



LONGBOROUGH FESTIVAL OPERA APPOINTS NEW MUSIC DIRECTOR



Christopher Ward © Marine Stassen

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Longborough Festival Opera has appointed conductor CHRISTOPHER WARD as its new Music Director from the 2027 season.

London-born Ward joins Longborough Festival Opera (LFO) from Theater Aachen and Sinfonieorchester Aachen, where he has served as General Music Director since 2018. He brings more than two decades of experience working at leading German opera houses, alongside a broad international guest conducting career that includes appearances at Staatsoper Hamburg, Komische Oper Berlin, Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Staatsoper Prague and Welsh National Opera.

Ward's appointment follows an extensive international recruitment process and comes at a significant moment for LFO as it approaches the 30th anniversary of its unique theatre and looks ahead to an ambitious and exciting future.

Ward succeeds Anthony Negus, who has been Music Director of LFO for more than two decades and was part of the recruitment panel. Negus will become Conductor Laureate in 2027, conducting the company's anniversary production of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

Emily Gottlieb, Executive Director of LFO, said:

"We are thrilled to appoint Christopher Ward as our new Music Director. This is a pivotal moment for Longborough and Christopher brings the musical authority, leadership experience and artistic curiosity to help shape our future. He impressed us with his sensitive and collaborative personal style, his deep commitment to musical excellence, his passion for nurturing new talent, and he shares our bold and ambitious vision for Longborough."

Artistic Director **Polly Graham** said:

"We are delighted to welcome Christopher into Longborough's artistic family. His extensive leadership experience and broad knowledge of the repertoire – from baroque, contemporary and late Romantic work, including that of Richard Wagner - will enrich and embolden the work of our entire festival. His collaborative, imaginative and deeply intelligent approach to opera is exactly what this art form needs. Christopher is a worthy successor to Anthony Negus, whom we continue to treasure as Conductor Laureate."

Christopher Ward said:

"Longborough Festival Opera, founded through the bold vision of Martin and Lizzie Graham, is a truly special place, with deep and loyal relationships with its audiences and a strong commitment to nurturing future generations through its education and community work. From my first meetings with the team, I was struck by their collective enthusiasm and collaborative spirit, and I am hugely excited to join them and to bring the experience I have gained over two decades working within the German opera house system to the next chapter of the festival."

The 2026 Festival opens on 30 May with a new production of Handel's *Orlando*, and continues until 8 August with Verdi's *Macbeth*, Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* and Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.

-ENDS-

For media enquiries, please contact:

Victoria Bevan | victoria.bevan@premiercomms.com | 07917 764318

Edward Christian-Hare | edward.christian-hare@premiercomms.com | 07870 859633

Notes to Editors

About Christopher Ward

London-born conductor Christopher Ward is a highly versatile musician, widely praised for his dynamic and compelling presence on the podium. His creative programming, commitment to contemporary music and imaginative education initiatives have earned acclaim from critics and audiences alike.

Christopher studied at Oxford University and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, working early in his career with Oxford's Philharmonia & Chorus, Bach Choir and New Chamber Opera. He was subsequently appointed Répétiteur Fellow at Scottish Opera and the RSAMD in Glasgow.

In 2004 he joined the International Opera Studio of Zurich Opera before making Germany his artistic home, serving from 2005 as Solorepetitor and Kapellmeister at Staatstheater Kassel. There he conducted numerous new productions and concerts with the Staatsorchester Kassel, alongside periods as chorus master and director of the theatre's annual youth orchestra project. A formative highlight was assisting Sir Simon Rattle on Wagner's *Das Rheingold* with the Berliner Philharmonie at the Aix-en-Provence Festival, later continuing this work in Berlin and Salzburg.

From 2009, Christopher was Kapellmeister and musical assistant to Kent Nagano at the Bavarian State Opera, conducting premieres and concerts and collaborating with the Bayerische Staatsorchester and opera studios in Munich and Milan. He went on to serve as Kapellmeister at Saarländisches Staatstheater, conducting repertoire ranging from Rameau and Weber to Verdi and the German premiere of Haas' *Bluthaus*.

