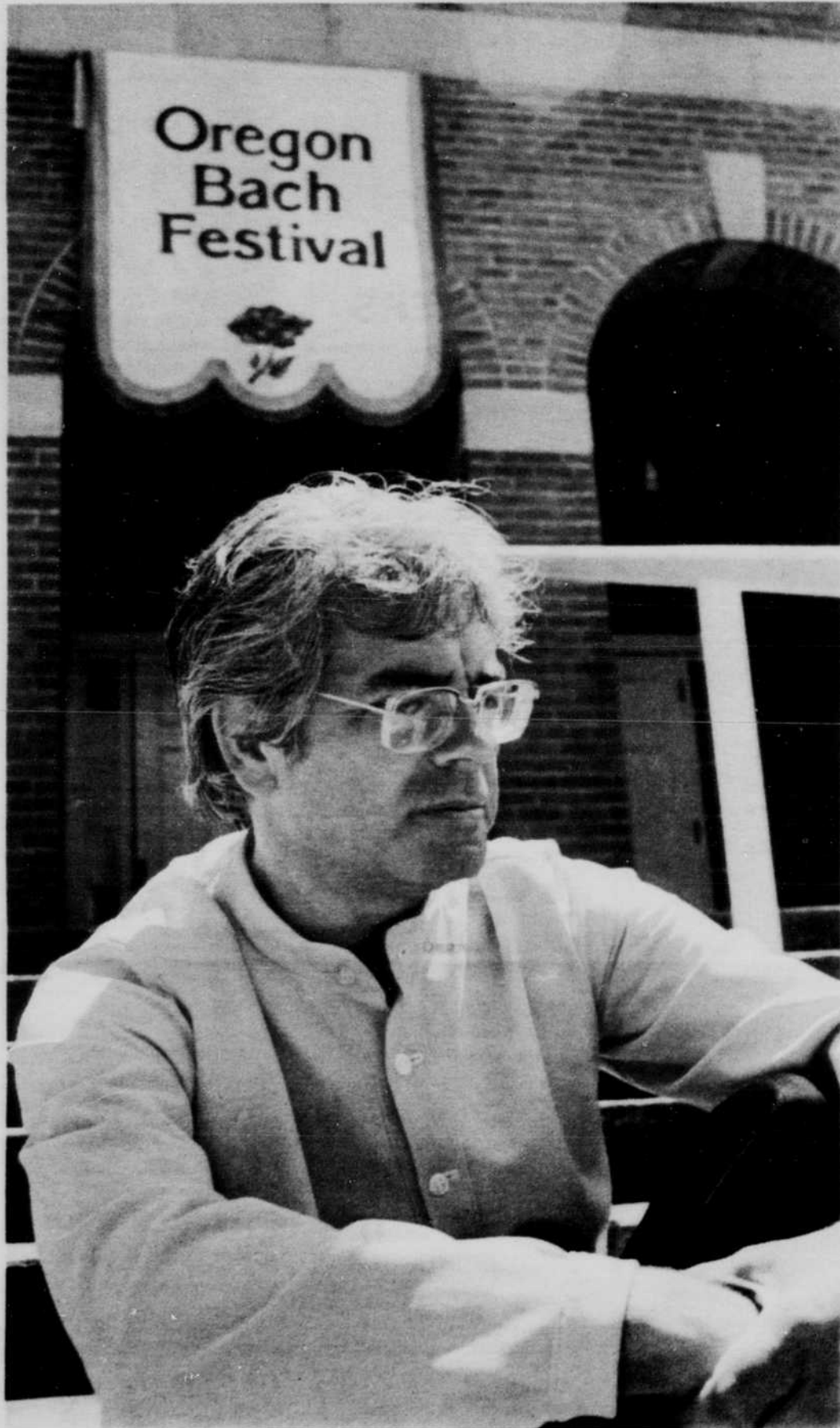


# Helmuth



Helmuth Rilling

Photo by Bill Wack

The Oregon Bach Festival and its conductor, Helmuth Rilling, may be Oregon's best-kept musical secret.

Rilling, an internationally acclaimed conductor from Germany, generally is regarded as one of the foremost conductors in Europe. A specialist in the music of Bach, Rilling has spent much of his life traveling throughout Europe, Asia, South America and the United States, conducting many of the world's most impressive orchestras.

For the last 12 summers, however, he has spent most of his time as musical director of the Bach Festival in Eugene — and his time has not been wasted.

"I've seen the festival develop from nearly nothing into what it is today," Rilling said. "It has quickly gained a reputation, not only in this country, but in many places around the world."

Yet few people in Eugene are aware of the festival or its conductor.

The ones who aren't aware, says Rilling, are missing an opportunity to learn important lessons about the inner workings of an orchestra.

"For instance, with the workshops in the afternoon, many students around here are missing a chance to observe the rehearsals and get insight into how a performance of this type actually comes about.

"For the cantatas, we're in a hall that will only seat 400 or 500 people, but there are some empty places. In Stuttgart, we do the same type of program and fill up the largest church we can get, which seats more than 2000."

Completion of the Eugene Performing Arts Center, currently under construction downtown, will bring important changes to the

festival. The University music school's facilities are adequate for the smaller activities of the festival, but larger quarters are needed for the larger performances.

"Without the upcoming facilities, it will be difficult to keep the festival at its current level of international reputation," Rilling says. "The hall is much too small."

One of the interesting features of the festival is the master class. Conductors from all over the country come to Eugene to work with Rilling. Under his guidance, they work with the festival musicians (from top orchestras in Oregon and around the U.S.) in rehearsing and conducting the Bach cantatas.

This system is unique to the Oregon festival, and offers a valuable opportunity to learn the art of conducting under a master.

Rilling has devoted much of his life to the study of Bach. He says he sees a quality in Bach's music that transcends the bounds of nationalities and cultures. Bach's music, he says, "is not only materialistic. The music is connected with thoughts beyond the experiences of human problems. It deals with the structure of the universe, something made following higher laws."

Perhaps this is why Bach's music is as well accepted in Eugene as it is in New York City or Tokyo. Because of this, plus the friendships he's developed here, the warm atmosphere at the School of Music, and the beautiful Oregon scenery, Rilling says he plans to continue his work with the Oregon Bach Festival in Eugene.

And who knows? Maybe in the future it won't be a secret any more.

"I've seen the festival develop from nearly nothing into what it is today."

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