



Song in Sign

23 January 19:30

Milton Court Concert Hall, Guildhall School of Music and Drama

30 January 19:00

Bradshaw Hall, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire

2 February 19:30

RNCM Concert Hall, Royal Northern College of Music

1 March 13:00

Stevenson Hall, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Glasgow

formidAbility



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**
LOTTERY FUNDED



About the Project

Song in Sign is a creative infusion of languages and cultures that connects the hearing and Deaf experiences and celebrates the strength that comes from difference. Through the expressive beauty of Sign Languages, we add visual expression to the energy and emotion in the music, while our audio describer's poetic description (available via headsets) ensures that visually impaired audiences are also included. Captioning in English enables everyone to follow the story, no matter what the language.

Dame Gillian Karawe Whitehead's "Awa Herea" sets the tone for the whole performance: "many strands woven together form an enduring, infinite, colourful cloth."

We are on a journey from the warmth of a New Zealand forest to the bleakness of a northern European winter, each song matching literary themes from our newly commissioned work: The Happy Prince by Rylan Gleave (composer) and Max Chase (librettist).





formidAbility

formidAbility is, to our knowledge, the UK's only majority disability-led opera company. Inspired by her work singing with Paraorchestra and her experience as a sight impaired opera singer, Joanne Roughton-Arnold (soprano) joined with Holly Mathieson (conductor) to found the company in 2019. The passionate belief that opera has the potential to reach many more people if we better reflect the diversity of the general public is at the core of our work. Nearly one in four people in the UK identify as disabled, but we don't see anywhere near that number on stage, in creative teams or in opera company governance.

We seek to lead by example: engaging a mix of disabled and non-disabled professional artists to create powerful work of the highest calibre that speaks to as wide a demographic as possible, weaving accessibility for our audiences throughout our productions. We believe that by placing accessibility front and centre and giving it artistic life of its own, we enrich the experience of all artists and audiences, breaking down barriers and challenging perceptions about disability and inclusion in the arts. We make art for everyone, raising the profile of disabled artists to the wider profession and shining a light on the talent and skills that have gone unnoticed for far too long.



Programme

First Half

Gillian Whitehead Awa Herea

Vocalise; Karakia; Awa Herea;
The Berries; Lake Ianthe; Scale
and Perspective; The Sandfly;
Awa Herea

Judith Exley A Fly

Judith Exley Peacocks

Herbert Howells King David

Henri Duparc Romance de Mignon
(Mignon's song)

Robert Schumann Tanzlied
(Dance Song)

Richard Strauss Heimliche Aufforderung
(Secret Invitation)

Richard Strauss Morgen! (Tomorrow!)

* Please note that the programme for 1 March 2024 - Royal Conservatoire of Scotland concert is a shortened programme of 1 hour, without an interval



Programme

Second Half

Robert Schumann Unter'm Fenster

(Beneath the Window)

Henri Duparc Au Pays Où Se Fait La Guerre

(To The Country Where

They Are At War)

Herbert Howells A Widow Bird

Ivor Gurney Snow

Herbert Howells The Song of the Secret

Madeleine Dring Song of a Nightclub

Proprietress

Richard Strauss Im Abendrot

(In Twilight)

Rylan Gleave The Happy Prince

(librettist Max Chase)

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Programme Notes

Awa Herea

Dame Gillian Karawe Whitehead | Ngāi Terangi DNZM, MNZM (b.1941)
(words and music), translation into te reo Māori by Keri Kaa

Awa herea was commissioned by soprano Tracey Chadwell, with assistance from Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council (now Creative New Zealand) and the Arts Council of Great Britain. The first performance was given by Tracey Chadwell and Margaret Nielsen (piano) on 15 July 1993 in the Adam Concert Room at Victoria University School of Music, Wellington.

Gillian Whitehead says: “I wrote the words for Awa Herea as I was travelling round Te Wai Pounamu — the south island of Aotearoa. The title means ‘braided rivers’.

The work is in 8 sections: **Vocalise, Karakia, Awa Herea, The Berries, Lake Ianthe, Scale and perspective, The Sandfly, Awa Herea (conclusion).**

After a **vocalise** and **karakia** (prayer), the song **Awa Herea** draws on imagery of the east coast rivers. It suggests that a single thread, though strong, has an end — 2 threads, woven together, are much stronger.

The Berries describes a scene walking from Ship Cove in the Marlborough Sounds. **Lake Ianthe** reacts to a beautiful scene where there is knowledge that behind the fringe of beauty the forest is being clear felled, while **Scale and Perspective** and **The Sandfly** deal with the comparative length of life cycles. The final section concludes the work; many strands woven together form an enduring, infinite, colourful cloth.”



Programme Notes

Born and educated in Aotearoa, Gillian Whitehead (DNZM, MNZM), is of Ngāi Terangi and Tuhoe descent. She lived and worked as a freelance composer in Europe and Australia for 15 years, then taught at the Sydney Conservatorium during the 1980s before returning to Aotearoa to resume her career as a freelance composer.

Her music, written for orchestral, vocal, choral, chamber, operatic and solo forces, sometimes involves taonga pūoro, te reo Māori or directed improvisation. In 2018 she became an icon of the Arts Foundation of New Zealand, and in 2021 received a Ngā Tohu ā Tā Kingi Ihaka/Sir Kingi Ihaka Award, recognising her lifetime contribution to ngā Toi Māori.

Four Small Songs: “A Fly” and “Peacocks”

Judith Exley (b. 1939) and Ruth Dallas CBE (1919-2008)

In 1993 New Zealand celebrated 100 years since the country led the world in giving women the right to vote. Composed in 1989 and revised in 1993, Judith Exley’s Four Small Songs were included in Kowhai, an anthology of songs composed by New Zealand women to mark this occasion, published by SOUNZ Centre for New Zealand Music.

The composer says of this set: “The poems appealed to me for their simplicity and directness. In setting them I have chosen to work with limited materials, to highlight that simplicity”.



