

## **Peter Schreier**

*conductor*

One of the world's most renowned tenors, Peter Schreier has distinguished himself as one of the foremost conductors of the music of Mozart, Bach and their contemporaries.

Born in Meissen, the son of a church cantor and music teacher, Peter Schreier was a member of the Dresden Kreuzchor where he was entrusted with many solo parts, including the Alto solos in Bach's passions and oratorios, instilling a lifelong relationship with these works. He attended the State Academy of Music in Dresden, where he studied singing with Herbert Winkler and Johannes Kemter, conducting with Ernst Hintze and choral conducting with Martin Flämig.

He made his operatic debut in 1959 as the First Prisoner in Beethoven's *Fidelio*. A few years later he joined the Dresden State Opera, where in 1962 he had his first big success in the role of Belmonte in Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*. This was followed by a series of important debuts: the German State Opera as a guest soloist, the Vienna State Opera, the Bayreuth Festival in 1969 and the Salzburg Festival in 1970, where he performed the role of the young seaman in *Tristan und Isolde*. He continued to appear in Salzburg every year for the next 25 years.

From the start of his long career, Peter Schreier earned a reputation as a world-class Mozartean tenor. Mozart's operatic roles form a core part of his stage work. He made major international debuts with the role of Tamino in *The Magic Flute* at the Metropolitan Opera (New York), La Scala (Milan), and the Teatro Colon (Buenos Aires). He has also won acclaim as Loge in *Das Rheingold* and in the title role of Pfitzner's *Palestrina*. He has a comprehensive repertoire in classical/romantic cantatas and oratorios and for decades was renowned as an incomparable interpreter of Art Song. His Lieder recitals have been presented in all of the most prestigious concert halls of the world, including Carnegie Hall. Drawing on his history with the Kreuzchor and his cantorial heritage, Peter Schreier considers the works of Bach to be the centerpiece of his artistic efforts.

Peter Schreier maintained a dual career as singer and conductor for over 25 years. He performed Bach's Passions and Christmas Oratorio, both conducting and singing the role of 'the Evangelist' with many of the world's leading orchestras in Cleveland, Los Angeles, Vienna, Helsinki, Copenhagen, Berlin, Dresden, Hamburg, and Cologne. He retired from singing in 2005, but continues to be in demand to conduct the world's leading orchestras. His performances with the Dresdner Staatskapelle, Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony Orchestra, Mozarteum Orchestra, Philharmonisches Staatsorchester Hamburg, the , New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra have made him a widely sought-after conductor.

Professor Schreier has been widely recognized for his outstanding achievements; Austria, the former West Germany, and the State of Bavaria have each recognized his musical contributions

with the honorary title of “Kammersänger.” He has been Honorary Professor of Singing since 1981, an Honorary Member of the Musical Society of Vienna since 1986, a member of the Royal Swedish Arts Academy since 1989, and is a member of the Musical Academies of Munich and Berlin. Other distinctions include the *Bundesverdienstkreuz*, German National Award of the former GDR, 1st Class (1972, 1986) and the Leonie Sonnigs Music Award, Copenhagen (1988). In 1988 he was awarded the Ernst von Siemens Prize in Munich, joining the ranks of other distinguished recipients including Leonard Bernstein, Wolfgang Sawallisch and Claudio Abbado. In 1994 he received the Georg Philipp Telemann Prize of the city of Magdeburg and the Wartburg Prize. For his recordings of the operas of Mozart, he received the prestigious “Wiener Flötenuhr,” and for his service to the music of J.S. Bach, the Royal Academy of Music Bach Prize (2009). Peter Schreier received the 2011 International Mendelssohn Prize, awarded in September at a Gala concert at Leipzig’s Gewandhaus, conducted by Kurt Masur. Upon the announcement Maestro Masur stated: “Schreier’s Mendelssohn interpretation will probably never be surpassed.” In October 2011 he was honored with the Hugo Wolf Medal of the Internationale Hugo-Wolf-Akademie, Stuttgart.

