

## **Simon Johnson** **Master of Music**

Simon Johnson is the Master of Music at Westminster Cathedral, where he is responsible for directing the iconic choir, the only ensemble of its kind in the world. Previously he was the Organist of St Paul's Cathedral for thirteen years.

Described by *Gramophone* magazine as “a brilliant and sensitive musician”, Simon's love of choral direction first came to the attention of many through his work establishing the reputation of the St Albans Abbey Girls' Choir (“stunning” *Choir and Organ*). Since arriving at Westminster, Simon has led the Choir in several concerts, including recent tours to Germany (“In short, the performance of the English choir under its new music director Simon Johnson was sensational” *Die Rheinpfalz*). The choir has released its first album under his direction (“Johnson and his well-drilled forces bring a genuine sense of occasion to proceedings, with pleasingly bright, forward projected singing from the boys” *Choir & Organ*), and another has recently been recorded.

Simon was involved in all of the important occasions that took place at St Paul's during his time there, playing for the senior members of the Royal Family, the Dalai Lama, as well as numerous Prime Ministers and Archbishops, and the funeral of Baroness Thatcher. He composed works for both the Diamond and Platinum Jubilee celebrations of Her Late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, and directed the music at many national occasions, as well as at the Memorial Services for fashion icons Alexander McQueen and Vidal Sassoon. As part of the Cathedral's partnerships with orchestras in London, he conducted works such as Saint-Saëns *Symphony No 3*, Gershwin *An American in Paris*, Strauss *Metamorphosen*, Messiaen *L'Ascension*, Bruckner *Mass in E minor*, Duruflé *Requiem*. Whilst at St Paul's, he also founded a pioneering partnership project with schools in East London that reached thousands of children.

An active recital schedule takes Simon regularly to the USA, as well as to many of the great venues in Europe, including a Royal Festival Hall debut in 2017. Last year he chaired the jury at the Longwood Gardens International Organ Competition in the USA.

Simon has performed with groups such as the LSO, RPO, City of London Sinfonia, The Cardinal's Musick and The Sixteen, with whom he has recently recorded ("Another of the album's great pleasures is Simon Johnson's superbly note-perfect organ-playing" *Gramophone*); he also made his BBC Proms debut performing with the group earlier this year.

Previously, Simon has recorded for Decca, Hyperion, Coro and Chandos, and also made a legendary disc of Holst's *The Planets* for Priory. He has been published by OUP and Peters, collaborated with NASA and the International Space Station, and worked on the Oscar-winning soundtrack for *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. In 2018, he was a keynote speaker at the Pontifical Council for Culture in Rome. He is Co-Chairman of the country's largest firm of organbuilders, Harrison & Harrison Ltd, who are also responsible for many of the most significant instruments in the UK and beyond, including those in Westminster Abbey, York Minster and King's College, Cambridge.

Reviews of Simon's latest solo recording, *B-A-C-H Anatomy of a Motif* (Chandos), a double-disc set featuring major works by Bach, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, Liszt, Reger and Karg-Elert:

"An outstandingly good release and a perfect combination of repertory, player and organ."

***Gramophone Magazine* Editor's Choice**

"This is a remarkable survey, brilliantly executed."

***BBC Music Magazine***

"The empathy, clarity and first-class musicianship of this admirable production make it one of the most significant releases for the organ I have encountered for some time. If you care in any way about organ music on record, this release must form part of your collection."

***The Organ***

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