



GUNMA KUSATSU MUSIC SOCIETY FOUNDATION
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February 18th, 2026

Gunma Kusatsu Music Society Foundation
Kusatsu Summer International Music Academy & Festival Executive Committee
Executive Committee Chairman: Takashi Nakazawa

Kusatsu International Summer Music Academy & Festival: Appointment of Artistic Advisor

Following the sudden passing of Akira Nishimura, who led as Music Director from 2010 to 2023, the festival has maintained its continuity through the dedicated support of Music Advisors Takashi Yoshimatsu and Otto Biba. We are now pleased to welcome Michael Haefliger, who served for 25 years as Artistic Director of the Lucerne Festival (Switzerland), one of the world's three major music festivals, as our new Artistic Advisor. As we look toward the 50th anniversary in 2030, a strategic restructuring will further elevate the quality of this historic festival. We remain committed to our core values: fostering young musical talent and strengthening our contribution to the cultural fabric of Gunma and Japan at large.

【Artistic Advisor】

Michael Haefliger -Former Executive and Artistic Director of the Lucerne Festival

*Please refer to the end of this text for my detailed background.

Founded in 1980 by violinist Koji Toyoda and Kazuyuki Toyama, the **Kusatsu International Summer Music Academy & Festival** has spent over 45 years as a cornerstone of Japanese culture. Built on the leadership of successive directors like Akira Nishimura and current advisors Takashi Yoshimatsu and Otto Biba, the festival is now embarking on a transformative journey toward its 50th anniversary in 2030.

At its core lies the **Academy**. Unlike traditional festivals, Kusatsu was built around master classes where world-class artists mentor students of all backgrounds—from aspiring professionals to dedicated amateurs. This immersive two-week environment offers an irreplaceable escape into the world of music.

The festival's founding spirit was personified by the world-renowned tenor **Ernst Haefliger**. A lecturer since the festival's fourth year, "Father Haefliger" was deeply beloved by Japanese audiences. His tireless devotion to teaching morning and night earned him the title of honorary citizen of Kusatsu, and his name remains engraved at the Yubatake hot spring to this day.

In a move that feels like destiny, the festival now welcomes his son, **Michael Haefliger**, as Artistic Advisor. Michael brings a peerless global reputation, having served as Artistic Director of the **Lucerne Festival** for 26 years. His career has been defined by innovation, from founding the Lucerne Festival Academy with Pierre Boulez to launching "Ark Nova"—a mobile concert hall created to bring music to the Tohoku region following the 2011 earthquake.

This appointment represents a poetic homecoming. Both father and son share a profound connection to Japan and a belief in the power of music education. By restructuring the organization and revitalizing the Academy under Michael's visionary leadership, the festival aims to enhance its global prestige while remaining a vital cultural force in Gunma. Together, we look forward to the next 50 years of nurturing young talent and celebrating world-class artistry.

Michael Haefliger has a new vision for the Kusatsu Summer International Music Academy & Festival. Called the "Three Mountains Project," it's inspired by Takasaki's Haruna, Kusatsu's Shirane, and Karuizawa's Asama. The goal is to expand the festival's bases, which have long been held exclusively in Kusatsu, and to promote this historic festival's efforts beyond Japan and around the world.

The "Three Mountains" Concept

- "**Kusatsu**": At Kusatsu Ongaku no Mori International Concert Hall, we will continue to host the Academy, which focuses on residential participation, and enhance chamber music concerts, aiming to make Kusatsu an even more attractive place, where people can immerse themselves in hot springs and music.

- "**Takasaki**": Takasaki City Theater has previously served as the venue for the festival's pre-concerts and is easily accessible from Tokyo. Taking advantage of this convenience, and with the cooperation of the Gunma Symphony Orchestra, we will further enhance the orchestral concerts that would not be possible in the concert hall in Kusatsu.

- "**Karuizawa**": At Karuizawa Ohga Hall, we will take advantage of the area's location as a gathering place for many cultural figures to plan chamber music-scale concerts to attract new classical music fans, and aim to create a venue that will encourage audiences to travel to Kusatsu, the festival's center, the following year.

As a mid-to-long-term vision, we aim to connect these three hubs not as isolated points, but as a continuous line. We anticipate that this will stimulate cultural promotion within each region and establish a new flow of visitors. Our goal is to create an environment where, in a few years' time, people can travel between these hubs and enjoy the music festival over the course of several days.

We look forward to Michael Haefliger's experience and planning skills, and we hope that the rich 45-year history passed down from our predecessors will be further enriched, and that you will enjoy the future growth of this music festival, which is broadcast from Gunma to the world.

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Michael Haefliger Biography (Photo Credit : Marco Borggreve)

Born in Berlin in 1961, he began studying violin and piano at the age of six and completed his violin studies at the Juilliard School in New York in 1983. He received an Executive MBA from the University of St. Gallen in 1999. He is also a graduate of Harvard Business School. In the early 1980s, he performed as a violinist at music festivals such as Lucerne, Interlaken, and Spoleto.



In 1986, he founded the Davos Festival - Young Artists in Concert and managed the festival until 1998. He then served as artistic director of Collegium Novum Zurich (CNZ) from 1996 to 1998. In 1999, he became executive director and artistic director of the Lucerne Festival. He has developed the festival by producing a wide variety of concert formats, including "40 Minutes" and "Piano-Offstage." He also devotes himself to nurturing young artists, planning the "DEBUT" Concert Series' and youth orchestra concerts. In 2003, he co-founded the Lucerne Festival Orchestra with Claudio Abbado, and in 2004, he co-founded the Lucerne Festival Academy with Pierre Boulez. As of 2025, he serves on the boards of directors of the Lang Lang International Music Foundation, the UBS Cultural Foundation, the Pierre Boulez Foundation, the Davos Festival Foundation, and Foundation of the Swiss Music Youth Competition.

[Major Achievements]

- Named as a "Global Leader for Tomorrow (now Young Global Leaders)" by the World Economic Forum Foundation in Switzerland (2000).
- Received numerous awards, including Lucerne Tourism Award by Tourism Forum Lucerne, Culture Prize of Central Switzerland, Swiss Society of New York Award, and Medal of Honor of the City of Lucerne.
 - He is the Chairman of the Jury for the Swiss Youth Music Competition and the UBS Young Artist Award.
 - In 2011, he launched the "Ark Nova Project" (planned and produced by KAJIMOTO) in collaboration with architect Arata Isozaki and sculptor Anish Kapoor to support the recovery efforts after the earthquake that struck in the north east area of Japan. In 2013, the "Lucerne Festival Ark Nova Matsushima 2013" was held in the town of Matsushima located in Miyagi

Prefecture.

- Since 2021, he has been planning "Music for Future" with the support of Zurich Insurance Group Ltd., which provides support to youth orchestras, young soloists, and young audiences around the world.

- On June 12th in 2025, he received the International Citation of Merit Award from the International Society for Performing Arts (ISPA).