

Dame Emma Kirkby

Soprano



“For two decades, Emma Kirkby’s clear, agile voice has epitomised the pure sound of early music. She remains one of the treasures of the music world.”

Toronto Globe and Mail

Originally, **Emma Kirkby** had no expectations of becoming a professional singer. As a classics student at Oxford and then a schoolteacher she sang for pleasure in choirs and small groups, always feeling most at home in Renaissance and Baroque repertoire. She joined the Taverner Choir in 1971 and in 1973 began her long association with the Consort of Musicke. Emma took part in the early Decca *Florilegium* recordings with both the Consort of Musicke and the Academy of Ancient Music, at a time when most college-trained sopranos were not seeking a sound appropriate for early instruments. She therefore had to find her own approach, with enormous help from Jessica Cash in London, and from the directors, fellow singers and instrumentalists with whom she has worked over the years.

Emma feels privileged to have been able to build further long-term relationships with chamber groups and orchestras, in particular London Baroque, Freiburger Barockorchester, L’Orfeo (of Linz), The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Fretwork, the Purcell Quartet, and the London Handel Players; and now with some of the younger groups, such as Florilegium, Armonico Consort and Daniel Taylor’s Theater of Early Music.


To date, she has made well over a hundred recordings of all kinds, from sequences of Hildegard of Bingen to madrigals of the Italian and English Renaissance, cantatas and oratorios of the Baroque era, and works of Mozart, Haydn and J. C. Bach. Favourites among these projects were: “Handel – Opera Arias and Overtures” for Hyperion, Bach wedding cantatas for Decca, Bach Cantatas 82a and 199 for Carus, J.C.Bach Motets for CPO, and Byrd Consort Songs for Harmonia Mundi USA.

Since 2000 Emma’s happiest collaboration has been with the Swedish record company,

BIS. With them she has recorded Handel motets and cantatas, Christmas pieces and Couperin with London Baroque, lute songs with Anthony Rooley and Jakob Lindberg, songs by Amy Beach, and more, mostly in the magical acoustics of Laenna church in Sweden.

In 2009 BIS issued a compilation entitled “The Artistry of Emma Kirkby”, drawing on nine CDs in all.

In 1999 Emma was voted *Artist of the Year* by Classic FM Radio listeners; in 2000 she received the *Order of the British Empire*, and 2007 saw her appointed a *Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire*. She was delighted in June 2008 to return to her *alma mater*, Oxford University, and receive an Honorary Doctorate of Music. Most surprisingly of all, *BBC Music Magazine*, April 2007, in a survey of critics to find “The twenty greatest sopranos”, placed Emma at number 10. While such media flurries can be discounted as parochial, partial, controversial, and outdated as soon as they appear, she was pleased at the recognition this implied for an approach to singing where ensemble, clarity and stillness are valued alongside the more usual features of volume and display.

Despite all the recording activity, Emma still prefers live concerts, especially the pleasure of repeating programmes with colleagues; every occasion, every venue and every audience combine to create something new from this wonderful repertoire. In 2019, Emma celebrated her 70th birthday with a concert at Wigmore Hall, and continued the celebrations with her programme ‘Dowland among Friends’ with Leamington Music in February 2020. 

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