Programme Notes

Judith Exley was born in Rawene, New Zealand in 1939. She trained as a teacher and after raising a family began to indulge her fascination with non-western music, exploring the forms from Indonesia and Japan. This led her to study for a degree in music at Victoria University in Wellington, which she completed with Honours in 1990.

She is one of the founding members of the Wellington Gamelan community and has written compositions for Gamelan ensembles.

She lives in Petone, near the sea, and has taught flute and composition in schools in the greater Wellington area. In her own compositions, she enjoys working texturally to create evocative soundscapes.

Ruth Dallas was one of New Zealand's most distinguished and widely read poets. Born in Invercargill, New Zealand's southern most city, she maintained a deep connection to the southern South Island throughout her life. She was also strongly influenced by Asian poetry and thought, and by an appreciation of poetry's links with song. When she was 15 she noticed reduced vision in one eye, which was removed to save the other. she was determined that her visual impairment would not be a barrier to success. She had numerous collections of poetry and children's stories published. In 1978 she was awarded an honorary doctorate in literature by the University of Otago and in 1989 was made a CBE for services to literature. In 1999 she won the Royal New Zealand Foundation for the Blind's National Blind Achievers Award for her contributions to literature.



Programme Notes

King David from “A Garland for de la Mare”

Herbert Howells (1892-1983) and Walter de la Mare (1873-1956)

Herbert Howells said of this song: “I’m prouder to have written King David than almost anything else of mine”, and Walter de la Mare said that this song was “so perfect that he did not want anyone else to set it.” Howells and de la Mare were friends; Howells had a close affinity with de la Mare’s poetry and set over thirty of his poems as songs. When de la Mare died in 1956, Howells wrote his Threnody for Walter de la Mare for string quartet in his memory; it is one of Howells’ most emotionally intense and beautiful works. As an additional memorial to his friend, Howells wanted to write a cycle of songs, to be called ‘A Garland for de la Mare’. This took a long time to ‘get right’; he dug out some previously written songs, wrote a couple of new ones, and initially assembled a collection of six songs. He was planning to extend this and publish it to coincide with de la Mare’s centenary in 1973, and particularly wanted the set to include King David, but this had already been published in 1923, so for contractual reasons it was not able to be re-issued as part of this proposed cycle of songs. Delays and wrangles such as this prevented the publication of the song-cycle up to the time of Howells’ death in 1983, and the complete set of 13 songs was finally published posthumously in 1995.

King David is dedicated to the tenor John Coates (1865-1941), who was particularly known for singing Elgar’s Dream of Gerontius and for his Wagner roles, which included Siegfried, Tristan and Lohengrin.



Programme Notes

Herbert Howells was born in Gloucestershire, the son of a plumber, builder, painter, and decorator, who was also the organist at the local Baptist church. The young Herbert was soon deputising for his father at the church and also at the parish church. When he was 16, he became a pupil at the choir school of Gloucester Cathedral, where his classmates included Ivor Novello, and also Ivor Gurney, but more of that later. In 1920 Howells married a singer, Dorothy Dawe (contralto), who he had met in 1911 while working as her accompanist. In 1935 their son Michael, then age 9, contracted polio and died three days later. Howells found solace in composing, and some of his most beautiful music, including his choral *Hymnus Paradisi*, was written in his son's memory, an example of how even the most tragic events can sometimes result in creations of great beauty. Howells died on 23rd February 1983 in a nursing home in Putney, and his ashes were buried in Westminster Abbey.

Walter de la Mare was a Londoner; he was born in Charlton and lived later in Beckenham and Twickenham. He was a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral and attended the choir school there. After leaving school he worked in the London office of the American oil company Standard Oil (which he hated) from 1890 to 1908 when he was given a civil list pension which enabled him to concentrate on his writing. De la Mare writings can be divided into two types; works for children, and writings with a supernatural theme, and he quite often combined the two. Literature for children (he was father to four) includes *Peacock Pie*, a volume of 81 poems published in 1913, from which *King David* comes, and his works based on the supernatural include the novel *Henry Brocken*, published in 1904.



Programme Notes

De la Mare suffered a coronary thrombosis in 1947 and died of another one nine years later having spent the last year of his life bed-ridden. His ashes are buried in St Paul's Cathedral, where he had sung as a choirboy seventy years before.

Romance de Mignon (Mignon's Song)

Henri Duparc (1848-1933) and Victor Wilder (1835-1892) after Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Mignon is a fictional character in Goethe's mammoth 8-volume novel *Wilhelm Meister*. She is Italian, the child of an incestuous relationship between the mysterious Harper, a blind, travelling musician, and his sister Sperata. The nature of this relationship results in Sperata losing her mind, and Mignon, for her own safety, is brought up by foster-parents. They live by a lake in the mountains, and through her childhood Mignon frequently goes on long walks alone, and dresses in boys' clothes. One day, she fails to return home from one of her wanderings, and her hat is found floating on the lake. She is presumed drowned, but she has in fact been kidnapped by a group of traveling acrobats and taken over the Alps to Germany. She is treated brutally, and is rescued by Wilhelm Meister, who is a disillusioned businessman and merchant who goes travelling in order to try to find a purpose in his life. He happens to see the acrobats' show, takes pity on Mignon, and buys her freedom. Mignon is just 13 years old at this point in the story, and she forms a close bond with Wilhelm who becomes a father-figure and saviour to her, and an object of her affections.



Programme Notes

In this song, translated into French from the original German, Mignon remembers the happiness of her Italian home, and expresses her feelings for Wilhelm Meister.

Henri Duparc was born in Paris. He studied law from 1867 to 1870, then served in the military during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870, as part of the garrison defending Paris during the Prussian siege. The following year, 1871, he founded the Société Nationale de Musique jointly with Saint-Saëns, with the aim of promoting French music. Duparc has achieved immortality in the world of Song with just a handful of masterpieces. He stopped composing entirely at the age of 37 as a result of neurasthenia, a condition that causes over-sensitivity to sensory stimuli, and he turned to religion for the remaining 48 years of his life, making frequent pilgrimages to Lourdes in the hope of a cure. He also suffered from crippling hyperaesthesia, and later blindness. He destroyed most of his music, leaving just this handful of songs and other works for us to enjoy. We are very fortunate that these incredible songs have survived for us to enjoy.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was a man of many talents: a scientist, diplomat, artist and linguist as well as a poet, novelist and playwright. He was a geologist, with a collection of over 17,800 rock samples which was the largest private collection of minerals in Europe, a biologist whose work proved to be important concerning the human intermaxillary bone, he wrote a theory of colour concerning the prism and spectrum, and he was an artist of whom nearly 3000 drawings survive.



