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Announcing ISPA 2025 Lugano Awards Recipients

Claus Christiansen, The Danish Research Foundation, Michael Haefliger, Kevin, Rosemary, and Hannah Rose McNeely, KHR McNeely Family Foundation, Łukasz Twarkowski, and Cindy Van Acker

*Award Presentation to be held at the
ISPA 2025 Lugano Congress: Art and Social Political Change
Thursday, June 12, 2025 | Lugano, Switzerland*

New York, NY, USA (May 19, 2025) – The International Society for the Performing Arts (ISPA) Board of Directors, together with the host of the 2025 Lugano Congress, Lugano Arte e Cultura, is pleased to announce the recipients of the ISPA 2025 Lugano Awards. Over the past 50 years, ISPA has recognized outstanding individuals for their contributions to the performing arts and their communities. The following ISPA Awards will be presented:

Distinguished Artist Award presented to Łukasz Twarkowski, and to Cindy Van Acker
Presented to artists who have made an outstanding contribution of talent, artistry, dedication, and service to the world of the performing arts. The contributions of these award recipients have gone above and beyond their prowess as artists.

International Citation of Merit presented to Michael Haefliger
Presented for unique lifetime achievement which has enriched the international performing arts. This Award is not for performance but rather for distinguished service working within the profession.

Angel Award presented to Claus Christiansen, The Danish Research Foundation, and to Kevin, Rosemary, and Hannah Rose McNeely, KHR McNeely Family Foundation
Presented to an individual or organization which has demonstrated a significant and lasting contribution to the support of the performing arts which transcends the boundaries of one country or institution, and merits international recognition.

ISPA CEO, David Baile, commented that “The 2025 Lugano award recipients embody the spirit of the awards in that each of the individuals honored has made significant contributions to the region while having a truly global reach.” The awards will be presented during a ceremony at the ISPA 2025 Lugano Congress: Art and Social Political Change, on Thursday, June 12, 2025. The ceremony will be hosted at Lugano Arte e Cultura in Lugano, Switzerland.

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Biographies of the Award Recipients

Claus Christiansen, The Danish Research Foundation

2025 Angel Award

Claus Christiansen is the founder and chairman of the Danish Research Foundation. He graduated as a medical doctor from the University of Copenhagen in 1971, and earned his doctoral degree in 1976. From 1978 to 1992, he was head of the Department of Clinical Chemistry at Glostrup Hospital, affiliated with the University of Copenhagen. In 1991, he co-founded what would become Nordic Bioscience together with Dr. Bente Juel Riis. The following year, they established the Center for Clinical and Basic Research (CCBR), where Christiansen served as CEO until 2013. His scientific career began in 1971 with the publication of his first peer-reviewed article. Since then, he has authored over 1,100 scientific publications and book chapters spanning multiple disease areas. He is especially known for his pioneering research in calcium metabolism in postmenopausal women and holds an H-index of approximately 160. Christiansen has supported and/or supervised 35 Doctor of Medical Science dissertations and 120 PhD dissertations.

Michael Haefliger

2025 International Citation of Merit Award

For nearly 40 years, Michael Haefliger has led the most significant festivals in the world, fostered innovation in the new music space, and created lasting and meaningful educational and early-professional opportunities for young artists. A violinist and graduate of Juilliard, Haefliger began his career as a performing artist; he carries that training with him in his management career, with an arts-forward approach that prioritizes cooperation, education, and musical innovation. Over his lengthy career, Haefliger has built bridges between the arts and society at large, pioneered festival formats and themes that have set the standard for programming at institutions around the world, and cultivated an extensive network of contacts at all levels of classical and contemporary music: from emerging artists and composers to seasoned institutional figures, legendary conductors and instrumentalists, and high-value sponsors.

As Artistic and Executive Director of the Lucerne Festival since 1999, Haefliger has utterly transformed the institution, working together with fellow visionaries Claudio Abbado and Pierre Boulez to establish the Lucerne Festival Orchestra and Lucerne Festival Academy, elevating the festival into a world-renowned international brand synonymous with musical excellence and innovation, and doubling the festival budget while maintaining a 95% self-funding rate. Now spread across multiple venues—ranging from the KKL Concert Hall and the streets, hotels, and restaurants of Lucerne, to the innovative Ark Nova Mobile Concert Hall and Connected streaming platform—and with several tours and extended residencies throughout Europe, Asia, and the United States, the Lucerne Festival, Orchestra, and Academy have had a profound impact on the cultural, musical, and educational landscape around the world.

For his efforts, Haefliger has been recognized with major international awards and titles. In 2000, he was named Global Leader for Tomorrow by the World Economic Forum Foundation in Geneva; further honors include the Cultural Award of Central Switzerland, Medal of Honor of the City of Lucerne, Swiss Society of New York Award, and European Cultural Innovation Award.

Haefliger serves on the boards of the Lang Lang International Music Foundation, UBS Cultural Foundation, Pierre Boulez Foundation, Davos Festival Foundation, and Foundation of the Swiss Music Youth Competition; he is also the Chairman of the Jury for the UBS Young Artist Award, and Vice-Chairman of the Board of the Swiss Top Events. He previously served on the boards of the World Arts Forum, American Friends of Lucerne Festival, and Avenir Suisse Foundation in Switzerland.

