

Citation - SIMONE YOUNG AM

19 September 2025

Pro-Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present Simone Young AM to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Music (honoris causa) for her extraordinary global impact as a trailblazing conductor, whose artistic brilliance and leadership have redefined classical music and elevated Australian musical excellence on the world stage.

Simone is one of the most distinguished conductors of our time, conducting virtually every major opera company and orchestra in the western world, including the Vienna Philharmonic, the Hamburg State Opera, the Metropolitan Opera in New York and Opera Australia. Since 2022, she has been Chief Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

In 2024 Simone was the first Australian and the first woman to conduct Wagner's complete "Ring Cycle" in Bayreuth. This is the ultimate international and Germanic accolade for a conductor.

Simone's musical beginnings were at Monte Sant Angelo Mercy Convent at North Sydney, followed by studies here at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. She went onto teaching at Riverview, where she met her husband, Greg Condon.

She may have conducted on the world's grand stages from London and Vienna to New York and Australia but her earliest conducting experiences were with local Sydney amateur music groups, notably the Lane Cove Light Opera Company. It was there where Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pinafore* and *Trial by Jury* were directed by her friend Stuart Maunder while she conducted. Simone became known for stiletto heels and occasional forays between the orchestra pit and the dance stage, and soon she was back at The Opera House, working as a repetiteur for singers in rehearsal.

In 1986, when Maestro Stuart Challender was conducting the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, he suggested Simone go to Germany to further her studies. Armed with a small grant from the Wagner Society and a Churchill Fellowship, Simone subsequently took up a position at Cologne Opera, as repetiteur and conductor. In 1991 she became Daniel Barenboim's assistant at the Bayreuth Festival, after which he invited her to become resident conductor at the Berlin State Opera. Here she developed her affinity for the German Romantic repertoire, in particular the works of Wagner, Strauss, Bruckner, Mahler and Beethoven.

It may be of considerable relevance to historians that she seemed to have passed effortlessly through the final and formerly impenetrable barriers for women conductors, but hardly at all to Simone who prefers to be known simply as a conductor, not a woman conductor.

Not only has she enlivened the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and displayed to their finest the newly enhanced acoustics of our Opera House; she has brought classical orchestral music to a younger generation and interpreted the romantic "classics" in new and expansive ways.

It is appropriate at a university that we remember the role of our teachers and others who went before, together with those who will come hereafter - our students. The world is indeed fortunate that Simone was mentored by three of Australia's finest international conductors - Maestro Stuart Challender, Dr Richard Bonyngé and Sir Charles Mackerras who, like Simone, brought Australia and central Europe closer together with music.

When accepting her award as Young Australian of the Year in 1988, Simone said her role was to be an ambassador for the arts in Australia. She has remained true to this vocation, as ambassador-extraordinaire for Australian musicianship throughout the world.

Pro-Chancellor, I present Simone Young AM to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Music (honoris causa) and I invite you to confer the degree upon her.