Programme Notes

As a botanist he formulated a new theory on the metamorphosis of plants, and as an architect and engineer he was partly responsible for the design and construction of the Ducal Palace and Botanical Garden at Weimar. Like Duparc, Goethe studied law, but his career as a lawyer was short-lived. In 1775 he was invited to Weimar to join the court of Karl August, Duke of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach. Weimar was an important centre for the Arts, and Goethe lived there for the rest of his life, holding various posts: heading the Duke's War Commission, Mines and Highways Commissions, at one point being the Duke's Chancellor of the Exchequer (pretty much Prime Minister), and heading the Ducal Library. In 1786-88 Goethe visited Italy, exploring the art and architecture of classical Rome, and ancient Greek architecture in southern Italy. He described this time there in his *Italienische Reise* (Italian Journey), published in 1816. Back in Weimar, in 1806 Goethe's house was attacked and occupied by members of Napoleon's invading army. Soon after this incident, Goethe married his long-term girl-friend - they had lived together for 18 years. Goethe died of heart failure in 1832, age 82.

Victor Wilder was a Belgian musicologist, translator and literary critic. He was born in Ghent and moved to Paris in his twenties where he remained for the rest of his life. His poems were set by César Franck and Edouard Lalo among others, and his non-poetical works include a two-volume study of Mozart; *Mozart, l'homme et l'artiste: histoire de sa vie*.



Programme Notes

Duparc's Mignon is dedicated to "Mon ami Arthur Coquard". He was a fellow school-pupil of Duparc in Paris, and they remained friends until Coquard's death in 1910. Like both Duparc and Goethe, Coquard initially studied law before coming to music in his 30s, but much of his music was never published and is forgotten now. One of his many jobs was the director of the Institut des Jeunes Aveugles (National Institute for Blind Children) in Paris from 1891 to 1899. He was also the music critic for two important French newspapers; Le Monde and L'Echo de Paris.

Tanzlied from "Vier Duette" Op.78

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) and Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866)

Robert Schumann also initially studied law, in accordance with his family's wishes. While studying at Leipzig University, he began piano lessons with Friedrich Wieck, the city's most eminent piano teacher, whose daughter Clara he would later marry, and he soon decided to abandon his law studies to pursue a career in music. An injury to his hand, which may have been focal dystonia, or may have been the result of a mechanical device that Wieck recommended to Schumann to strengthen his fingers, put a stop to his piano-playing ambitions, and he turned whole-heartedly to composition. This is another example perhaps of good coming out of something bad, as this resulted in so much beautiful music that Schumann otherwise may not have written. It is generally thought that Schumann was bi-polar.



Programme Notes

His reaction to, and depression following, the deaths of his brother Julius and sister-in-law Rosalie from cholera in 1833 sowed the seeds of, or at least exacerbated, his future mental health problems. His *Davidsbündlertänze* for piano, written in 1837, shows his dual personality, with the more passionate and compulsive movements signed F (for Florestan) and the more dreamy numbers signed E (for Eusebius), the two names Schumann used to describe the two sides of his personality. Schumann's feelings for Clara Wieck were growing in strength and intensity, but when her father found out, he forbade them to see or write to each other, thinking that Robert would distract Clara from the big plans he had for her to be a world-class virtuoso pianist. As it happened, after eventually marrying Robert, Clara continued her career as one of the world's leading pianists, as well as not only having to deal with Robert's incarceration in an asylum, but also bringing up their eight children, four of whom died before she did. These would have been extraordinary achievements for anyone, but for a woman in the 19th century they were almost super-human.

In 1837, when Schumann was 27, he formally proposed to Clara, then 18, who accepted. However, her father refused to allow the wedding to take place, and Robert and Clara, and a long and bitter struggle began, which culminated in legal proceedings to force his hand. On 12th September 1840, they finally married, having won the legal battle with her father. Theirs was a supremely happy marriage, but Robert's mental health issues were increasing; he was seeing angelic and demonic visions, and developed a fear of metallic instruments.



Programme Notes

He also suffered from tinnitus. On 27th February 1854 he attempted suicide by throwing himself into the River Rhine. At his own request he asked to be admitted to an asylum, where he remained until his death on 29th July 1856, age 46.

Tanzlied is the first of Schumann's four duets Op 78, written in August and September 1849. Robert and Clara had now been married for nine years, their fifth surviving child had been born in July, and we can well believe that Clara often had the upper hand in their relationship.

The poet Friedrich Rückert was fluent in over thirty languages, including Arabic, Turkish and Persian, and many oriental languages, and translated works including the Maqamat-al-Hariri a collection of fifty stories by the twelfth century Arab poet Al-Hariri of Basra and Hamasa, oder die ältesten arabischen Volkslieder (Hamasa, or the Oldest Arabian Folk Songs). He was appointed Professor of Oriental Languages at the University of Erlangen in 1826 and held the same post at the University of Berlin from 1841. He wrote over ten thousand poems, published in volumes that include Ostlichen Rosen (Eastern Roses - 1822), Morgenländische Sagen und Geschichten (Oriental Myths and Poems - 1837) and Liebesfrühling (Spring of Love - 1844), a cycle of love-songs, which is now his best-known work. In 1815, the year of the Battle of Waterloo, he published his Napoleon, eine politische Komödie in drei Stücken (Napoleon, a Political Comedy in Three Parts) and his longest work is Die Weisheit des Brahmanen (The Wisdom of the Brahmins) which was published in six volumes from 1836 to 1839.