Born in West Berlin in 1961, Michael Haefliger began studying the violin and piano at the age of six; he completed his violin studies at the Juilliard School of Music in New York in 1983, graduating with a Bachelor of Music degree. As a performer, Haefliger made appearances at festivals including Interlaken and Spoleto; in 1985, together with his brother Andreas, he made his debut at the Lucerne Festival. He subsequently studied management at the Schools of Business, Law, and Social Sciences at St. Gallen University, earning his Executive MBA in 1999. In 2003, Haefliger received a scholarship (through the Harvard Club of Switzerland) to attend the General Management Program at Harvard University. Haefliger speaks German (native), English, Spanish, French, Italian, and Russian.

Kevin, Rosemary, and Hannah Rose McNeely, KHR McNeely Family Foundation

2025 Angel Award

The KHR McNeely Family Foundation, based in Sonoma, California, is a family-led philanthropic organization committed to advancing the arts, education, environmental stewardship, and community development. Founded by Kevin and Rosemary McNeely and joined by their daughter Hannah Rose, the Foundation supports cultural institutions, land trusts, artist residencies, and youth-focused education programs both in the U.S. and abroad. Kevin W. McNeely, President and CEO, has over four decades of experience in philanthropy and business, including his leadership at the Manitou Fund since 1980 and his pivotal role in shaping the Sonoma International Film Festival (2004–2023). He is a Claremont McKenna alumnus (BA, Economics) and received an honorary doctorate from Franklin University Switzerland in 2023, where he has served as a trustee for over 25 years. Rosemary McNeely, Vice President, brings an arts education background from MassArt and the Philadelphia College of Arts, with extensive experience integrating arts into social impact work. Their daughter, Hannah Rose McNeely (FUS Class of 2023), brings expertise in global program development and communications, with experience in Italy, New York, and Switzerland. Together, the McNeelys lead the Foundation with a collaborative, intergenerational approach rooted in creativity, cultural engagement, and lasting community impact.

Łukasz Twarkowski

2025 Distinguished Artist Award

ŁUKASZ TWARKOWSKI is a creator of multimedia performances combining theatre and visual arts. He places his projects in the context of extending reality through multimedia. A crucial element of Twarkowski's creative work is investigating the ability and limitations of theatre as a medium and tool of communication. By permanent deconstruction of narratives, questioning the fixed habits of the audience and by meaningful usage of new media, Twarkowski creates a new, original language of stage performance based on multimedia and, more widely, digital technologies. In using these, Twarkowski analyses and observes increasingly complex relations between the Real, the Symbolic and the Imagined.

His projects are being programmed at the most important festivals and stages around the world, among others: Odéon - Théâtre de l'Europe, Ruhrtriennale, New York Skirball Center, Piccolo Teatro de Milano, Festival de Otoño de Madrid, Wiener Festwochen, Southbank Center London, Onassis Stegi, Taipei Performing Arts Center, Holland Festival, Münchner Kammerspiele, Théâtre de Vidy, Thalia Theatre.

Cindy Van Acker

2025 Distinguished Artist Award

Born in Belgium, Cindy Van Acker trained as a ballet dancer in the Royal Ballet of Flanders and the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève. From 1994 on, she started to experiment her own work and emerged on the contemporary Geneva dance scene with her solo performance Corps 00:00 in 2002. The piece gained international recognition, including the participation in the 2005 Venice Biennale at the invitation of Romeo Castellucci. She founded the Compagnie Greffe in Geneva in 2002. Since then, she has staged over thirty works for Cie Greffe, Ballet de Lorraine, Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève, P.A.R.T.S. and Romeo Castellucci's productions. Her choreographic work combines aesthetic sobriety and minimalism and attentively explores the connections between soul, body, sound and rhythm, creating works that transcend the boundaries between dance, performance and plastic arts. She has won numerous awards, including the UFC Choreographic Production Award for the works Diffraction and Speechless Voices. Van Acker was awarded the Swiss Grand Award for the Performing Arts / Hans Reinhart Ring 2023 and the Leenaards Cultural Prize 2023.

About ISPA: The International Society for the Performing Arts (ISPA) is a global association of more than 500 arts management leaders from 56 regions, who come together with the shared goal of strengthening and developing the arts internationally. We achieve this by building leadership ability, by recognizing and discussing field-wide trends and new developments, and by deepening global exchange through the arts. ISPA members include presenters, performing arts organizations, artist managers, competitions, funders, consultants and other professionals working in the performing arts. Founded in 1948, 2024 marked ISPA's 75th anniversary.



About ISPA Awards: As a leadership network, ISPA is committed to recognizing excellence in the performing arts globally. The first ISPA Award was presented in 1975 to soprano and cultural leader Beverly Sills. Over the past 50 years more than 250 artists, organizations, and cultural leaders have been celebrated for their contribution to the global performing arts. There is a semi-annual call for award nominations. All nominations are reviewed by the Nominating Committee and then a slate of nominees is recommended to the Board of Directors for approval.

For more information on the ISPA Awards, visit www.ispa.org/page/awards_landing

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