

Rundfunkchor Berlin

Simon Halsey – Conductor Laureate

Simon Halsey was Principal Conductor of Rundfunkchor Berlin from 2001 to 2015. As of 2015/16 season he passed on the baton to the young Dutch conductor Gijs Leenaars. He was awarded Conductor Laureate as part of his official farewell and will furthermore retain his ties to the ensemble as regular guest conductor. His enthusiasm, wit, perfectionism and passionate pedagogical dedication have made him one of the most sought-after choral conductors in the world.

Born in London in 1958, Halsey was appointed director of music at the University of Warwick when he was only 22. In 1982, Sir Simon Rattle engaged him as director of the CBSO Chorus, a position that he holds until today. Under the auspices of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, he initiated an exemplary youth choral programme with three further choirs. Between 1997 and 2008 he was engaged as guest conductor then principal conductor of the Netherlands Radio Chorus in Hilversum. From 2004 to 2012 he also directed the Northern Sinfonia Chorus and the choral programme at the Sage in Gateshead.

He took up two new directorships in 2012: the London Symphony Chorus and the BBC Proms Youth Chorus. In 2012 he was also appointed artistic director of the new youth choral programme »Vokalhelden« of the Berliner Philharmoniker. With the 2016/17 season he assumed his post as the new artistic director of the chorus Orféo Català and artistic advisor at the Palau de la Música Catalana Barcelona.

For his preparation of Rundfunkchor Berlin in Brahms's »Ein deutsches Requiem« and Stravinsky's »Symphony of Psalms« for the CD recordings with Sir Simon Rattle conducting the Berliner Philharmoniker as well as Kaija Saariaho's »L'Amour de loin« for the CD recording with Kent Nagano conducting the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Halsey won the Grammy Award in 2008, 2009 and 2011.

Besides his work as a conductor and choral trainer, Halsey is also in demand as a pedagogue. In 2012 the recipient of three honorary doctorates took up his post as professor at the University of Birmingham. With Rundfunkchor Berlin he established the Berlin International Masterclass. His teaching activities also include numerous guest lectureships – thereunder at Princeton and Yale. In 2011 his book on choral conducting »Chorleitung: Vom Konzept zum Konzert« was issued in the Schott series »Master Class«.

For his outstanding contributions to choral music in Germany, Simon Halsey was awarded the »Bundesverdienstkreuz« (Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany) in 2010. In 2015 he was presented by the Queen with »Her Majesty's Medal for Music« and appointed »Commander of the Order of the British Empire« (CBE). In 2016 he received the »Geschwister-Mendelssohn-Medaille« of the Berlin Choral Association, with a laudatory speech by Berlin's former State Secretary of Culture Tim Renner.

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