



MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS • MUSIC DIRECTOR

CRITICAL ACCLAIM FOR RAGNAR BOHLIN AND THE SAN FRANCISCO SYMPHONY CHORUS

"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*
February, 2013

"The greatest impact of the evening, however, came from the Chorus. The coordination among the different voice ranges was precise to a degree that one could appreciate the spatial effects arising from Handel's imitative passages. This realization of several of the stretto sections as movement across the stage was thoroughly engaging, if not downright stirring."

—Stephen Smoliar, *Examiner.com* review of Handel's *Messiah*, December, 2012

"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*, December, 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*,
October, 2012

"And when the finale arrived, buoyed by a tremendous contribution from Ragnar Bohlin's Symphony Chorus, Thomas' 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, October 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, November 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 lustroously 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*, December 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*, December 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*, December 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*, November 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*, November 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*, December 2007

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

–*San Jose Mercury News* review of Berlioz’s *Lelio*, December 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*, October 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, February 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, February 2001

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