As a guest conductor, he has appeared at major European houses including Staatsoper Hamburg, Komische Oper, Deutsche Oper am Rhein, Oper Graz and Staatsoper Prague. In 2019 he conducted the world premiere of Jörg Widmann's *Babylon* at short notice at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, stepping in for Daniel Barenboim.

His recordings for Naxos and Capriccio have received international acclaim and multiple Opus Klassik nominations, including projects with leading German and European orchestras.

Since 2018, Christopher has served as Generalmusikdirektor of Theater and Sinfonieorchester Aachen, where he has strengthened music standards across opera and concert repertoire, developed a period-instrument baroque ensemble from within the orchestra, championed forgotten composers and expanded audiences through innovative programming and outreach.

www.csward.com

About Longborough Festival Opera

Martin and Lizzie Graham started promoting opera in the grounds of their home in 1991 as Banks Fee Opera. Longborough Festival Opera has since grown into an established opera company, situated in the heart of the Cotswolds, with an annual season taking place in a unique opera house, formerly a chicken barn, established in 1997 and seating 500.

The company is an independent charity that continues Martin Graham's legacy in the theatre he built in the grounds of the family home. It is not in receipt of public grant funding nor any

revenue from the Graham family and relies on ticket sales and the generosity of members and audiences.

Throughout Longborough's history, the company have achieved what some might have said to be impossible: in 2013 they presented a full-length production of Wagner's Ring Cycle, directed by Alan Privett, becoming the first, and thus far only, UK Opera Festival to present the *Ring*. The musical leadership of Anthony Negus, one of the most perceptive and original conductors of the Wagner repertoire, has over the last 26 years, helped to establish it as a destination for Wagnerians in the UK and abroad. In 2019 the company embarked on a new *Ring*, directed by Amy Lane, culminating in another new and critically-acclaimed full cycle in 2024.

Alongside its interest in the work of Richard Wagner, the festival has broadened its ambitions across other repertoire, staging Erich Wolfgang Korngold's *Die tote Stadt* in 2022, Avner Dorman's *Wahnfried* and Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 2025.

Since the 1990s, LFO has presented high-quality opera overlooking the beautiful Evenlode valley in Gloucestershire in an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Conscious of its surrounding environment, the Festival is committed to sustainability and creative reuse with a tradition of repurposing, reclaiming and recycling objects to create transformative architecture, artwork and performances.

Learning and Participation are central to the work of the company. LFO operates an Emerging Artist Programme offering solo roles, understudy and chorus positions in its world-class productions for singers at the beginning of their careers. Longborough's music staff also lead weekly choral sessions in six local state primaries, under the banner of Singing Schools, with a new scholarship introduced in 2025 to offer recipients the opportunity to perform in the LFO Youth Chorus in a production in the summer festival. Another schools scheme – Playground Opera – reimagines classic operas to make them accessible for children. Workshops with local secondary schools also take place every year, involving interactive sessions with live performances and discussions. Additionally, the company runs a free to access Community Chorus for adults who enjoy singing and performance, who perform in a festival production each year.