Programme Notes

Vier Lieder: “Heimliche Aufforderung” and “Morgen” Op. 27

Richard Strauss (1864-1949) and John Henry Mackay (1864-1933)

Both Heimliche Aufforderung and Morgen come from Richard Strauss’s Vier Lieder Op 27, written as a wedding present to his wife the soprano Pauline de Ahna in 1894. The poems are by John Henry Mackay, who was born in Greenock in Scotland; his mother was German and his father a Scottish marine insurance broker. His father died before John was two years old, and mother and child moved to Germany. He lived in Berlin from the age of 32 until his death and became a campaigner for gay rights, though that terminology wasn’t in use at that time. Writing under the pseudonym Sagitta, his works include Die Bücher der Namenlosen Liebe (Books of the Nameless Love), a series of books issued twice a year from 1905 to 1913, available by subscription only, that promoted the cause of homosexual emancipation.

Mackay’s other main work in this field, also written under the pseudonym Sagitta, is Der Puppenjunge, which was also published in English with the title The Hustler in 1926. It is a sign of the times that Mackay was very concerned that the authorship of these works should never be traced back to him. Though he was living in Berlin, and they were published in the same city, all the manuscripts and the correspondence dealing with the publications came from Dresden, in the handwriting of Mackay’s friend the actress Luis Firle.



Programme Notes

That this was justified became evident in 1908, when several manuscripts were seized by the police, resulting in a court case that lasted nineteen months, at the end of which the manuscripts were declared immoral and ordered to be destroyed, and Mackay's publisher Bernard Zack was given a heavy fine, which was in fact paid by Mackay. Strauss knew Mackay personally, so it is inconceivable that he was unaware of Mackay's work.

Both these songs can be read as speaking of same-sex love; in *Heimliche Aufforderung* a signal is passed between two lovers at a party to arrange a secret assignation in the garden and *Morgen* expresses the hope of a future world in which everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation (and by extension anyone who is 'disabled' or 'different' in any way), can live in happiness, free from bigotry and discrimination, and be fully accepted for who they are.

The relationship between Richard Strauss and his wife often baffled their contemporaries. She had a volatile temper, was easily jealous, frequently belittled her husband's work in public, was famous for throwing attention-seeking tantrums, and bullied him mercilessly. She had a notorious obsession with cleanliness and was notorious for running her gloved finger over the furniture in other peoples houses to check for dust. However Strauss declared he could not live without her; he called her "Mein kleiner Igel" (My little hedgehog) and when he died holding her hand, their daughter Alice said of Pauline that she could never imagine anybody could weep so much.



Programme Notes

Strauss said that he had her voice in mind when writing all his songs, and he wrote far fewer songs after she retired from singing in 1906. His opera *Intermezzo* (1927), which sets Strauss' own libretto, depicts the Strauss' turbulent home life, only thinly disguised as the troubles of the Storch family. Christine (Pauline) is depicted as a snobbish, bad-tempered, self-dramatising shrew; this understandably angered and upset Pauline, but Strauss' depiction of himself as Robert Storch is as unflattering.


Unter'm Fenster (Beneath the Window)

from "Vier Duette" Op. 34

Robert Schumann and Robert Burns (1759-1796) translated by Wilhelm Gerhard (1780-1858)

Schumann's four duets op 34 were written in July 1840, his 'Liederjahr', that magical 'Year of Song' when he wrote 138 songs inspired by his marriage to Clara Wieck. Unsurprisingly, all four duets in this opus are about love and seduction. Two of the four are translations of Burns, whose poems also make an appearance in Schumann's *Myrthen*, a collection of songs written earlier that year, and later presented to Clara as a wedding present.

Robert Burns, Scotland's national poet, was born in Ayrshire, into poverty and hardship. His schooling was intermittent, and he worked as a farm labourer through much of his childhood, receiving most of his education (reading, writing, maths and history) from his father. Burns was writing songs and poetry from an early age. In 1786, when Burns was 27, a volume of his poetry was published with the title *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*.





Programme Notes

This has become known as the Kilmarnock Volume and contains many of his best-known poems including To a Mouse. Later that year Burns moved to Edinburgh, and a second edition was published. On the back of this Burns quickly became an established part of Edinburgh society. At this time Burns became interested in Scots folksongs and was a contributor to the collection of songs known as the Scots Musical Museum which began publication in 1787. In 1790 he wrote what many consider his masterpiece, Tam O' Shanter. He moved to Dumfries and contributed lyrics for over 100 songs for the collection The Melodies of Scotland, and these, together with his contributions to the Scots Musical Museum, cemented his reputation as a poet and lyricist. He travelled round Scotland collecting folk tunes, and wrote words to them, combining his own poetry with words and phrases and sometimes complete verses from traditional songs he heard. Examples are Auld lang Syne and My Love is like a Red, Red Rose. The publisher George Thomson commissioned arrangements of Scottish, Welsh and Irish Airs from composers included Haydn and Beethoven, for which Burns wrote many of the words. Politically Burns was a radical, as can be seen in his A Man's a Man for A' That, based on Thomas Paine's The Rights of Man and The Slaves' Lament. Burns' 'day job' was working for Customs and Excise, which often created uncomfortable conflicts with his political views. The long journeys on horseback that his job entailed, often in stormy weather, took a toll on his health, and Burns died in 1796 age just 37.

Wilhelm Gerhard was born in Weimar. He was a merchant dealing in fabrics, and also worked as a dramaturg at the Leipzig Stadttheater.



Programme Notes

He was the father of Livia Frege, Schumann's favourite soprano, who sang in the premiere of his secular oratorio *Das Paradies und die Peri* and whose operatic roles included Giulietta in Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, Rosina in Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, and Cherubini in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*. Gerhard translated Byron's *Mazeppa*, based on the life of Ivan Mazeppa, a 17th century Ukrainian leader, and a large number of poems by Robert Burns. His house in Leipzig was the venue for regular salons which attracted guests including Robert and Clara Schumann, Mendelssohn, and the poet Friedrich Rückert, who wrote the text of *Tanzlied*, heard earlier in this programme.

