

SIMON PRESTON

Biography

Simon Preston made his debut at the Royal Festival Hall, London in March 1962, performing the organ solos in Janacek's Glagolitic Mass. However, prior to that, devotees of the annual Christmas Eve broadcast from King's College, Cambridge of the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols had heard Simon Preston accompanying the Choir from the Chapel, where he had been a chorister as a boy, and where he returned later as Organ Scholar. Shortly after his London debut Mr. Preston was appointed Sub-Organist of Westminster Abbey, and later that same year appeared for the first time at the Henry Wood Promenade Concerts at the Royal Albert Hall. During that period he worked under many famous conductors, including Leopold Stokowski, Pierre Monteux, Leonard Bernstein and Benjamin Britten. In 1965 he made his first tour to the United States and Canada, and by the time he left Westminster Abbey in 1967 Mr. Preston was already an internationally acclaimed artist. In 1970 he became Organist of the Cathedral and Tutor in Music at Christ Church Oxford where his work with the choir won high praise.

Fourteen years later in 1981, he was appointed Organist and Master of the Choristers at Westminster Abbey, where his work with the choir received great acclaim. He directed the music at the Royal Wedding of Sarah Ferguson and Prince Andrew in 1986, and was responsible for writing much of the "Salieri" music in the movie *Amadeus*.

Since leaving Westminster Abbey in 1987 he has continued to pursue an active career as a highly sought-after concert organist. He recorded the Saint-Saëns "Organ" Symphony with the Berlin Philharmonic and James Levine, the Poulenc *Concerto for Organ, Strings and Timpani* with the Boston Symphony and Seiji Ozawa, and the

Copland *Symphony for Organ and Orchestra* with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra and Leonard Slatkin. Since his first tour in 1965, Simon Preston has been a regular visitor to the United States, often appearing as a guest artist at conventions of the American Guild of Organists as well as tours that have included most of the states in America.

The description in a Vienna newspaper of Simon Preston as “a living legend” serves as a reminder that his recording career began nearly fifty-five years ago with the performance of a Gibbons Fantasia on a King’s College, Cambridge disc. There are currently nearly fifty of his CDs still available, including versions of the Handel Organ Concertos with both Yehudi Menuhin and Trevor Pinnock, and Bach’s 5th *Brandenburg Concerto* as harpsichord soloist, as well as many recordings with the choirs of both Westminster Abbey and Christ Church, Oxford. In 1971 Mr. Preston was awarded an “Edison Classique” for his recordings of Messiaen’s *Les Corps Glorieux* and Hindemith’s Organ Sonatas. The recording of Handel’s *Coronation Anthems* with the Westminster Abbey Choir conducted by Simon Preston was awarded a “Grand Prix du Disque” in 1983. In October of 2000 Deutsche Grammophon launched his complete recording of Bach’s organ works.

For Simon Preston honors and accolades abound. The New York City Chapter of the AGO named him International Performer of the Year for 1987. *Classic CD* recently named Mr. Preston in its list, “The Greatest Players of the Century,” which included the entire classical music world. In 2009 Simon Preston was made a C.B.E (Commander of the British Empire) in the New Year’s Honours List; in 2011 he was made an honorary Student at Christ Church, Oxford University; and in November of 2011 he will be awarded an honorary doctorate by Mount Royal University, Calgary, Canada. (Last revised August 2011)