



San Francisco Symphony Chorus at 50

In October 2023, the San Francisco Symphony Chorus kicks off its 50th anniversary season with performances of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, led by Music Director Laureate Michael Tilson Thomas. In celebration of this milestone, we look back at half a century of memorable music making.

1973: The San Francisco Symphony Chorus is founded at the behest of music director Seiji Ozawa. Major works performed in the inaugural season include J.S. Bach's *Saint Matthew Passion*, Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*, and Berlioz's *Te Deum*.

1974: Louis Magor is appointed first chorus director, a role he would occupy until 1982.

1981: First Chorus recording: Debussy's *La Damoiselle élue* with Edo de Waart conducting the Orchestra and Chorus on Philips. That same year, the Chorus gives the world premiere of John Adams's *Harmonium*, commissioned to celebrate the opening of Davies Symphony Hall. A recording with Edo de Waart on the ECM label follows in 1984.

1983: Vance George is named chorus director, following a year under interim director Margaret Hillis. George's highly successful tenure concludes in 2007, at which point he is named Chorus Director Emeritus.

1984: The Chorus appears on the soundtrack for the Academy Award-winning film *Amadeus*. Other notable film soundtrack appearances include *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* in 1987 and *Godfather III* in 1990.

1992: The Chorus helps the SF Symphony capture its first Grammy Award—for Best Choral Performance—for *Carmina burana* with Herbert Blomstedt on the London label. An additional Grammy for Best Choral Performance follows in 1995 for Brahms's *A German Requiem*, also conducted by Blomstedt.

1998: *Christmas by the Bay*, the Chorus's first solo recording is issued on the Delos label. In 2001, the Chorus expands its discography with another solo recording, *Voices 1900/2000*, released on Delos.

2001: A year of notable firsts: The Chorus makes its Carnegie Hall debut in two sold-out performances of music by Mahler and Stravinsky with Michael Tilson Thomas; John Adams's *El Niño*, a Symphony co-commission, receives its North American premiere with Kent Nagano leading the Orchestra and Chorus; a concert performance of Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* is recorded and later goes on to win an Emmy Award for Outstanding Classical Music-Dance Program.

2004: A disc of Mahler's Symphony No. 3, the Chorus' first recording on SFS Media, receives a Grammy for Best Classical Album. The Chorus helps bring MTT's Mahler recording cycle to a close in 2010 with a Grammy-winning album of the Eighth Symphony.

2005: Continuing its legacy of performing contemporary works, the Chorus appears on a disc of Gordon Getty's choral works on the Pentatone label. Also of note in the new-music sphere: A 2008 recording of Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate's *Iholba*, released on Thunderbird Records.

2007: Ragnar Bohlin succeeds Vance George as chorus director. Bohlin's highlight-filled tenure concludes in 2021.

2007: John Adams leads the Orchestra and Chorus in the North American premiere of his opera *A Flowering Tree*, a Symphony co-commission, in a staging by Peter Sellars. The Chorus is also a part of staged productions of Adams's *El Niño* in 2010 and *The Gospel According to the Other Mary* in 2017.

2012: As part of the Symphony's centennial celebrations, Donato Cabrera leads the Chorus in the world premiere of Mason Bates's *Mass Transmission*, commissioned for them.

2014: The Symphony's adventurous SoundBox series launches with a program curated by Michael Tilson Thomas and featuring the Chorus. That same year a recording is released of the complete score to Bernstein's *West Side Story*, led by MTT and featuring the Chorus.

2015: It's a Beethoven year, as the Chorus performs in a staging of *Missa solemnis*, helps recreate a legendary 1808 Beethoven marathon concert, and releases a recording of the Mass in C major, all led by MTT.

2022: Ushering in the Esa-Pekka Salonen era, the Chorus stars in *LIGETI: PARADIGMS*, a film combining György Ligeti's music with artificial intelligence-inspired visuals by Refik Anadol. A year later, the Chorus' recording of Ligeti's *Lux Aeterna* is released as part of a new Symphony partnership with Apple Music Classical.

2022: In the first staged production of the Salonen years, the Chorus appears in Stravinsky's *Oedipus rex* and *Symphony of Psalms*, reuniting them with director Peter Sellars. Sellars continues his partnership with the San Francisco Symphony and Chorus in 2023 with a staging of Kaija Saariaho's *Adriana Mater*.

2023: Jenny Wong is appointed chorus director.