



SAN FRANCISCO
SYMPHONY

MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS • MUSIC DIRECTOR

CRITICAL ACCLAIM FOR RAGNAR BOHLIN AND THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY CHORUS

“The San Francisco Symphony Chorus, who sounded gorgeous all night, brought a particularly deep shine to the work’s climax.”

- Steven Winn, *San Francisco Classical Voice*, Jan 2018 review of Bernstein’s *Candide*

“As it happens, tonal beauty is one of the superpowers of Ragnar Bohlin’s San Francisco Symphony Chorus, and Friday’s performance was nothing if not alluring — vigorous but soft-grained in the opening movement with its ever-so-slightly irregular rhythms, and impossibly lush in the warm-toned finale, which also featured gorgeous contributions from cellists Peter Wyrick, Barbara Bogatin, Barbara Andres and Carolyn McIntosh.”

- Joshua Kosman, *San Francisco Chronicle*, Sept 2017 review of Bernstein’s *Chichester Psalms*

“And throughout it all, the Symphony Chorus, whether in small subgroups or the mighty, full complement of voices, sang with all their customary vibrancy and ardor.”

- Joshua Kosman, *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 2017 review of Berlioz’s *Roméo et Juliette*

“Ragnar Bohlin’s SFS Chorus was magnificent in important contributions requiring a dauntingly wide range of expression. From start to finish, they provided an electric charge of theatricality.”

- Phil Campbell, *Bay Area Reporter*, Feb 2017 review of John Adam’s *Gospel According to the Other Mary*

“The real highlight for me was just how impressive the SFS Chorus was. They were able to produce a great range of dynamics in unity, and when *forte* was asked of them, it was a *forte* that was worthy of the romantic period. They enunciated the text with superb clarity and altogether their voices had a great unified fluidity in moving through the text.”

- Mayumi Wardrop, *Bachtrack*, Feb 2017 review Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy*

“One could only feel grateful for the presence of Ragnar Bohlin’s Symphony Chorus, which brought tonal robustness and emotional power to the finale—particularly in the difficult and exposed “Seid umschlungen,” with its call for a humanity-wide group hug.”

- Joshua Kosman, *San Francisco Chronicle*, Feb 2017 review of Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy*

“The San Francisco Symphony Chorus—peeking out from a ‘ripped’ hole in the backing shell as per the SFS production of *Peter Grimes* in 2014—sang with robust splendor.”

- Richard Ginell, *Classical Voice North America*, Jan 2017 review of Mahler’s *Das Klagende Lied*

“Tilson Thomas brought them forth in brilliant detail, and the orchestra played with tremendous verve. Ragnar Bohlin’s Symphony Chorus made potent otherworldly contributions.”

- Georgia Rowe, *San Jose Mercury News*, Jan 2017 review of Mahler’s *Das Klagende Lied*

“The SF Symphony Chorus, prepared by Ragnar Bohlin, Chorus Director since 2007, was a revelation. They did a spectacular job in every respect, and in every vocal section.”

- Donna Stoering, *Bachtrack*, June 2017 review of Mahler’s *Symphony No. 2*

“Ragnar Bohlin’s Symphony Chorus made an excellent contribution — hushed and shapely in their opening moments, then growing to seraphic splendor at the climax.”

- Joshua Kosman, *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 2017 review of Mahler’s Symphony No. 2

“[The SFS Chorus] sang with a welcome blend of robust vigor and precisely shaded transparency.”

- Joshua Kosman, *San Francisco Chronicle*, Oct 2015 concert review

“This [week’s] evocative and cinematic program has another thing going for it: three superb performances by the San Francisco Symphony Chorus, directed by Ragnar Bohlin. Thursday, the 90 or so singers made extraordinarily difficult works (by Lukas Foss, Charles Ives and György Ligeti) sound easy to perform -- an illusion -- while opening up each piece’s expressive avenues and otherworldly powers.”

- Richard Scheinin, *San Jose Mercury News* September 2014 concert review

“Each Symphony season seems to contain at least one program in which the chorus a group proves to be continuously growing and striving for new levels of artistic excellence, but this was an altogether new height. ...a performance by the Symphony Chorus that can’t be praised highly enough with words.”

- Mark Rudio, *A Beast in the Jungle* (blog) June 2014 review of *Peter Grimes*

“The SF Symphony Chorus, celebrating its 40th anniversary as an organizational mixture of professionals and gifted amateurs, is one of my favorite musical groups in the world. Under their director Ragnar Bohlin above, they seem to getting better every year. Their ability to sing at every possible dynamic, and their wide range of repertory, from Bach to John Adams, is one of San Francisco’s serious cultural treasures.”