More than fifty of Peter Schreier’s many recordings remain in current release ranging through all musical styles up to the present. In 1990 and 1991 he committed the three great song cycles of Schubert to disc with the pianist Andras Schiff; these recordings were recognized with the Gramophone Avery Prize. Many of his performances appear on DVD and there is film by Heide Blum, “Alles hat seine Zeit (Everything Has Its Time),” documenting his final year of singing. A noted author on various musical subjects, he is also the subject of six German-language books: a biography by Jürgen Helfricht, “Peter Schreier – Melodien eines Lebens (Melodies of a Life);” Gottfried Schmiedel’s “Peter Schreier: Eine Bildbiographie (A Photo-biography);” two memoirs: “Peter Schreier: Aus meiner Sicht (From My Point of View);” and “Im Rückspiegel. Erinnerungen und Ansichten (In the Rearview Mirror. Memories and Views);” “Peter Schreier. Interviews, Tatsachen, Meinungen (Interviews, Facts, Opinions)” by Wolf-Eberhard von Lewinski; and the portrait “Für Sie porträtiert: Peter Schreier,” published by the Deutscher Verlag für Musik.

Updated June 2012– please discard any previous version

### **Press Comments:**

“The great German tenor [Peter Schreier](#) and the New York Philharmonic do not share an extensive history, but what they have done together over the years has been noteworthy. Having made his debut as a soloist with the orchestra in 1973, Mr. Schreier returned just three times in that capacity. Now Mr. Schreier has returned to the Philharmonic as the latest in a string of distinguished conductors who have conducted the orchestra’s annual performances of Handel’s ‘Messiah.’ Mr. Schreier, who retired from singing in 2005, has conducted in public since 1979 and is best known for his [Bach interpretations](#). Still Handel is amply represented in his résumé and discography. A [cheeky post](#) on the Philharmonic’s Tumblr page asserted that Mr. Schreier ‘surely knows how to ‘Handel’ this music.’ The pun proved accurate during the work’s first outing at Avery Fisher Hall. Working with a scaled-down complement of Philharmonic players

and a sizable choral contingent, Mr. Schreier favored comfortably brisk tempos and sharply etched rhythms in a generous collection of the most popular and seasonally relevant selections from 'Messiah.'

New York Times - December 14, 2011

“Although the name of Peter Schreier and his distinguished soloists should be enough to attract anyone, I was drawn by my fascination with singers as conductors. The German tradition has appeared recently with Rilling in 2009 and now Peter Schreier, who, during and after his illustrious career as an all-round tenor, pursued a second career as a conductor. His approach to *Messiah* is founded on sturdy Saxon tradition. His rock solid pacing did not inhibit him from eliciting quite a lot of energy from the orchestra, while with the singers he had only to set it free, it seemed. This and his attention to the structure of each number, part, and the whole, enabled him to build the 'Hallelujah' Chorus and the other great fugal choruses to powerful climaxes. What made the performance unique was Schreier's total sympathy with the human voice, whether in solo or chorus. While the Philharmonic played with warmth and elegance, as well as their handsome string sound, the immediacy and vitality of the singing made the performance exceptional, as it was intended to. The soloists and the chorus seemed liberated in expression and vocal coloring, although Schreier kept a tight control of tempo and phrasing. He wanted the Westminster Symphonic Choir to sing like a group of soloists, and they delivered brilliantly. The chorus was always beautifully balanced, with a sturdy bass, rich tenors, and silvery female voices, all using very light vibrato. Schreier was constantly seeking clarity, and I can't remember a performance in which all the choral lines came through so well. He pursued this further by having them sing staccato in some running passages—a strategy unfamiliar to American and British audiences. This was a performance with a foreign accent—a cultivated and thoroughly attractive one, to be sure. The diction was about the best I have heard in a choral performance. Every word was understandable. As the soloists proceeded from tenor to bass to contralto and back to bass, this sequence of vocal timbres was truly remarkable, and brought a special insight into the sounds Handel imagined. One could only assume that Peter Schreier hand-picked them for just this sort of effect...and they continued on to the end at this high level. With Schreier's solid pace and exceptional clarity, the New York Philharmonic's eloquent playing, and the full expressiveness and consummate technique of every voice in the hall, this was one of the most musically fulfilling and spiritually moving *Messiahs* I have heard.”

