

Richard Farnes

Conductor

“I need to say that Farnes’s conducting justifies all the praise it has received, and that it is now even more confident than it was. His shaping of phrases and then paragraphs and whole acts can only be compared to the supreme Wagnerians, and his care for lovely or telling detail reminded me, again, of Goodall, while his tempi are never too relaxed; his concern for the feeling of a riveting story moving forward is as potent as Furtwängler’s, and it is impossible to say or envisage anything finer than that.”

Michael Tanner, The Spectator

Richard Farnes won the 2017 Royal Philharmonic Society Conductor of the Year Award, the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Critics’ Circle Music Awards in the same year, and the award for Achievement in Opera at the UK Theatre Awards in 2014.

In recent years he has appeared with the London Symphony and London Philharmonic Orchestras, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Russian National Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Stavanger Symphony Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra in Dublin, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Danish Orchestra in Copenhagen, as well as all the BBC orchestras. With the BBC Symphony Orchestra he has appeared at the Henry Wood Proms in London and at the Dubai Proms where in 2019 he conducted the first ever performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony in the city. Last year he made his first appearance with the Symphony Orchestra of India in Mumbai, where he will return in September 2023.

Richard was Music Director of Opera North in Leeds from 2004 to 2016, conducting productions of La fanciulla del West, La Boheme, Tosca, Manon Lescaut, La Rondine, Otello, Falstaff, La Traviata, Macbeth, Giovanna d’Arco, Don Carlos, Un ballo in maschera, Le nozze di Figaro, The Secret Marriage, Peter Grimes, Gloriana, The Turn of the Screw, Death in Venice, Werther, Eugene Onegin, The Queen of Spades, Katya Kabanova, The Makropoulos Case and From the House of the Dead as well as première productions of David Sawer’s Skin Deep and Simon Holt’s The Nightingale’s to Blame. With Opera North he made recordings of Bluebeard’s Castle and Don Carlos for Chandos Records.

After successful performances of Salome, Elektra, Hansel & Gretel, Bluebeard’s Castle and Der fliegende Holländer in the concert hall, Richard embarked with Opera North on an ambitious project to perform Wagner’s Ring semi-staged, which culminated in 2016 with six highly acclaimed complete Ring Cycles presented in Leeds, Manchester, Nottingham, Gateshead and London, and subsequently streamed

online. In 2022 he returned to Opera North to conduct semi-staged performances of Parsifal in various UK cities.

For the Royal Opera in London Richard has conducted Simon Boccanegra, Il trovatore and Death in Venice, and Falstaff at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Return visits for Don Carlo at the Royal Opera and Manon Lescaut at The Met were casualties of Covid-19. He has had close associations with both Glyndebourne – conducting The Makropoulos Case, La traviata, Jonathan Dove's Flight and Sir Peter Hall's production of Otello at the Festival as well as Albert Herring, Die Entführung and Le nozze di Figaro on tour – and Scottish Opera, where he has conducted Tosca, La bohème, Die Zauberflöte, L'elisir d'amore, the world première of David Horne's Friend of the People and a double bill of works by Param Vir.

Other opera engagements have included The Turn of the Screw with the London Symphony Orchestra, La traviata for the Royal Danish Opera in Copenhagen, The Cunning Little Vixen and Tosca at English National Opera, Nabucco for New Israeli Opera in Tel Aviv, Hänsel und Gretel at the Tchaikovsky Hall in Moscow, and various projects for Birmingham Opera Company, English Touring Opera and Opera Theatre Company in Dublin. Later this year he returns to English National Opera with La traviata.

Richard read Music at King's College, Cambridge where he was organ scholar, and subsequently studied at the Guildhall School of Music, Royal Academy of Music and National Opera Studio in London. He was awarded a European Community Youth Orchestra Scholarship in 1988 for his contribution to the orchestra as its keyboard player, and won the 1990 British Reserve Insurance Conducting Competition.

He has a strong interest in music education and its place in the curriculum, and gives individual and group tuition in conducting. He has worked with students at both the Royal College of Music and the Guildhall School of Music in London, where during Covid restrictions in Autumn 2020 he rehearsed and conducted a performance in which different sections of the Guildhall Symphony Orchestra played simultaneously in separate buildings, the sound combined instantaneously to create a live performance using pioneering "Low Latency" technology – thought to be a world first.

Richard is also a keen portrait and landscape photographer, and enjoys astronomy, hill-walking and general peace and quiet!