Au pays où se fait la guerre (To the land where there is war)

Henri Duparc and Théophile Gautier (1811-1872)

This song is the only surviving fragment of Duparc's **Roussalka**, an opera based on Pushkin's last verse drama. This opera was one of the many works destroyed by Duparc. It was written while he was serving in the military during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. The song is dedicated to Mademoiselle Eugénie Vergin (1864-1941), a singer and singing teacher, and wife of the conductor Édouard Colonne, who founded the Colonne Concerts in Paris, and championed the music of Berlioz as well as the songs of Duparc.

In a poignant letter to his friend the composer Jean Cras, dated 19th January 1922, Duparc wrote:

“Having lived for 25 years in a splendid dream, the whole idea of [musical] representation has become – I repeat to you – repugnant.



Programme Notes

The other reason for this destruction, which I do not regret, was the complete moral transformation that God imposed on me 20 years ago and which, in a single minute, obliterated all of my past life. Since then, Roussalka, not having any connection with my new life, should no longer exist.”

The poem is from Théophile Gautier’s *La Comédie de la Mort* (The Comedy of Death), first published in 1838. The title *La Comédie de la Mort* harks back to Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and the poems portray death in all its forms, sometimes through the eyes and words of a young beautiful dead girl who speaks of the loves of her life. For Gautier, death is something voluptuous and exhilarating, the flip side to life and an often-welcome escape from life’s turbulence.

Théophile Gautier was born in Tarbes in south-west France. When he was 18, he was introduced to Victor Hugo, under whose influence and encouragement Gautier turned from being an aspiring painter to having a career as a writer. Gautier was present at the premiere of Victor Hugo’s play *Hernani* on 25th February 1830 at the Comédie-Française, where he wore for the first time (probably) the red waistcoat that was to become his trademark. Gautier worked as a journalist, writing for *La Presse* as their art and theatre reviewer, and later becoming the editor of the literary magazine *Revue de Paris* and the weekly illustrated review *L’Artiste*. In these publications he promoted his belief in ‘Art for art’s sake’. He was well-known for his very vivid travel writings, including *Voyage en Espagne* (1843), *Trésors d’Art de la Russie* (1858) and *Voyage en Russie* (1867).



Programme Notes

He also travelled to Algeria (1845), Italy (1850 and 1852), Constantinople (1852) and Egypt (1869). Gautier was also writing poetry; he always felt himself to be a poet and was bitter about the fact that he had to work as a journalist (which he disliked and thought demeaning) in order to earn a living. Gautier supported the ideals of the 1848 revolution and wrote many articles promoting the new republic, including *La République de l'Avenir* (The Republic of the Future). One of Gautier's main loves was the ballet; he wrote several ballet scenarios, including *Giselle*, first performed in 1841 with music by Adolphe Adam, famously danced by Carlotta Grisi, an Italian ballerina who was the love of Gautier's life. She however rejected him, so he began a relationship with her sister Ernesta (Ernestina); they never married, but this relationship lasted 22 years, and they had two daughters together.

The Widow Bird from Four Songs Op. 22

Herbert Howells and Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

A trio of songs by Herbert Howells and Ivor Gurney comes next. Howells and Gurney were friends; both were born in Gloucestershire, they were choristers together at Gloucester Cathedral, and they went on long walks together through the Gloucestershire countryside. Ivor Gurney entered the Royal College of Music in 1911, and Howells followed him a year later, studying under Charles Villiers Stanford, Hubert Parry, and Charles Wood.



Programme Notes

The Widow Bird is the third song of Howells' four songs Op 22, written in 1915 when he was 23. He had just been diagnosed with Graves' Disease and given six months to live, but a previously untried treatment consisting of twice-weekly radium injections in the neck was begun, which saved his life. This treatment lasted for two years, during which he composed works including the piano quartet in A minor, dedicated to Ivor Gurney. This treatment prevented Howells from being conscripted to fight in the first world war, which saved him from possible death or being gassed as Gurney was.

It can safely be said that the life of the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, was full of drama. He was the illegitimate son of a Whig MP. He went to Eton, where he was cruelly bullied, and later Oxford, from which he was expelled when it was discovered that he was the author of a pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism*. Soon afterwards, at the age of 19, Shelley eloped to Scotland to marry Harriet Westbrook, then age 16, leading to him being disowned by his family. He became a disciple of William Godwin, a radical and one of the earliest proponents of Anarchism, and he wrote and published leaflets attacking the English government. At the age of 22 he abandoned Harriet (now pregnant with their son) and ran away to Switzerland with Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, daughter of William Godwin and the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. They returned to England and then in 1816 went back to Switzerland as a threesome with Mary's stepsister Claire, who was infatuated with Shelley. He rejected her, and in anger she instigated an affair with Lord Byron, who was living in the house next door.



Programme Notes

Mary wrote *Frankenstein* while they were there. Meanwhile Harriet committed suicide by drowning in the Serpentine in Hyde Park. Later that year Shelley married Mary, and the couple moved to Italy, living in Venice close to Byron, and later in Florence and Rome. Shelley was drowned at the age of 30 in a sudden storm off the coast of Italy, while in his sailing boat, the 'Don Juan'. Conspiracy theories circulate to this day debating whether this was suicide, murder, or an accident.

Snow

Ivor Gurney (1890-1937) and Edward Thomas (1878-1917)

The child referred to in Edward Thomas' poem *Snow* is his youngest daughter Myfanwy, his third child, born on 10th August 1910, so aged 4 ½ when this poem was written on 7th January 1915. Thomas himself would be killed at Arras while fighting in the first world war just over two years later. Only six of Thomas's poems were published in his lifetime; *Snow* was published posthumously in 1918 in a volume called *Last Poems*. Ivor Gurney only discovered Thomas's poems after his death, and was bowled over by them, setting a total of nineteen as songs.

Edward Thomas was a Londoner, born in Lambeth to Welsh parents. His father was a staff clerk at the Board of Trade who introduced him to literature, particularly the works of Isaac Walton (*The Compleat Angler*) and Richard Jefferies, works that instilled in Thomas a life-long and rather romanticised love of the English countryside.



