Harry Christophers
Conductor

Any account of choral music in the early twenty-first century would be incomplete without a chapter dedicated to the work of Harry Christophers and The Sixteen. The conductor, in partnership with the ensemble he founded forty years ago, has set benchmark standards for the performance of everything from late medieval polyphony to new works from today’s finest choral composers. While his artistry arises from the great British tradition of cathedral and collegiate choral singing, it soars above convention to open fresh perspectives on Renaissance, Baroque and contemporary music.

The Sixteen’s soundworld, rich in tonal variety and expressive nuance, reflects Harry Christophers’ determination to create a vibrant choral instrument from the blend of mixed adult professional voices. “There is nothing bland or homogenised about the choral sound,” observed the *Guardian* following a recent performance. “But [Christophers’] choir can also produce wonderfully smooth sustained textures, in which miraculously they make every word clear at the same time.” The Sixteen has also developed an acclaimed period-instrument orchestra under Christophers’ artistic leadership, now central to their series of Purcell odes and royal welcome songs and ongoing survey of Handel’s dramatic oratorios.

Collaboration and collegiality are among the cornerstones of Harry Christophers’ music-making. He speaks of The Sixteen as a family of musicians, one united by ties of loyalty and reinforced by the strength of the organisation’s board and staff. Their recent work together includes an Artist Residency at Wigmore Hall, a large-scale tour of Monteverdi’s *Vespers of 1610*, and the world premiere of James MacMillan’s *Fifth Symphony*. Recent highlights have included a performance of MacMillan’s *Stabat mater* for Pope Francis in the Sistine Chapel at Easter 2018, and a return to Australia during The Sixteen’s 40th anniversary tour in 2019.

Alongside his commitments with The Sixteen, Harry Christophers has served as Artistic Director of the Handel and Haydn Society (H+H) since 2008. He has attracted critical acclaim to America’s oldest continuously active performing arts organisation, enhancing the international reputation of its period-instrument orchestra and chorus with a succession of recordings for The Sixteen’s own CORO label while broadening its local reach through education and community projects in Boston and beyond. His H+H contract was recently extended to run until 2021.

Guest conducting engagements add an extra dimension to Harry Christophers’ work. He has appeared with, among others, the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, the Deutsches Kammerphilharmonie and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, and has been Principal Guest Conductor of the City of Granada Orchestra since 2008. His conducting credits also include extensive work in opera, including productions for English National Opera, Lisbon Opera and Buxton and Grange festivals.

Harry Christophers has overseen a transformation in The Sixteen’s work since the launch of their annual *Choral Pilgrimage* in 2000. *Choral Pilgrimage* programmes have introduced many newcomers to unfamiliar sacred compositions and composers, drawing capacity audiences to the cathedrals, churches and other venues within The Sixteen’s national touring circuit. Christophers and The Sixteen have also connected with large audiences through their BBC television series, *Sacred Music*, presented by actor Simon Russell Beale. Their latest hour-long programme, *Monteverdi in Mantua*, was first broadcast in 2015 at Easter time.

Christophers was inspired by the success of the *Choral Pilgrimage* to commission new scores for The Sixteen, supported by Genesis Foundation funding, and develop Genesis Sixteen, a pioneering young artists’ scheme designed to nurture the next generation of professional ensemble singers. The tour’s positive momentum also influenced the decision to form CORO in 2001. The label’s award-winning catalogue has grown to include over 170 titles, comprising all The Sixteen’s new recordings and albums by such associated artists as the Handel and Haydn Society.

Harry Christophers’ recordings for CORO and other labels have attracted numerous prestigious prizes. He won the Ensemble/Orchestral Album of the Year at the 2005 Classical Brit Awards for *Renaissance*, issued to mark The Sixteen’s 25th anniversary, and was nominated for a 2007 Grammy Award for *IKON*. In 2009 his second recording of Handel’s Messiah, made for CORO, was honoured with the MIDEM Classical Award, while he received the coveted Gramophone Artist of the Year Award together with the Best Baroque Vocal Award for Handel’s Coronation Anthems. Away from the recording studio, he has recently collaborated with BBC Radio 3 presenter Sara Mohr-Pietsch to produce a book entitled *A New Heaven: Choral Conversations* in celebration of the group’s 40th anniversary.

Harry Christophers was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the Queen’s 2012 Birthday Honours for his services to music. He is an Honorary Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, as well as the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and has Honorary Doctorates in Music from the Universities of Leicester, Northumbria, Canterbury Christ Church and Kent.