



San Francisco Symphony Chorus

Biography

One of America's most distinguished choruses, the 152-member San Francisco Symphony Chorus led by Director [Ragnar Bohlin](#) is known for its precision, power, and versatility. The SF Symphony Chorus performs more than 26 concerts each season and is comprised of 32 professional and 120 volunteer members. *San Francisco Chronicle* classical music critic Joshua Kosman has praised the Chorus for its "tonal beauty" and "customary vibrancy and ardor." Most recently, the Chorus can be heard on the SFS Media recording of Charles Ives' Symphonies Nos. 3 and 4 along with Music Director Laureate Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony, released in November 2019.

Established in 1973 at the request of Seiji Ozawa—the San Francisco Symphony's Music Director at the time, the SF Symphony Chorus has sung under the world's major conductors, including SF Symphony Music Directors Michael Tilson Thomas, Herbert Blomstedt, Edo de Waart, and Seiji Ozawa; the Chorus has also performed with Kurt Masur, James Conlon, Valery Gergiev, David Robertson, Charles Dutoit, Sir Neville Marriner, Sir Roger Norrington, Yuri Temirkanov, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Wolfgang Sawallisch, and Robert Shaw. Louis Magor served as the Chorus's Director during its first decade, and in 1982 Margaret Hillis assumed the ensemble's leadership. The following year Vance George was named Director, serving through the 2005–06 season. Ragnar Bohlin assumed the position of Chorus Director in March 2007.

Recordings featuring the SF Symphony Chorus have won a total of eight Grammy awards, including three for Best Choral Performance. SFS Media's recording of Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with Tilson Thomas and the SF Symphony and Chorus won three 2010 Grammys, including the award for Best Choral Performance. Previous Grammys awarded to the Chorus include Best Choral Performance for Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem* in 1995; Best Choral Performance for Orff's *Carmina burana* in 1992; Best Classical Album with the SF Symphony for Mahler's Symphony No. 3 and *Kindertotenlieder* in 2004; and Best Classical Album for the recording of Stravinsky's *Perséphone*, as part of a collection of the composer's music, in 2000. In February 2001, the Chorus made its Carnegie Hall debut in two sold-out performances of music by Mahler and Stravinsky with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony. Members of the Chorus can also be heard on the SF Symphony's complete concert recording of Bernstein's score for *West Side Story*, released in June 2014, which was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album and won the 2015 ICMA Award for Best Album.

The Chorus is also featured on recordings with Tilson Thomas and the SF Symphony in Beethoven's *Cantata on the Death of Emperor Joseph II*, Symphony No. 9, and Mass in C major; Mahler's Symphony No. 2 and *Das klagende Lied*; Ives's *An American Journey*; and selections from Berlioz's *Lélio*. The Chorus, under the direction of Conductor Laureate Herbert Blomstedt, can also be heard in Grieg's incidental music for *Peer Gynt*; its first recording of Mahler's Symphony No. 2, which was nominated for a Grammy; and a collection of choral works by Brahms. The Chorus has recorded John

Adams's *Harmonium* twice, on ECM under Edo de Waart's direction and on Nonesuch with the composer conducting; Gordon Getty's *Annabel Lee* and *Young America* with Tilson Thomas and the SF Symphony in live concerts for inclusion in a PentaTone Classics disc of Getty choral works; and Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate's *Tracing Mississippi* and *Iholba* with the SF Symphony for Thunderbird Records. The Chorus has released two solo recordings—*Christmas by the Bay*, which was released in 1998 on the Delos label and nominated for a Grammy in the Best Classical Crossover category, and *Voices 1900/2000*, released on the Delos label in 2001.

The Chorus appears in the second season of *Keeping Score*, the San Francisco Symphony's national television program, in Ives's *Holidays Symphony*. The episode aired nationwide on PBS in 2009 and is now available on DVD, Blu-ray, and for free on the Symphony's YouTube channel. The Chorus can be heard on the soundtracks of the films *Amadeus*, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, *Godfather III*, and on the video/DVD release of the Emmy-winning *Sweeney Todd* with the San Francisco Symphony.