Programme Notes

His first book *The Woodland Life* (1897) was dedicated to James Noble, the father of Helen, to whom Thomas was secretly engaged and who he secretly married in Fulham in 1899, in secret because of his father's disapproval of the match. They had three children together. His publications include several guidebooks including *The Heart of England* (1906), *The South Country* (1909) and *The Ickniel Way* (1913). He began writing poetry around 1914, with the encouragement of the American poet Robert Frost (1874-1963) who was part of the literary community living in the Gloucestershire village of Dymock. Thomas became a part of this circle that included Rupert Brooke, John Drinkwater and Wilfred Gibson. Thomas' most famous poem, *Adlestrop*, was written after his train stopped at that Gloucestershire railway station in June 1914. Thomas enlisted in the Artists' Rifles Officers' Training Corps in July 1915. Thomas was encouraged in this by Robert Frost, whose poem *The Road Not Taken* was written in response to Thomas' notorious indecision, particularly regarding whether or not he should enlist. Thomas was killed at the Battle of Arras in April 1917, shot through the chest. W H Davies' poem *Killed in Action* (Edward Thomas) expresses something of his friend's devastation at his death. In 1913 Gurney suffered a minor nervous breakdown. He had always suffered from bouts of depression, and he took time off from studying at the Royal College of Music to spend time in his beloved Gloucestershire to recover. The following July he returned to the Royal College, but his studies were interrupted by the outbreak of war. Gurney tried to enlist in the 1st and 5th Gloucestershire Regiment (known as the Glosters) but was rejected because of his weak eyesight.



Programme Notes

He tried again in February 1915 and was accepted. On 17th April 1917, Gurney was wounded, shot in the arm. He spent some time in a military hospital in Rouen, then sent back to the Front. On 17th September he was caught in a gas attack, sent back to Britain and admitted to the Bangour War Hospital in Edinburgh. Gurney fell in love with Annie Nelson Drummond, one of the nurses at Bangour. His mental condition worsened, tipped over the edge when Annie Nelson Drummond stopped writing to him. In June 1918 he wrote to Sir Hubert Parry, Principal of the RCM threatening suicide. He seemed outwardly to recover though, and in October 1918 was discharged from the army. That autumn Gurney once again resumed his studies at the RCM, this time with Vaughan Williams. The years 1919-1922 were his most prolific for song writing, and Snow dates from this time. Gurney was finding life in London and at the RCM difficult, he felt the pull of Gloucestershire, and on one occasion walked there by night from London. In 1922 Gurney abandoned his studies at the RCM and went to live with an aunt in the outskirts of Gloucester.

He tried many jobs; as farm labourer, cinema organist, church organist, a clerk in a tax office, but his mental state didn't allow him to hold down any of them. His behaviour became more and more irrational, he went for long nocturnal walks, arriving back at the house in the middle of the night, leaving mud on the furniture; erratic eating habits, and frightening his brother and his wife with tales of being tortured and being bombarded with radio waves. In September 1922 Gurney was admitted as a patient to Barnwood House mental hospital in Gloucester.



Programme Notes

A desperate night-time escape during which he injured himself and the police were called led to the decision to move him to the City of London Mental Hospital in Dartford, Kent. He was admitted there on 21st December 1922 and remained in the asylum until his death 15 years later. He died of tuberculosis on 26th December 1937 and was finally allowed to return to his beloved Gloucestershire to be buried at Twigworth church. Herbert Howells played the organ at the funeral.

Song of the Secret from “A Garland for de la Mare”

Herbert Howells and Walter de la Mare

Herbert Howells wrote Song of the Secret in September 1969 for his cycle A Garland for de la Mare. The poem is from Walter de la Mare’s Peacock Pie, first published in 1913, and written ostensibly for children.

Song of a Nightclub Proprietress from “Five Betjeman Songs”

Madeleine Dring (1923-1977) and John Betjeman (1906-1984)

Madeleine Dring was born in Raleigh Road, Haringay in north London. Her mother was an amateur mezzo-soprano and her father an amateur cellist. She won a junior violin scholarship to the Royal College of Music which she entered on her 10th birthday, and continued there as a senior student, studying composition with Herbert Howells and briefly with Vaughan Williams. It was at the RCM that she developed a love of theatre, which stayed with her for life and led to her writing extensively for the stage, television and radio.



Programme Notes

In 1947 she married the oboist Roger Lord, for whom she wrote several works including her best-known music *Dances for Solo Oboe*. Most of her works are songs and piano pieces, but she also wrote a one-act opera *Cupboard Love*, and a 'Dance-Drama' *The Fair Queen of Wu*, broadcast by the BBC in 1951, and several stage plays produced between 1946 and 1971.

The *Five Betjeman Songs* from which this song is taken, were written in 1976. The manuscripts are in the Royal College of Music Library. Betjeman's poem is called *Sun and Fun*. Kummel is a Dutch liqueur flavoured with caraway seed, cumin and fennel. Baby Pollies refers to Apollinaris, bottles of German sparkling mineral water sold in the UK as Baby Pollies. The Sedanca refers to the Owen Sedanca, an exclusive GT-class car built in the UK in the 1970s. The model was commissioned by Gerald Ronson, owner of the HR Owen car dealership, and was a hand-crafted body placed on a Jaguar XJ6 chassis, the design inspired by the Lamborghini Espada. The car was unveiled in Kensington in 1973 and priced at £8,500, which is £126,770 in today's prices. 80 orders were taken but the 1973 oil crisis intervened and only two were ever sold. Teddy refers to King Edward VIII, who abdicated in 1936 over his relationship with the divorced American Wallis Simpson.

John Betjeman was born in London, the son of a silverware maker of Dutch descent. The family lived in Gospel Oak, and three years later moved to Highgate. His schooling was at Marlborough College in Wiltshire and then Magdalen College Oxford where he studied English Literature. Betjeman left Oxford without a degree, but his interest in architecture was nourished there and he had a poem published in *Isis*, the university magazine.