<https://lfo.org.uk/>

Longborough Festival Opera 2026

<https://lfo.org.uk/whats-on>

Handel: *Orlando* | 30 May – 7 June

Academy of Ancient Music

Christopher Moulds *conductor*

Beth Taylor *Orlando*

Anna Devin *Angelica*

Katie Bray *Medoro*

Kelli-Ann Masterson *Dorinda*

Andrew Foster-Williams *Zoroastro*

Wagner: *Tristan und Isolde* | 20 June – 18 July

Longborough Festival Orchestra

Anthony Negus *conductor*

Peter Wedd *Tristan*

Catharine Woodward *Isolde*

Catherine Carby *Brangäne*

Alastair Miles *Marke*

Robert Hayward *Kurwenal*

Brian Smith Walters *Melot*

Verdi: *Macbeth* | 1 – 16 July

Longborough Festival Chorus and Orchestra

Longborough Community Chorus

Nil Venditti *conductor*

Mark Stone *Macbeth*

Viktoriiia Balan *Lady Macbeth*

Jung Soo Yun *Macduff*

John Molloy *Banquo*

Humperdinck: *Hansel and Gretel* | 30 July – 8 August

Longborough Youth Chorus

Karen Kamensek *conductor*

Joanna Harries *Hansel*

Rosalind Dobson *Gretel*

Darren Jeffery *Father*

Lee Bisset *Witch / Mother*

Kelli-Ann Masterson *Dew Fairy*

Full Quotes

Emily Gottlieb, Executive Director of Longborough Festival Opera, said:

“We are thrilled to announce Christopher Ward as our new Music Director. His appointment comes at a pivotal moment for Longborough Festival Opera, as we approach the 30th anniversary of our theatre, celebrate three decades of the festival’s remarkable achievements, and look ahead to an exciting future. Christopher impressed us with his sensitive and collaborative personal style, his deep commitment to musical excellence and his passion for nurturing new talent. Just as importantly, he shares our bold and ambitious vision for Longborough. I am very much looking forward to working with both Polly and Christopher to create and deliver inspiring, compelling work for our artists and audiences.”

Artistic Director **Polly Graham** said:

“We are delighted to welcome Christopher into Longborough’s artistic family. His extensive leadership experience and broad knowledge of the repertoire from baroque to contemporary, as well as late Romantic opera including that of Richard Wagner, will enrich and embolden the work of our entire festival. His collaborative, imaginative and deeply intelligent approach to opera is exactly what this art form needs. Christopher is a worthy successor to Anthony Negus, whom we continue to treasure as he steps into his new position as Conductor Laureate.”

Andrew Mosely, Chair of LFO said:

“I am absolutely delighted that Christopher Ward has accepted the position of Music Director. He has deep experience in the repertory that lies at the heart of Longborough’s identity, whilst also having conducted an exceptionally broad body of music across different styles and eras. His work in assisting Simon Rattle on Das Rheingold and Kent Nagano on many Wagner productions at the Bavarian State Opera (including a full Ring Cycle) have been pivotal to his development as a Wagnerian musician, providing continuity with the extraordinary artistic legacy that Anthony Negus has built with us. Christopher shares our belief, and that of our founder Martin Graham, that opera is a truly extraordinary artform that should be available and accessible to everyone. We look forward to the creativity, commitment and audacity that he will bring to Longborough in this exciting new chapter.”

Anthony Negus, who has been Music Director of Longborough Festival Opera for more than two decades and will become Conductor Laureate in 2027 said:

“Christopher Ward is a thoughtful and sympathetic musician, with a genuine interest in – and admiration for – Longborough Festival Opera. Over more than a decade as MD in Aachen (where Karajan began his career before the war), he has gained invaluable experience across a wide range of opera and concert repertoire, as well as in planning whole seasons. I am confident that Longborough’s musical standards will be in imaginative and capable hands, and in my new role as Conductor Laureate I look forward to a happy and productive collaboration.”

Commenting on his appointment, **Christopher Ward** said:

“Longborough Festival Opera, founded through the bold vision and dedication of Martin and Lizzie Graham, is a truly special place. Over the years it has built deep and loyal relationships with its audiences while remaining firmly committed to nurturing the audiences of the future through its far-reaching education and community work.

“In meeting the Longborough team, I was immediately struck by their collective enthusiasm for the festival and by the innovative, collaborative spirit that has shaped it into the remarkable annual event it is today. I am hugely excited to become part of that team and to bring home the experience I have gained over two decades working within the German opera house system – particularly in the Wagner repertoire.

“Together with the staff, artists and the Longborough Festival Orchestra I look forward to helping continue Longborough’s journey of offering audiences exceptional theatrical and musical experiences, combined with the uniquely warm welcome that defines the festival, set amidst the beauty of the Cotswolds landscape.”