



JOSEPH SWENSEN – Conductor/Composer

Conductor - Composer **Joseph Swensen** has been Music Director of the Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine (ONBA) since 2024. His work with the orchestra has included a wide range of repertoire, from the great Romantic composers, including Mahler, Bruckner and Sibelius, to contemporary music, often bringing works from different periods together within the same programme. His work with ONBA has also led to a growing series of live recordings, including Wagner/Swensen's *Ring Odyssey*, Mussorgsky/Ravel's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, released on Alpha Classics, as well as his *SAGA TRILOGY*, a series of three interconnected solo concertos for amplified double bass, cello and clarinet, released on B Records.

As a conductor, Swensen has worked with orchestras and opera companies including the London Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, Royal Danish Opera and English National Opera. His long-term appointments have included Principal Conductor of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra (1996–2005), Music Director of Malmö Opera (2005–2011), Principal Guest Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales (2000–2003), Artistic Advisor and Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestre de Chambre de Paris (2009–2012), Conductor Emeritus of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra (since 2005), and Artistic Director of the NFM Leopoldinum Orchestra in Wrocław, Poland (2017–2023).

Alongside his conducting career, Swensen has continued to compose. The spring of 2027 will see the release and World Premiere Recording of his newest work, *Hafiz*, a large-scale symphony inspired by the poetry of the 13th-century Sufi mystic. Following its first performance, Classykeo described the work as “a luminous work, a world of profound

emotional contrast, a genuine poetic jewel", while Diapason called it *"a love letter by a conductor to his orchestra"*. The recording, made live with the Orchestre National Bordeaux Aquitaine, will be paired with Swensen's performance of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Shéhérazade* and released on B Records.

Swensen's compositional work has developed alongside his career as a performer and conductor. He has never used computer technology in his compositional process, preferring to work without digital tools. His views on the potential influence of technology on artistic creativity form an important part of his broader thinking about the creative process.

Born in New York in 1960 into a musical family, Swensen was introduced to many of the instruments of the orchestra by his parents from an early age. He studied at The Juilliard School from the age of seven to 22, focusing on piano, violin, composition and conducting. He wrote his first composition at the age of seven and has continued to compose throughout his career.

From the age of seventeen, Swensen pursued a career as a violin soloist, performing with orchestras and conductors internationally and recording exclusively for RCA/BMG Classics. Having decided at the age of nine that he wanted eventually to become a conductor, he concluded his solo career in 1990 in order to devote himself to conducting and composition.

In 2000, Swensen was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of St Andrews in Scotland.

Swensen's work as a conductor and composer continues to develop alongside his role in Bordeaux, where his close relationship with the orchestra has provided an important context for a number of recent projects and recordings.

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