

JONATHAN BERMAN, conductor



"Jonathan Berman conducts with great care and elegance, it's brave and deeply affecting."

The Guardian Debussy's *Pelleas et Melisande*

Full of life, energy and optimism. Berman communicates the natural organic quality he finds in the music

Andrew Macgregor, BBC Radio 3 Record Review Franz Schmidt *Symphony no. 1*

Jonathan Berman's open-minded approach to music making is reflected in his impressively broad repertoire. Whether on stage, in front of cameras, writing a script or curating a concert programme, Jonathan derives his energy from his ability to engage with audiences in numerous ways. For him, unlocking the imagination is the key.

A fearless advocate of contemporary and new music, with more than 70 premières under his belt, Jonathan is equally well versed in the music of the classical and Romantic periods. A recent champion of the works of Franz Schmidt, he is currently midway through recording the complete symphonies with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales (BBCNOW) which will be released by Accentus Music in time for Schmidt's 150th anniversary in December 2024. In 2021, with the release of the First Symphony, Jonathan launched The Franz Schmidt Project, a new online resource to promote Schmidt's music.

Whilst music is central to all his interests, Jonathan's deep engagement with literature, visual art, theatre, film, and a particular fascination with Japanese culture, leads to constant questioning of the boundaries of classical music and feeds into the unique and creative ways in which he connects to his audiences. Conscious of the need to get to the heart of things, Jonathan is recognised for his thoughtfulness and insight, creating performances which are known for their sensitivity, structure, and flexibility.

On the first day of lockdown in March 2020 and in the wake of mass concert cancellations across the world, Jonathan and his sister launched Stand Together Music which, together with a directory of support available to musicians, promoted conscious streaming of music. For 100 days, Stand Together Music published details of every concert that would have taken place in the UK (both classical and non-classical), linking the concerts to daily Spotify playlists that featured the musicians whose concerts had been cancelled. In total, Stand Together Music curated 12,149 tracks and over 1000 hours of music created by over 10,000 performers and composers.

With live music temporarily off the agenda, Jonathan taught himself how to make films using animation, stop motion and choreographic cinematography, building on the ideas that he first experimented with in 2015 at Southbank Centre's Changing Britain Festival; 2017 at the Waterloo Festival; and in 2018 at The Bridge Theatre. Curating Southbank Sinfonia's contribution to the Changing Britain Festival, Jonathan's concerts explored three distinct post war periods in the UK: 1945-1979, 1979-1997, and 1997-2015 using the combination of music, visual art and spoken word. At Waterloo Festival, he explored Bruckner's Fourth Symphony in the context of nature and spirituality using texts from 2400 BC up until the present day; and at

The Bridge Theatre, he directed and designed the lighting for a show about Schumann's Rhenish Symphony using poetry by German Romantic Poets with actors Adjoa Andoh, Fred Haig and Nicola Harrison.

Over the two years of lockdown, Jonathan wrote and directed a series of nine films for Onjam - including a four-part documentary series Postcards from Vienna - in which music ranging from Bach to Messiaen, Stravinsky, Satie and Ravel was illustrated through film. Amongst the recognition he received, *Rêves de Jeux Mécanique*, which uses stop animation to bring to life Ravel's Sonata for Violin and Cello, won the Silver Medal Award for Outstanding Achievement at the Global Music Awards 2021; and *Stravinsky Septet – Three Choreographic Canvases* was an Official Selection for Best Music Video at 2021 Venice Shorts Film Festival.

Jonathan Berman grew up in a musical family playing piano, cello and singing from an early age. At 14, wrist injuries caused by too much practising forced him to look at alternative ways to be part of music which led him to take up conducting. From the very outset of his career, Jonathan was supported by Oliver Knussen, Stanisław Skrowaczewski and Jac van Steen with whom he spent six years studying at the Royal Conservatory at the Hague. Throughout Knussen was a life-long friend and mentor, recommending Jonathan as his replacement at the Tanglewood Festival in 2015 and inviting him to share his concert at the BBC Proms the following year.

In 2014 Jonathan was the first British musician and the first conductor to win the prestigious Kempinski Art Programme Fellowship, which enabled him to spend two months observing Franz Welser-Möst and the Cleveland Orchestra, and Michael Tilson Thomas and the New World Symphony. In the 2014-15 season he became Assistant Conductor to Vladimir Jurowski at the London Philharmonic Orchestra (LPO). Jonathan has now worked with LPO for over eight years and it is amongst several orchestras and organisations with whom he has developed long-term relationships including BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Southbank Sinfonia, London Sinfonietta and Aldeburgh Festival.

In recent years, Jonathan has conducted the Philharmonia Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, Royal Academy of Music, London Mozart Players, City of London Sinfonia, Nash Ensemble, BCMG, Crash Ensemble Dublin, and the Britten Pears Ensemble in the UK; as well as the Cleveland Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, Filharmonica 'George' Enescu', Sinfonietta Riga, Lithuanian National Philharmonic Orchestra, City Chamber Orchestra of Hong Kong, the Orchestre de Picardie, Orchestra di Padova e Veneto, Hagen Philharmonic Orchestra, Bilkent Symphony Orchestra, Turku Philharmonic Orchestra, Ensemble Modern and, New European Ensemble abroad.

Additionally, he has conducted over 40 operas including productions for the Nationale Reis Opera, English Touring Opera, Aldeburgh Festival, Grachten Festival, Anghiari Festival, Dartington International Festival, Jerwood Opera Course, Opera Studio Netherlands, Dutch National Opera Academy, Mahogany Opera, Centre for Opera Studies in Italy.

Alongside performances, Jonathan has given masterclasses in both conducting and composition at Dartington International Summer Festival, Birmingham Contemporary Music Festival and at Aldeburgh Festival.

"We have a thousand different types of music and ways to listen depending on the functions in our life. We put music on when we go to the gym, we put music on to sleep, to cover awkward silences in a conversation or just as some kind of background. That is all wonderful. I use music like that. But there is this thing which I love, it can be any genre, you sit, you focus and you engage actively your imagination, your sensitivity; you engage and commit yourself fully in following the music. I love bringing people into this way of listening... Musical

understanding is not something that you either have or don't have – a clandestine group of those in the know. There are many pieces, composers which at first hearing I didn't understand or didn't even like. But through time, through multiple listenings, through listening to others talk about this music, I have come to absolutely adore these pieces and composers.”

This biography is updated regularly, please contact ej@jamesbrownmanagement.com for the latest version or if you wish to crop. Last updated: October 2022