New York Arts – December 14, 2011

“Last weekend we heard Mozart's *Missa Brevis* KV. 321 with the Vienna Court Orchestra conducted by Peter Schreier for their traditional autumn concert in Vienna's Musikverein. This, after all, follows a tradition going back to 1498, bringing together members of the Vienna Philharmonic, the Mens Chorus of the Staatsoper and the Vienna Choir Boys, performed each year under a different prominent conductor in the "Golden Hall." This year's choice fell on Peter Schreier for several reasons. First, he is particularly connected to Vienna through numerous performances. Secondly, he studied both singing and choral conducting and began his musical career as a chorister at the Dresden Kreuzchor. Accordingly, a great deal has been made of Schreier for his Mozart interpretations – in addition to the Coronation Mass, the *Versperae de Dominica* KV 321 was on the program for these two concerts this weekend. His sculptural approach to the individual vocal parts called for clear articulation and rounded phrasing and tempo choices that made it easy for the singers' texts to be understood across the footlights. The

good training of the choristers of Hofmusikkapelle showed.”

Die Presse – November 15, 2010

The Schumanniade 2010 Festival in Reinhardtsgrimma:

“The rooms in the Reinhardtsgrimma Castle are more the size of a salon than a concert hall. As a listener you are aware of every movement. But that does not matter when the guests are world class. Peter Schreier founded this exquisite Festival several years ago. And it is thanks to him that international stars such as the pianist Andras Schiff and the Dutch bass Robert Holl find their way in this rural idyll. Under the inspired direction of Peter Schreier, Ruth Ziesak offered “Der Rose” with her wonderfully slender soprano.”

Dresdener Neueste Nachrichten – June 7, 2010

Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, J.S. Bach's Christmas Oratorio:

“Conducting the IPO was Peter Schreier, well known to Israeli audiences from his concert appearances here as a solo tenor singer. Peter Schreier’s reading of the work shone in the delicate blending and interaction of instruments and solo voices in obbligato arias. These were moments to savor.”

ConcertCriticBlog – December 12, 2009

Bach St. Matthew Passion, Tapiola Sinfonietta:

Headline: “Schreier’s dramatic Passion”

“Peter Schreier as conductor assured a solid interpretation, built on long experience. Schreier has dealt with this music since he was boy soprano in Dresden Kreuzchor and he conducted the three-hour passion with heart. Schreier built the structure in stable, accessible blocks in which the vibrant story of the passion came alive.”

Hufvudstadsblader – November 2, 2009

Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival at Castle Salzau

Headline: “Idolized star tenor enthusiastic conducting”

“With the participation of Peter Schreier, star-tenor and conductor, the last concert in Segeberg’s St. Mary’s Church was the most atmospheric. A great experience, the audience cheered not only the 61 outstanding singers from all over the world, but idolized the conductor. They adore the 74-year-old former star tenor and operatic hero and sought autographs from Schreier. Peter Schreier is a specialist in the works of Johann Sebastian Bach, and the program was mostly Bach motets, sung by the Festival Choir, along with three motets by Felix Mendelssohn. With precision, depth of soul and joy in the singing, the choir joyfully worked out the intoxicating music of Mendelssohn. Schreier led with dramatic contrast; excellent tiered solo sections, allowing Bach’s wealth and variety of colors to sound enjoyable.”

Hamburger Abendblatt – August 26, 2009

Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*, Zurich Festival:

“With the conductor Peter Schreier the performance was in the best of hands. With comparatively economical gestures, he led the musical events from one tension-filled section to another. This performance will remain in our memories.”

Zürichsee Zeitung – July 9, 2009

“This is a thoughtful, satisfyingly dramatic modern-instrument *St. Matthew*, with Peter Schreier a solid Evangelist and conductor, accompanied by a good contingent of soloists and a responsive orchestra and first-rate choruses. Overall, the many components necessary to bring this great masterpiece successfully together are properly in place and are delivered with authority and sensitivity to both the more meditative sections and the more theatrical moments.”