- Michael Strickland, Civic Center blog review of Stravinsky’s *Symphony of Psalms* June 2014

“Under the canny leadership of Ragnar Bohlin, the Symphony Chorus proved its workhorse credentials with a series of splendid and alert performances, bringing a blend of textural richness and rhythmic clarity to all three works...the chorus sang superbly throughout, combining rhythmic precision with robust textures that turned winningly fuzzy at the edges to give the piece an appropriately numinous feeling.”

- Joshua Kosman, *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 2014 review of works by Poulenc, Stravinsky and Fauré

“Every now and then, the San Francisco Symphony puts on a program apparently designed to show off the glorious Symphony Chorus, sounding better than ever under Ragnar Bohlin. This week’s Poulenc and Berlioz extravaganza, led in masterly fashion by guest conductor Charles Dutoit, is one of these occasions...Even in the mostly richly orchestrated sections, the chorus soars over all — or underpins all, given the *Stabat Mater*’s bottom-weighted SATBB choral division, as in the opening “Stabat Mater dolorosa,” where the lower-voiced male singers enter almost stealthily. The chorus sang with liquid transparency throughout the 35-minute work, with an especially lovely float to “O quam trista” (How sad and afflicted). The transparency stood it well during the austere “Fac, ut ardeat” (Make my heart burn) and in the passionate outburst of the “Cujus animam gementem” (Her grieving heart)... the chorus sang with complete musical and sonic confidence and sounded perfectly glorious.”

- Lisa Hirsch, *San Francisco Classical Voice* review of Berlioz *Te Deum* and Poulenc *Stabat Mater*, Feb 2013

“Last weekend’s San Francisco Symphony *Messiah* performances were wondrous. Chorus director Ragnar Bohlin, who has honed the SFS Chorus to an instrument of precision and affecting sensibility, conducted with his usual understated, self-effacing manner, which masks palpable understanding and passion for the great masterpiece.”

-Janos Gereben, *San Francisco Classical Voice* review of Handel’s *Messiah*, Dec, 2012

“This week, Vladimir Jurowski made his debut, and under his baton the orchestra and Ragnar Bohlin’s SFS Chorus were as powerful as Siberian tigers, as majestic as the Volga flooding at springtime.”

-Janos Gereben, *San Francisco Classical Voice* review of Prokofiev (arr. Atovmyan) *Ivan the Terrible*, Oct 2012

“And when the finale arrived, buoyed by a tremendous contribution from Ragnar Bohlin's Symphony Chorus, Thomas's energized approach paid off in full. It's rare to hear Schiller's "Ode to Joy" proclaimed with such a sense of moral urgency or emotional fervor, not to mention such choral splendor...”

–Joshua Kosman, *San Francisco Chronicle* review of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, June 2012

“What the audience heard — and rewarded with a justified standing ovation — was an assured, majestic performance by MTT and the orchestra, and something even beyond that by Ragnar Bohlin's Symphony Chorus. Besides the power required for the "Ode to Joy," a great choral performance must also be seamlessly unified and yet with distinguishable layers of tonal beauty, and that was the case here. In addition to the accustomed excellence from the women, the men also shone this time, particularly baritones and basses (not usually singled out, but starring tonight).”

– Janos Gereben, *San Francisco Classical Voice* review of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, June 2012

“Gyorgy Ligeti's *Lux aeterna* opened the night with the music of the spheres in an amazingly sustained performance by the Chorus. Watching Bohlin conduct the silence at the conclusion set the seal on a reading that managed to sound unearthly and very human all at once.”

-*Bay Area Reporter* review of Ligeti's *Lux aeterna*, June 2012

“...the evening's heroes were the members of Ragnar Bohlin's Symphony Chorus, who sang with gusto and an exquisitely calibrated dynamic range. That opening was almost translucent in its still-breathed sense of wonder, and the explosive passages of the "Dies Irae" thundered magnificently.”

-*San Francisco Chronicle* review of Verdi's Requiem, Oct 2011

“This is an ensemble that can balance weighty textures and transparent passages with precision and that boasts a broad and subtle dynamic spectrum.”

-*San Francisco Chronicle* review of Beethoven's *Missa solennis*, June 2011

“But Bohlin, the director of the Symphony Chorus, shone most impressively when wrangling Bach's dense contrapuntal textures into fluid, eloquent shape.”

