

# THOMAS HENGBROCK **Biography**

“A conductor who is second to none” (*La Terrasse*, Paris), and moreover researcher, scholar, musical-creative freethinker, and stage director – the name Thomas Hengelbrock has many facets. As a whole, they combine to make one of the most complex and exciting artist personalities of our time.

This year in July he made his debut at the Bayreuth Festival with a new production of Wagner’s “Tannhäuser”. Since September 2011 he has been the new chief conductor of the tradition-rich NDR Sinfonieorchester. As founder and director of the Balthasar-Neumann-Chor and -Ensemble, he produces internationally sought-after concerts and opera projects.

Thomas Hengelbrock is interested in the whole spectrum of the opera repertoire – from Baroque rarities such as “Il Giustino” by Giovanni Legrenzi or “Niobe” by Agostino Steffani through Mozart’s operas, Bernstein’s “West Side Story”, and Stravinsky’s “The Rake’s Progress”, to contemporary works such as Dallapiccola’s “Il Prigioniero”.

Thomas Hengelbrock rigorously delves into the intellectual world of former times and of today, and into the listening comprehension associated with it. In this manner, he critically calls into question traditional interpretational and listening customs, for example, with his readings not only of Mozart’s and Haydn’s operas, but also of those by Rossini, Bellini, and Verdi on historical instruments. And the press applauds: “Bellini’s music has possibly never been heard as sumptuous” (*Opernwelt*), “Today, Mozart can hardly be performed with more excitement and intensity” (*Bonner Generalanzeiger*), “Illuminating conducting” (*AFP*), “So beguiling that it leaves one breathless” (*ZDF*).

Hengelbrock’s involvement with musical theater never remains limited to the orchestra pit, but is marked by an extraordinarily close collaboration with stage directors such as Philippe Arlaud, Achim Freyer, Pina Bausch, Sebastian Baumgarten, and Luc Bondy. Recently, Thomas Hengelbrock has himself made his mark as a stage director, including in 2006 with “Il Re pastore”, which opened Mozart Year at the Salzburg Festival, and “Don Giovanni” at the Feldkirch Festival.

Thomas Hengelbrock’s concert activities are likewise distinguished by unconventional program concepts. Here, too, he moves effortlessly between the poles of the almost forgotten and the contemporary, and has been dedicating himself increasingly to the nineteenth and twentieth century’s. Moreover, he reconquered for the repertoire Antonio Lotti’s Requiem and works by today hardly known masters from J. S. Bach’s music library, recording them for the first time on CD. At the same time, he enjoys intense collaborations with contemporary composers, such as Jan Müller-Wieland, Quigang Chen, Erkki-Sven Tüür, and Simon Wills, having premiered many of their works.

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In an innovative combination of music, acting, literature, and dance, Hengelbrock has created extraordinary scenic projects. Successful productions such as “Metamorphosis of Melancholy” or “Festa teatrale” captivate with their enthralling dramaturgy and represent a new form of musical theater. With the actors Klaus Maria Brandauer and Graham Valentine, music for the stage such as Grieg’s “Peer Gynt”, Beethoven’s “Egmont”, or Purcell’s “King Arthur” are revived within the context of their original dramatic texts.

Thomas Hengelbrock initially became known as one of the outstanding representatives of historically informed performance practice. He was significantly involved in permanently establishing the performance on original instruments in Germany’s concert venues. In the 1990s, with the Balthasar-Neumann-Ensemble and the Balthasar-Neumann-Chor, he founded ensembles that today number among the most successful of their kind. With his ensembles, Thomas Hengelbrock additionally attracted attention for over a decade with spectacular rediscoveries at the Schwetzingen Festival.

Thomas Hengelbrock was artistic director of the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen (1995–1998), music director of Vienna’s Volksoper (2000–2003), and founded in 2001 the Feldkirch Festival, of which he was artistic director until 2006. He conducts internationally renowned ensembles on a regular basis, including the Münchner Philharmoniker, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, and the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks. He has accepted invitations from major opera houses such as the Opéra National de Paris, London’s Royal Opera House, and the Teatro Real in Madrid.

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