ClassicsToday.com – March 20, 2007

Mozart Arias, Tapiola Sinfonietta:

“This is an intelligently chosen program, mixing operatic and concert arias by Mozart in such a way that there is significant variety of mood and expression as one listens to the hour-long recital. One should also point out that Peter Schreier, for decades an outstanding tenor, has also been conducting for many years—and his experience and his sensitivity to this music is another important asset. I have already received a great deal of pleasure from hearing and re-hearing this disc, and I anticipate that pleasure continuing for many years to come.”

Fanfare Magazine – July/August 2005

Bach *St. John Passion*, Teatro Lyrico di Cagliari:

“Peter Schreier’s third *St. John Passion* (he has recorded it previously both as a singer under Helmut Rilling and for Philips as conductor) is a live performance recorded in the Teatro Lyrico in the Sardinian capital Cagliari. On this occasion, Schreier has chosen to combine the role of the Evangelist with that of conductor, an option that causes no real problem, since the Evangelist’s music is of course accompanied only by continuo. On paper, this looks like a throw back to an old-fashioned style of performing the passions, with a modern-instrument orchestra. In practice, Schreier appears to take on board at some aspects of period- performance practice. Indeed, those who equate traditional performances of the passions with slower tempos than those adopted by the adherents of historically informed performance will be surprised to learn that Schreier’s timing is faster than any of the period performances on my shelves. The great opening chorus, *Herr, unser Herrscher*, provides a good indication of what is to come, with a brisk tempo and full-blooded choral singing. The upside of the approach is its commitment, the performance owing to a raw, dramatic urgency that can work in the narrative-biased *St. John* in a way it would not in the *St. Matthew Passion*. This is epitomized by Schreier’s intensely involved singing of the Evangelist, where his long experience of the work shows in many a tellingly turned phrase.”

Fanfare Magazine – May/June 2003

The following article appeared in Gramophone Magazine: September 2003

PETER SCHREIER: CRYSTAL CLEAR

Peter Schreier first came to my attention at Sadler's Wells Theatre in a production of *Così fan tutte* given by the Hamburg Opera in 1966. The staging was an early example of German chic, and rather heartless, but Schreier stood out for his flawless assumption of Ferrando. It was about that time (1967) that he replaced Fritz Wunderlich, who had died the year before, at the Salzburg Festival as Tamino. His interpretation was so admired that it catapulted the Dresden tenor from a local singer of repute on to the international stage as the acknowledged successor to Wunderlich in Mozart.

Thereafter he sang and recorded almost all the major Mozart parts for tenor, perhaps most notably Belmonte for Karl Böhm and Tamino for Cohn Davis (the latter role he has also recorded for Otmar Suitner and Wolfgang Sawallisch). He also won an award from the International Mozarteum Foundation in recognition of his efforts to promote the composer's more rare[ performed operas, several of which he has also recorded, including the title role in *Lucio Silla*.

Those who may have other versions of the complete operas, but want to hear Schreier's skills as a Mozartian, may be drawn to a recital disc made around the time of that Salzburg debut and just reissued by Berlin Classics. It reveals his voice in pristine condition, his technique at its most fluent (the runs in Belmonte's arias, among the most taxing for tenor in all the opera, easily accomplished) and also that gift, present in all his work, for shaping words to music.

Schreier's pre-eminent musicality stems from his training in the Dresden Kreuzchor, where he learnt the faultless musicianship that has held him in good stead throughout a long career which even now hasn't come to an end: he appeared in lieder at the Wigmore Hall, apparently in good fettle, earlier this year as part of William Lyne's farewell season.

