



SAN FRANCISCO OPERA

AFTER 35 YEARS AS SAN FRANCISCO OPERA'S CHORUS DIRECTOR,
IAN ROBERTSON WILL RETIRE AT CLOSE OF 2021

December Concerts Featuring the San Francisco Opera Chorus
Conducted by Robertson Will Honor His Distinguished Tenure



Ian Robertson; San Francisco Opera Chorus in Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, 2015;
Robertson conducting the Chorus in concert, 2018 (Photos: Kristen Loken, Cory Weaver, Matthew Washburn)

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (July 21, 2021) — San Francisco Opera's Tad and Dianne Taube General Director Matthew Shilvock announced today that Chorus Director Ian Robertson will retire at the close of 2021, capping a distinguished career with the Company. Robertson joined as Chorus Director in 1987 and throughout the ensuing 35 seasons established the San Francisco Opera Chorus as one of opera's finest vocal ensembles. To celebrate his momentous impact on San Francisco Opera and the sustained excellence of the Chorus under his leadership, two performances of an all-choral concert will showcase Maestro Robertson and the singers of the San Francisco Opera Chorus in December.

Robertson said: "As I reach retirement, I would like to thank San Francisco Opera for the honor and privilege of working with the superbly talented members of the San Francisco Opera Chorus and with the entire Company in all its artistic and technical disciplines. It has been a lifetime journey for me which has been rewarding in so many ways. I have seen exciting changes and developments over the years, and have witnessed so many

inspirational moments during rehearsals and performances at this great company. I've been so fortunate to have collaborated with its four music directors and many fine stage directors and artists. I wish the Opera continued success in its mission to present the very best of international opera."

Throughout his 35 years at the helm, the Scotland native has led the San Francisco Opera Chorus in 342 productions, including dramatic expansions of the Company's stage repertoire with significant premieres and the integration of large-scale works only attempted by a handful of companies worldwide. A shortlist of highlights and achievements includes the American premiere of Messiaen's monumental and rarely performed *Saint François d'Assise*, Berlioz's epic *Les Troyens (The Trojans)*, Prokofiev's *War and Peace* and two productions of Britten's *Billy Budd*. Robertson has also conducted several works for the Company, including Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, Verdi's *Rigoletto*, Puccini's *Turandot* and Wagner's *Lohengrin*.

American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA) representative and San Francisco Opera Chorister Sally Mouzon said: "It is hard to believe that Ian Robertson is actually retiring! His hair may be gray now, but Ian's dedication to the sound and to the preparation of the Opera Chorus has remained a constant throughout his years here. The glorious sound of the San Francisco Opera Chorus, one of the premier operatic choruses in the world, is the result of his work. We are always ready for anything a conductor or director throws at us, in any style and in any tempo. Ian has shaped our Chorus with his ear, his hard work, his attention to detail, and his humor. It has been a tremendous honor to be part of 'Ian Robertson's Opera Chorus.' His place in our Opera family will be enormously difficult to fill."

Under Robertson's leadership, the San Francisco Opera Chorus has garnered widespread acclaim and was the subject of the 1991 Academy Award-winning documentary *In the Shadow of the Stars*. Robertson has likewise been the recipient of many awards, including the Messiaen prize for his work on the 2002 American premiere of *Saint François d'Assise*. In 2012, then general director David Gockley awarded Robertson the Opera Medal, San Francisco Opera's highest honor, in recognition of his dedication and artistic vision. Robertson's 35 years as San Francisco Opera's Chorus Director constitute the longest tenure of any individual to hold that artistic leadership role in Company history. In 2019, Robertson stepped down as artistic director of the Grammy-winning San Francisco Boys Chorus, a role he had held since 1996.

San Francisco Opera Caroline H. Hume Music Director Eun Sun Kim worked with Robertson during her 2019 Company debut conducting Dvořák's *Rusalka*. Though subsequent projects, including Verdi's *Ernani*, were canceled due to the pandemic, the two will collaborate this season on Puccini's *Tosca* (opening August 21) and Beethoven's *Fidelio* (opening October 14). Eun Sun Kim said, "It has been lovely to work with Ian, and I'm so glad we can celebrate his retirement with our new production of *Fidelio* in October. This is such a wonderful opera for the Chorus, and it will be a fitting coda to Ian's storied history with San Francisco Opera."

Matthew Shilvock said: "For 35 seasons, Ian Robertson has been a pillar of tremendous artistic strength at San Francisco Opera. He has guided and shaped the sound and musicality of the San Francisco Opera Chorus with insightful leadership. When one considers the hundreds of productions for which Ian has directed the Chorus, one realizes the unshakeable artistic legacy of his tenure. The monumental expressions of choral singing in works like *Die Meistersinger*, *The Trojans*, *La Damnation de Faust*, *War and Peace*, *Saint François d'Assise*, *Doctor Atomic*, *Turandot* and so many others will resound as great testaments to Ian's legacy.

Shilvock continued: "It has been an absolute joy to work alongside Ian. I am particularly happy that, in the past few years, we have been able to institute an annual Chorus Concert that Ian has curated and led with impeccable finesse and the finest quips in his commentary. This year's concert will be a wonderful summation of the extraordinary artistic journey Ian has taken here, a journey that we have all been the richer for sharing with him."

In 2016, Robertson inaugurated a series of concerts showcasing the San Francisco Opera Chorus. This concert series held in the intimate Dianne and Tad Atrium Theater returns December 11 and 12 with a program of choral works, handpicked by Robertson. The singers of the San Francisco Opera Chorus will be led by Maestro Robertson with Associate Chorus Master Fabrizio Corona at the piano.

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SAN FRANCISCO OPERA CHORUS IN CONCERT: CELEBRATING IAN ROBERTSON
Saturday, December 11 at 7:30 pm
Sunday, December 12 at 2 pm

Dianne and Tad Taube Atrium Theater
Diane B. Wilsey Center for Opera
Veterans Building (4th floor), 401 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco

General admission: \$39

Chorus Director Ian Robertson, conductor
San Francisco Opera Chorus

The concert program highlights beloved opera choruses by Mozart, Puccini and Verdi and more contemporary works by Florence Beatrice Price, Joan Szymko and Kate Rusby.

To purchase tickets, call the San Francisco Opera Box Office at (415) 864-3330. Additional information can be found at sfopera.com/chorusconcert.

San Francisco Opera is sponsored, in part, by The Dolby Family, Carol and Dixon Doll, Bertie Bialek Elliott, Keith and Priscilla Geeslin, Gordon Getty, John A. and Cynthia Fry Gunn, Burgess and Elizabeth Jamieson, Franklin and Catherine Johnson, Edmund W. and Jeannik Méquet Littlefield Fund, Steven M. Menzies, Bernard and Barbro Osher, Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem, Dianne and Tad Taube, Phyllis C. Wattis Endowment Funds, Diane B. Wilsey, and Barbara A. Wolfe.

Yamaha is the official piano of San Francisco Opera.

San Francisco Opera would like to acknowledge the team of UCSF doctors who have provided guidance in planning the Company's safe return to the stage. Thank you to Drs. George Rutherford, Mark Almond, Peter Chin-Hong, Robert Harrison, Sânziana Roman and Clark Rosen.

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PRESS PHOTOS: High-resolution, downloadable images of Ian Robertson and highlights from his work with the San Francisco Opera Chorus are available at sfopera.com/press

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