Programme Notes

After Oxford, Betjeman worked as a film critic for the London Evening Standard and as an editor for the Architectural Review. Betjeman was bi-sexual: he made (unsubstantiated) claims to have had affairs with the Labour Party leader Hugh Gaitskell and with the poet W H Auden. He married the daughter of Field Marshal Lord Chetwode on 29th July 1933, after which they lived in Uffington in Berkshire (now Oxfordshire) where he was a churchwarden. Betjeman was instrumental in setting up the Shell Guides to English counties, aimed at tourists travelling round by car, and he wrote the guides to Cornwall and Devon. During the second world war Betjeman worked with the films division of the Ministry of Information, and in 1941 was appointed British press attaché in Dublin and may have been involved in intelligence work. After the war Betjeman's poetry became ever more widely read – his Collected Poems (1958) reached sales of 100,000. He was a founder member of the Victorian Society in 1958 (he was instrumental in preventing the demolition of St Pancras Station in the 1960s) and made a number of documentaries for television including Metro-Land (1973) and A Passion for Churches (1974). Betjeman was appointed Poet Laureate in 1972, having been rejected for that post in 1967 because of 'anti-establishment views'. Betjeman suffered from Parkinson's Disease and died in Cornwall in May 1984 age 77.

Im Abendrot from Vier Letzte Lieder (Four Last Songs)

Richard Strauss and Joseph von Eichendorff (1788-1857)

Richard Strauss's Vier Letzte Lieder (Four Last Songs) were written in 1948 when he was 84.



Programme Notes

Three are settings of poems by Hermann Hesse, the fourth, *Im Abendrot*, sets a text by Joseph von Eichendorff. They were premiered in London on 22nd May 1950, eight months after Strauss's death, by Kirsten Flagstad and the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler at the Royal Albert Hall, and were published the same year by Boosey and Hawkes. Strauss's friend Ernst Roth was the chief editor at Booseys, having previously worked for Universal Edition in Vienna before fleeing that city when Austria was annexed by the Nazis in 1938. *Im Abendrot* was the first song of the four to be written, on 6th May 1948, but it is generally sung as the final song of the set (Strauss never specified an order). The postlude quotes Strauss's tone poem *Tod und Verklärung* (Death and Transfiguration), written 60 years previously.

The Prussian poet, novelist, and playwright Joseph von Eichendorff has come to be seen as the archetypal voice of German Romanticism. His father was a Prussian army officer, (Eichendorff himself enlisted in the Prussian Army in 1813 and remained there until Napoleon's defeat in 1815) and his mother came from an aristocratic family. He grew up in Lubowitz Castle, now in Poland, which was a sumptuous rococo villa, destroyed in 1945, whose lavish reconstruction bankrupted the family. Eichendorff began writing a diary from the age of ten, in which he related details of his family's financial troubles, recorded his love of Mozart and of the theatre. Eichendorff's diaries also relate his various love affairs, many unrequited, which led him to write some of his most famous poems, including *Das zerbrochene Ringlein* (The Broken Ring), published in 1813.



Programme Notes

His parents hoped Eichendorff would marry a rich heiress and thus save the family wealth and estates, but he fell in love with Aloysia von Larisch, a seventeen-year-old girl from an impoverished family, whom he married in 1815. The death of his mother a few years later resulted in the loss of the family's few remaining assets and their one remaining estate. Eichendorff spent most of his life working as a Civil Servant for the Prussian government; first as a clerk, then as a regional councillor in Danzig, then as Chief Inspector of Schools and Oberpräsidialrat (chief administrator) in Königsberg and finally as Privy Councillor at the Foreign Ministry in Berlin.

The Happy Prince

Rylan Gleave (b.1997) and Max Chase (b.1995)
after Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

formidAbility commissioned The Happy Prince in 2022, supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England. The work is scored for two Deaf actors, soprano, tenor and piano, i.e. it was conceived with space for signing integrated into the musical score and informed by the composer's familiarity with British Sign Language.

The piano sets the scene at the start: winter is coming, there is a hint of an approaching storm. A delicate flutter in the piano indicates a parting of the clouds and the late arrival of the swallow, who soars above the town, weary from his long flight and looking for a place to rest. He notices the beautiful gleaming statue of the happy prince, "a perfect golden room to rest a-while".



Programme Notes

This statue of the prince begins to weep, tears dropping like rain on the swallow's head. The prince tells the swallow about his past life filled with happiness with no hint of sorrow. But now as a statue, he looks down and sees the misery in his town. He asks the swallow to take the ruby from his sword, pluck his sapphire eyes from his face and peel off his golden skin to share among the poor and the sick. The swallow is horrified, asking "what will be left of you?" but eventually relents and does as the prince asks, the swallow's soaring music returning in the piano as he flies from house to house. The snow arrives and the prince is now dull and grey. The swallow has delayed his journey south for far too long. He rests on the prince's shoulder, exhausted and cold but reluctant to leave. He tries to tell the prince that he will stay always, but death overcomes him before he can finish the words.

New energy in the piano indicates the arrival of the townspeople the next morning. They are horrified to see the treasured statue of their happy prince is now ugly and dull with a dead bird at its feet. They toss the pieces of the statue into the furnace, then throw away the statue's leaden heart that remains along with the dead bird.

The piano writing becomes delicate, ethereal and spacious in rhythm and pitch. The swallow's fluttering motif from the beginning returns as a flicker of hope. The swallow's and the prince's spirits are united as the swallow promises to fly the prince's heart to fields of ruby flowers, rivers of bluest sapphire and fields of golden light. The prince cannot understand how the swallow can love him now that he is dull and grey, but the swallow reminds him of his promise to stay, always. The piece ends with their promise to each other floating in the air.



Programme Notes

Rylan Gleave is a composer and vocalist working in experimental and divergent fields. His work has been praised as “haunting” by The Herald, “dripping with spectral dread” by SNACK Magazine, and “rapturous” by The Scotsman, who named him One to Watch 2021, describing him as “one of the brightest lights in Scotland’s new music scene”.