In many respects, he gives continuity to the lineage of German tenors which can be traced on records from Karl Erb through Julius Patzak and Anton Dermota to Ernst Haefliger, none of whom had world-beating voices but all of whom triumphed through artistry and powers of communication. Indeed listening to Erb's old discs I often imagine I am hearing Schreier, and vice versa. Like Erb and indeed Patzak, Schreier has been not just a memorable Mozartian but also an unforgettable Evangelist. All have had that ability to tell the story with absolute conviction and with the high, silvery tone which is so vital in Bach - and Bach was most important in the early days of Schreier's career, as can be judged by his recordings of the Passions and many of the cantatas.

His thorough grasp of Bach's idiom as both singer and conductor obviously derives from his upbringing. Son of a cantor, he joined the Dresden Kreuzchor in 1945, and studied there and in Leipzig. At the same time he learnt his opera at the Dresden Staatsoper, and in 1961 made his stage debut as First Prisoner in *Fidelio* (he would go on to sing a tormented Florestan with Harnoncourt). Remaining in what was then East Germany, he joined the Berlin State Opera, where he quickly built an extensive repertory. Besides Mozart, his repertory included *Almaviva*, *Fenton* (Verdi and Nicolai), *Des Grieux*, the Simpleton in *Boris Godunov*, *Leukippos* in *Daphne*, the Dancing Master in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *David*, *Mime* and *Lensky*.

A souvenir of that period, once available on Berlin Classics, has Schreier floating an effortless legato in *Almaviva*'s opening aria (in German) and an airy, youthful account of *Fenton*'s lovely

solo from Nicolai's *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor*. Listening to Schreier in these performances and comparing them with later ones makes clear the remarkable consistency of his singing.

Six years after his Salzburg debut, Schreier showed a further side to his versatility when Karajan cast him as Loge in his Salzburg Easter Festival *Rheingold*, which he subsequently recorded, along with Mime, on the Janowski Ring. In both cases he eschewed caricature and relied on the virtues of musicality to project character. Both readings are models of their kind in the way Schreier always keeps a sense of proportion while retaining individuality.

He has also made at least three memorable contributions to recordings of operas by Richard Strauss. His Flamarid in Karl Böhm's famous studio recording of *Capriccio* is the epitome of romantic ardour. To the doomed Leukippos, in Haitink's set of *Daphne*, he brings an appropriate aura of pathos. His Dancing Master, in Kempe's classic *Ariadne auf Naxos*, discloses yet another, lighter aspect of Schreier's gift for characterisation.

One of his later stage roles was Palestrina in Pfltzner's opera. That part suited to perfection Schreier's ability to convey intensity of expression on a pure line. Once more the line of interpreters of the part from Erb through Patzak was maintained by an artist of their class. Besides his extensive career in opera and on the concert platform, many may count his interpretation of Lieder gives him his overriding place among the aristocracy of tenors. From his early career, when he made a number of recordings of the genre, in East Germany, many of them now available on Berlin Classics, through to his invaluable series of Decca recitals with Andreas Schiff and his notable disc in Graham Johnson's Schubert Edition on Hyperion, he has made as significant a contribution in this area as anyone bar Fischer-Dieskau. In many ways his performances, though in a different and often more appropriate voice range, accord with those of his older coeval in the sense that they are positive, interventionist interpretations in which the music in hand is lived on a personal level: a performance of *Die schone Mullerin* at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall in the 1980s that left me emotionally drained by its immediacy. His recording with Schiff preserves that quality, but the plainer, fresher performance recorded much earlier with Walter Olbertz Peter Schreier's depth of characterisation of Bach's passions and Schubert's songcycles is second to none. But his dry, sappy tenor has graced a number of lighter roles: like Basilio in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, below, at the Berlin Staatsoper has its own virtues - as does the very personal one with guitarist Konrad Ragossnig (in parenthesis there was once available another, fascinating recital, on Novalis, of songs with 'tar by Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Spohr and Brahms, among others). All three versions of the Schubert are available for comparison.

In the case of *Winterreise*, Schreier's arresting account with Richter, recorded live, held sway - I once chose it as supreme for BBC Radio 3's *Building a Library* - but the recording with Schiff offers a more considered and unified view of the work. Both remain compelling experiences - as of course does Schreier's and Schiff's *Schwanengesang*, where for once a tenor makes the darker Heine settings even more tragic than do baritones. The rest of the series with Schiff, including discs devoted to the lieder of Mozart and Beethoven, are equally recommendable.

