Pacific Northwest morning, what gets you motivated and out of bed?

My family: driving my kids to school and coming here for rehearsals. Making music motivates me; looking forward to learning something that day. And, of course, coffee.

Q If you could dine with anyone, alive or dead, whom would that be and why?

I need to organize a party! There are so many, I don't want to choose. But I won't be too serious and say 'Beethoven' or anyone like that. I'd love to sit with Roger Federer. I get inspired by how he lives as a performer. But I'm more interested in playing tennis with him than eating dinner!

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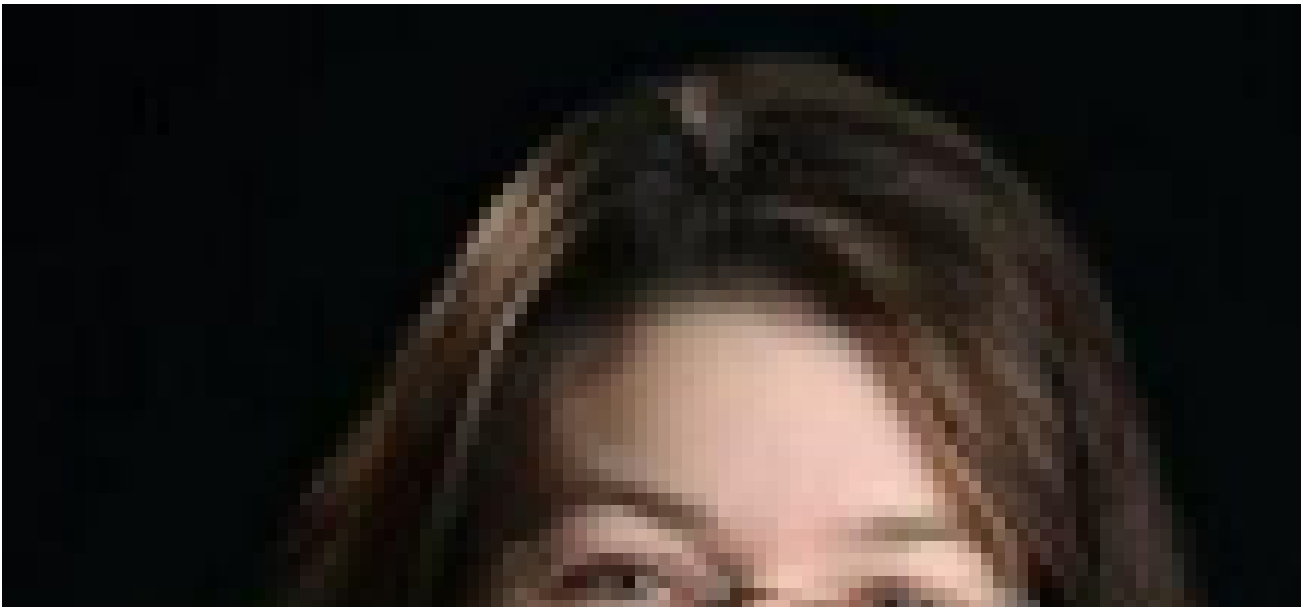
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ABOUT AUTHOR





BY GEMMA ALEXANDER

Gemma Alexander is a Seattle-based freelance writer with two daughters. When she is not writing for ParentMap, she [blogs about books and travel](#) and spends too much time on Twitter.

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