Rayfield Allied

Mahan Esfahani

Harpsichordist, Director, Conductor



" ...Such virtuosity and disarming presentation suggests that Esfahani could inspire a whole new appreciation of the instrument ..."
The Guardian

Mahan Esfahani has made it his life's mission to re-establish the harpsichord in the mainstream of concert instruments. He is the first harpsichordist in a generation active in virtually all areas of music-making from large completist projects of earlier composers to commissioning over twenty new solo and concertante works for the harpsichord. His extensive work in performing modern and new concertos for the harpsichord — from the earlier pioneering works of Falla (1926), Martinů (1935), Gerhard (1956) to new ones by Coll (2017), Ruders (2021), Srnka (2023), Bryars (2023), et al. — has seen him as a soloist partnering with the leading conductors of the day: François-Xavier Roth, Ilan Volkov, Ludovic Morlot, Leif Segerstam, Andrew Manze, Joshua Weilerstein, Jiří Bělohlavek, Yalda Zamani, Andris Poga, Ken-David Masur, and Thierry Fischer. The totality of these activities is attested by extensive features on his work in *The New York Times*, *Gramophone*, *De Volkskrant*, and the Wigmore Hall Prize awarded in 2022.

Esfahani has taken the harpsichord beyond the realm of the esoteric into a new area of appreciation with recitals at The Wigmore Hall, Carnegie Hall, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Wiener Musikverein, Klavier Festival Ruhr, the Edinburgh International Festival, Schleswig-Holstein Festival, Konzerthaus Berlin, Tokyo's Suntory Hall, BBC Proms, Walt Disney Hall of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Fundacion Juan March, L'Auditori Barcelona, Zürich Tonhalle, and Beijing's Forbidden City Concert Hall.

His work with new music has extended to collaborations with leading and emerging composers of the day including: Gavin Bryars, Miroslav Srnka, Kaija Saariaho, Brett Dean, Poul Ruders, Daniel Kidane, Laurence Osborn, Francisco Coll, Anahita Abbasi, Atsuhiko Gondai, Marcus Rock, Nilufar Habibian.

Last season marked several important milestones in Esfahani's work. As the artist-in-residence of the 2026 Leipzig Bach Fest, he demonstrated his dedication to the work of J.S. Bach — the entirety of whose keyboard output he is currently recording to significant critical acclaim for Hyperion Records. He also performed a new onstage role written especially for him in Brett Dean's new opera *Of One Blood* at the Bayerische Staatsoper under the direction of Vladimir Jurowski. The season also saw new commissions including an ensmeble piece by Calliope Tsoupaki with the Nederlandse Bachvereniging, a new concerto by Julian Grant, a new solo work by Nilufar Habibian for the Elbphilharmonie, and a commission by Alberto Carretero as part of a program of four modern Spanish harpsichord concertos for the *Festival Internacional de Musica de Granada*.

Further, he presented a three-concert series on the work of Domenico Scarlatti at The Wigmore Hall, returned to New York's Frick Gallery with Bach's *Art of Fugue*, recorded concertos by Gavin Bryars, Gary Carpenter and Caroline Shaw with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, and had a guest curatorship of modern chamber music and the entirety of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* at the Czech Philharmonic.

This season sees him return to the Bayerisches Staatsoper for further performances of Brett Dean's *Of One Blood*, a 3-concert residency at LSO St Lukes in collaboration with BBC Radio 3, concerts with the Helsinki Baroque Orchestra in Finland and at the Wigmore Hall, a new commission by Zad Moultaka for performances with the Netherlands Chamber Choir, and a return to the Klavier Festival Ruhr.

Most recently, Esfahani has been sought-after as a conductor, directing ensembles from the keyboard; to date, his most notable collaborations in this new role have been with the Britten Sinfonia, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Seattle Symphony, and similar chamber and symphony orchestras. This season will see him conduct his first opera - Handel's *Sosarme* - in concert performances with the Orquestra Barroca de la Casa de Música in Porto and at the Halle Handel Festival.

Esfahani's extensive discography, in addition to the ongoing complete series of Bach's keyboard works for Hyperion/Universal, includes an album of 20th-century Czech harpsichord concertos for Hyperion (awarded a 2023 Opus Klassik); sonata by CPE Bach (Gramophone Award 2014); the complete keyboard pieces of Jean-Philippe Rameau (New York Times Best Recordings 2014); and the album *Musique?* of modern electroacoustic works for harpsichord (*Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik* quarterly list 2021). Recording collaborations include the *Brandenburg Project* on BIS with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra/Dausgaard; Dutilleux's *Les Citations* with the Seattle Symphony/Ludovic Morlot; and four albums with Michala Petri, a collaboration particularly close to his heart.

Following studies in musicology and history at Stanford University, Mahan Esfahani studied privately with Peter Watchorn in Boston before completing his formation as the last student of the celebrated Czech harpsichordist Zuzana Růžičková. Following a period as artist-in-residence at New College (Oxford) he continues his non-musical activities as a guest instructor in various international courses and as a frequent cultural commentator for such publications as *The New Yorker*, *The Critic*, and *Engelsberg Ideas*. Born in

Rayfield Allied
9-12 The Stableyard
Broomgrove Road
London, SW9 9TL, UK
www.rayfieldallied.com
E-mail info@rayfieldallied.com
Telephone +44 (0) 20 3176 5500

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Tehran and raised in the United States, he went on to live in Milan, Oxford, and London before finally making his home the past decade in Prague.

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info@rayfieldallied.com

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