-*San Francisco Chronicle* review of Bach's B Minor Mass, March 2011

“The result is a delightful surprise, the opposite of big or grandiose, a B minor Mass different from almost all the many in my experience. Using minimal forces, Bohlin presides over an intimate, gentle, and lyrical performance of this majestic expression of yearning for peace and the good of all humanity.”

-*San Francisco Classical Voice* review of Bach's B Minor Mass, March 2011

“The San Francisco Symphony Chorus...continues to boast its characteristically robust sound and emotional responsiveness, but Director Ragnar Bohlin has added a new measure of clarity and rhythmic bite to the mix.”

– *San Francisco Chronicle*. Most Improved of 2008

“... the Symphony Chorus [is] attaining new heights under the leadership of Ragnar Bohlin [and] sang with unparalleled vigor... the Symphony Chorus, whose singing – mighty and volcanic in the first movement, celestially radiant in the second – was a constant source of wonder.”

– *San Francisco Chronicle* review of Mahler's Symphony No. 8, Nov 2008

“The Symphony Chorus, which, under director Ragnar Bohlin, sings with a control of dynamics that continually astonishes...”

- *Financial Times* review of Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, May 2010

“Bohlin led his forces in a vivid and often lustrously sung concert that was as rewarding for its programming as for its execution... the Symphony Chorus sang with a trademark blend of tonal lushness and transparency, as well as a welcome note of rhythmic vigor. And the fascination of the musical choices proved irresistible.”

- *San Francisco Chronicle* review of *Swedish Choral Music*, April 2010

"Ragnar Bohlin led a supple and often touching account of Bach's "Christmas Oratorio"... [He] adopted a contemplative and sometimes stately approach to the music - but it teemed with passages of beauty and emotional insight. In particular, Bohlin excelled at integrating the various textural strands of the performance, relating the choral singing to the orchestra, say, or ensuring that the solo voices blended well with the larger forces."

- *San Francisco Chronicle* review of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, Dec 2009

"Since his appointment in 2007, Bohlin has been molding this chorus, testing and perfecting its proportions to make them pour forth in a heady blend. And if there was a star of Friday's show, it was the chorus itself. Nothing was oversung or underdone; the group's singing was felicitous, lit up from the inside, organized according to some musical golden mean."

- *San Jose Mercury News* review of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, Dec 2009

"[Bohlin] succeeded admirably, presenting an expansive, memorable work, true to Bach's intention...Bohlin ruled over a reduced orchestra (two dozen players) and Symphony Chorus (44 singers) with an iron hand in velvet gloves. A more pleasant gentleman on the podium you will never see, but Bohlin gets his way just as well as if he were channeling Toscanini in a bad mood."

- *San Francisco Classical Voice* review of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*, Dec 2009

"The chorus' unity, diction, projection, and presence were all impeccable... The combination of precision and a sense of freedom in the phrasing spoke of a major-league chorus working hard, but without showing effort."

- *San Francisco Classical Voice* review of Mahler's *Symphony No. 8*, Nov 2008

"Ragnar Bohlin's chorus dispatched its assignment with passionate clarity and supernal respect for dynamics."

- *Financial Times* review of Mahler's *Symphony No. 8*, Nov 2008

"Best of all were the contributions by the San Francisco Symphony Chorus. Under the direction of Ragnar Bohlin, the ensemble sounded radiantly ethereal in the "Tempest" fantasia. And the "Chorus of the Shadows," delivered with brilliant articulation and exemplary dynamics, was the high point of the first half."

-*Contra Costa Times* review of Berlioz's *Lelio*, Dec 2007

"The San Francisco Symphony Chorus, directed by Ragnar Bohlin, sounded floatingly exquisite."

-*San Jose Mercury News* review of Berlioz's *Lelio*, Dec 2007

"Ragnar Bohlin, the chorus director, needs to be saluted: omnipresent in *Nevsky* and bringing the cavalry to conclude the Choral Symphony, the chorus was excellent."

-*Sfist.com* review of *Alexander Nevsky*, Oct 2007

"The night belonged to the San Francisco Symphony Chorus, which sang Stravinsky's luminous chords with unforced precision and tender strength."

- *Newsday* review of Stravinsky's *Perséphone* and *Les Noces* at Carnegie Hall, Feb 2001

"[Tilson Thomas] drew lushly beautiful playing from the orchestra and rich, alert singing from the chorus...the chorus and vocal soloists sang with almost scary fervor."

- *New York Times* review of Stravinsky's *Perséphone* and *Les Noces* at Carnegie Hall, Feb 2001

(February 2018)