For Teldec Schreier has made extensive recordings of Schumann's lieder with Christoph Eschenbach, including *Dichterliebe* and the Op 24 Heine Lied erkreis. Earlier recordings with Norman Shetler as excellent companion, are available on two CDs. All disclose Schreier as an almost ideal interpreter of Schumann, where a seamless legato, a poetic lyricism and an

immediacy of communication bring out all that composer's flights of fancy. Dichterliebe is a most persuasive example; unfortunately my favourite version, a 1984 live recording with Wolfgang Sawallisch from Munich on Philips, is unavailable at the moment. In it Schreier and his partner catch to perfection every aspect of this much-recorded cycle.

Schreier has always been an eloquent advocate of Hugo Wolf. Contributors to Song on Record I (CUP: 1986) without exception praised his efforts in this field. At the moment you can hear his finely shaped, penetrating, Gramophone Editor's Choice CD of excerpts from the Morike Lieder with Karl Engel on Orfeo, made as recently as 1998, and his 1994 Italienisches Liederbuch, with Felicity Lott and Graham Johnson, a Building a Library choice by Hilary Finch. The famed concentration and intensity of Schreier's Lieder singing is evident throughout these discs as it is on his earlier CD of Goethe Lieder.

His choral recordings most of the most notable works, under great conductors, include an eloquent Missa Sole'mnis under Kubeilk on Orfeo. The same company has also issued Schmidt's Das Bitch mit sieben Siegen, with Schreier in the important tenor part.

Schreier's timbre has never been to everyone's taste, some finding in his tone what the Germans term 'grell': perhaps the closest translation is 'glaring'. To my ears that quality is one that adds to the individuality of Schreier's vocal makeup. In any case, while it may be there in his forte singing, it is singularly absent from his beautiful mezza voce, which he controls literally from the head as well as from the heart.

In spite of all his activity as a singer, Schreier has found time to conduct and record, with sympathy, much of the choral music of Bach, Haydn and Mozart. Still, it is as a tenor of supreme intelligence and searching powers of interpretation that he will be remembered in years to come, above all in the works of Bach and Mozart and of the greatest composers of lieder. I have found that many of his recordings are not only benchmarks in their field but also provide a source of constant pleasure and spiritual renewal. CIA I-it CD Alan Blyth Hear Peter Schreier as Schubert's wanderer -with an unusual twist - in the opening song of Die Schöne Mullerin on track 12 of the cover CD.

#### DATES FROM:

1935 Born Meissen, July 29

1945 Becomes a member of the Dresden Kreuzchor.

1956 Begins studies at Dresden Music Academy

1957 Debut as student, Paolino (II matrimonio segreto)

1959 Joins the school of the Dresden Staatsoper 1961 Stage debut as First Prisoner (Fidelio) at Dresden Staatsoper

1959-63 Member of the Berlin State Opera Company

1966 London debut singing Ferrando (Cosi fan tutte) with the Hamburg State Opera at London's Sadler's Wells Theatre

1967 Debut at Salzburg Festival, as Tamino

1967 Debut at the Metropolitan, New York, as Tamino

1968 First appearance at Teatro Colon, Buenos Aires

1970 Debut as conductor, with the Berlin Staatskapelle

1973 Sings first Loge in Karajan's Das Rheingold at the Salzburg Easter Festival

1974 David in Die Meistersinger at Salzburg Easter Festival, under Karajan

1974 Records Die Entführung aus dem Serail with Böhm



1974 First recording of Die schöne Müllerin with Walter Olbertz  
1980 Records Loge and Mime with Marek Janowski  
1981 Undertakes Pfitzner's Palestrina at the Munich Festival  
1984 Records Die Zauberflöte with Cohn Davis  
1989 Starts series of lieder recordings with Andreas Schiff  
2003 Recital at Wigmore Hall as part of director William Lyne's farewell season