

Raphaël Merlin, Conductor



Appointed to the position of Artistic and Musical Director of the Geneva Chamber Orchestra from the 2023/2024 season, Raphaël Merlin passionately pursues an artistic path tinged with eclecticism, curiosity and commitment.

From a very young age, he displayed this innate desire for diversity in music. Cello, piano, piano-jazz, writing, composition, analysis, conducting, orchestration, chamber music, arrangement, teaching ... each of these disciplines generating an intense musical activity.

He began his musical training at the CNR of Clermont and quickly developed a love of polyphony and improvisation, which will naturally lead him to jazz and his first compositions; sometimes escaping from his studies accompanying a choir to the guitar, writing a few songs, infiltrating a big band or even founding a quartet of jazz ... Some composition contests later, his first diplomas in conservatory in the bag and 15 years old, he moved to Paris and contracted the virus of orchestra's conducting. The teachings of Igor Kiritchenko, Xavier Gagnepain and Philippe Müller for the cello, Hortense Cartier-Bresson for chamber music and Janos Komives for the conducting, trained him to interpretation, and he brilliantly completed his studies at the CNSM in Paris in 2005.

Chamber music, initially practiced with his family growing up, occupies a central part in Merlin's work today. This has intensified since joining the remarkable Quatuor Ebène in 2002. The Quartet garnered a First Prize in 2004 at the international ARD competition in Munich, and now performs regularly throughout Europe, the U.S. and Asia in such prestigious venues as the Berlin Philharmonie, Wigmore Hall in London, Konzerthaus Vienna, the Library of Congress in Washington, Carnegie Hall in New York, Philharmonie, Châtelet and Champs-Élysées theatres in Paris... The Quartet counts amongst its esteemed advisors Gabor Takacs, Eberhard Feltz, Gyorgy Kurtag and Pierre-Laurent Aimard. Musical collaborators have included Mitsuko Uchida, Nicholas Angelich, Menahem Pressler, Natalie Dessay, Renaud Capuçon, Gary Hoffman, Martin Fröst, Michel Portal. The Mirare label produced two discs, devoted to Haydn and Bartok, before the quartet signed an exclusive deal with Virgin Classics (now Erato/Warner) : Debussy, Fauré and Ravel (Gramophone of the year), Brahms, Mozart, Mendelssohn quartet albums followed, along with several arrangements and self compositions albums : "Fiction", "Brazil", "Eternal Stories" (2017). Recently a Schubert record featuring Gautier Capuçon and Matthias Goerne (songs arranged by Raphaël Merlin) received the Choc by Classica and the Edison prize 2016.

The son of a French teacher and enthusiastic former pupil of Xavier Gagnepain, Raphaël is passionate about teaching, and maintains lasting links with his former and current pupils. Regular cello teacher at Boulogne-Billancourt Conservatory, he gives regular master classes in chamber music at the CNSM Paris, American Arts Schools in Fontainebleau, at Universities of Stuttgart, Freiburg, Houston and at the Colburn School in Los Angeles. Merlin also performs as soloist with the Tchaikovsky Conservatory Orchestra in Moscow, the Massy Orchestra, Sostenuto, Ut 5è, Orchestre d'Auvergne . He recorded Brahms trio, Fauré sonatas and trio, Hersant trio, a tango album "Café 1930". He remains a prolific arranger of classical, Jazz, Tango, and traditional music arrangements. From 1997 to 2002 he was the pianist in the Wildflower Quartet, and still sometimes plays jazz concerts from the piano.

As a conductor, he has led the Orchestre du Lycée Racine, the Orchestre des lauréats du Conservatoire, the Ostinato orchestra, Opus 93. In 2014, he founded "Les Forces majeures", a chamber musicians orchestra : this energetic and versatile ensemble (traditional repertoire, contemporary, jazz...) instantaneously got an international success for its Rossini recording (Aparté label) with famous mezzo-soprano Karine Deshayes, released in 2016. Concerts with Nicholas Angelich, Edgar Moreau, Sayaka Shoji, Sarah Nemtanu, Inva Mula, Florian Sempey, Amel Brahim-Jelloul, Marc Mauillon... got interest by the French radios such as Radio Classique, who broadcasted live a French program including Fauré's *Requiem* at Invalides Cathedral. An album recorded with Les Forces Majeures and cellist Edgar Moreau, including Gulda and Offenbach's *Concertos*, was released in December 2018 (Erato / warner classics label). He also recently conducted the Orchestre de l'Opéra de Rouen for the project "Création habitants", shared with choreographer Alban Richard, director of the CCN de Caen.

In 2011 he received his first commission as a composer, a concerto for string quartet and orchestra, for Cracow and Munich, with the Ebène String Quartet and the Klangforum Mitte Europa. Cellist Nicolas Altstaedt created his duet for violin and cello (2014, Concertgebouw Amsterdam) and a cello and string concerto (Lockenhaus Festival 2016).

Raphaël Merlin is represented by RSB Artists since 2017.

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