Under moniker All Men Unto Me, Rylan creates genre-merging work, with 2023 debut release *In Chemical Transit* reviewed as “breath-taking” by Veil of Sound, and a “an outstanding and mind blowing recording” by Echoes and Dust. The live launch was a sold-out show at St Vincent’s Chapel, Edinburgh, with the support of Chamber Music Scotland. All Men Unto Me’s second album has grown via Sound and Music’s New Voices Programme, exploring the conditions of survivorship and trans-masculinity with an Anglican filter.

Recent notable performances have been with Ashenspire at Supersonic Festival, Roadburn Festival, Islington Assembly Hall, Amplifest, and ArcTanGent, and with class-work ensemble at Leipziger Jazztage, and Stadtgarten Köln. Rylan recorded at Abbey Road Studios with Oliver Vibrans, Paraorchestra, and Pulled By Magnets, where his performance of Scott Walker’s *The Drift* was premiered on Sky Arts, 2022. He was a Musician in Residence 2022-23 and serves as a Trustee for Paraorchestra, and on the ABRSM’s Music Education Advisory Committee and as their Youth Voice Lead. He holds an MMus and BMus in Composition from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.



Programme Notes

Max Chase is a Glasgow-based writer. His most recent writing includes Meet Me in the Pines (Playwrights Studio Mentoring Programme) Letters To Space Girl (A Play, A Pie and A Pint) Powder Down (Shadwell Opera); Living Well Is the Best Revenge and Hopper (Distracted Rat); Flood (Face Forward Festival) and Duck (Lyceum Youth Theatre).

He has also worked with the Short Attention Span Theatre, Traverse Young Writers, Tron Theatre Playwrights Group, Only Skin, The Midnight Snack Factory and Playwright's Studio Scotland.

He graduated from University of Glasgow with an MLitt in Theatre Practices in 2018.



Song in Sign Team

Song Sign Director	Caroline Parker MBE
BSL Creative Consultant	Daryl Jackson
NZSL and Māori Cultural Consultant	Cha'nel Kaa-Luke
Actor	Rhiannon May
Actor	Petre Dobre
Creative Director and Soprano	Joanne Roughton-Arnold
Tenor	Ben Thapa
Pianist	Nigel Foster
Community Participation Producer and Stage Manager	Ellen Booth
Producer	Ruth Bertram
Access Coordinator	Zach Waddington
Community Workshop Creative Lead	Ruth Montgomery
Conservatoire Workshop Creative Lead	Aga Serugo-Lugo
Audio Describer	Mo Pickering-Symes
Technical Consultant	Mat Spencer
Lead BSL Interpreter	Anna Kitson
BSL Interpreter	Katie O'Connor
BSL Interpreter	Matthew Williams
BSL Interpreter	Erin Hutching

Biographies



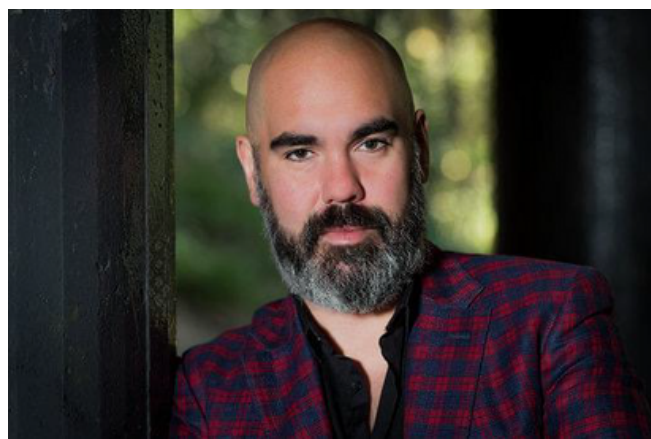
Aga Serugo-Lugo

Aga Serugo-Lugo is a vocalist, clarinettist, pianist, composer and workshop leader. He sang in the 9-piece Funk band “Gefunkt”, and also composed and played for the jazz-fusion group ‘Eclectiv’.

Aga has delivered community workshops for Sing-up, Royal Opera House, ENO Engage, Music in Detention, Britten Pears Arts and Turtle Key Arts. He works in Education settings for SEN Schools, Trinity Laban, Pegasus Opera, London Sinfonietta and BBC Proms. In addition, Aga co-runs Camberwell Community Choir, is an Ambassador for Britten-Pears Arts, an associate artist for Prime Theatre, Streetwise Opera and the Citizens Of The World Choir. Aga specialises in collaborative musical storytelling and believes music making should be a shared immersive experience.

Ben Thapa

Ben started as one quarter of the classical group G4, runners up on ITV’s The X Factor, in 2004. He studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, the Royal College of Music, and the Wales International Academy of Voice.



Ben has sung for many of the major UK opera companies, and on most of the main UK concert stages. Highlights include the title role in La Clemenza di Tito at the Teatru Manoel, Malta, Kudrjash Katya Kabanova for Scottish Opera on tour,

Biographies

Monteverdi Vespers solos for John Eliot Gardiner and the Monteverdi Choir, Tamino Die Zauberflöte for Garsington Opera Emerging Artists and Arbace Idomeneo for Buxton Festival Opera. He premiered the the President in Stockhausen's Mittwoch aus Licht, for Birmingham, repeated in 2013 at the BBC Proms. In 2022, Ben created the roles of Dr Anton and Salieri in Errolyn Wallen's The Paradis Files, which Graeae toured with the BBC Concert Orchestra. In 2023, Ben sang the title role in La Clemenza di Tito for Chelsea Opera Group, Verdi Requiem with the London Mozart Players at the Royal Festival Hall, and Siegmund (Die Walküre) for the London Opera Company at St. John's Smith Square, also touring the Evangelist in Bach St Matthew Passion, tenor soloist in Monteverdi Vespers, and Aeneas in Dido and Aeneas, all for the Armonico Consort. 2024 plans include Puccini Messe di Gloria with Collegium Musicum Costa del Sol, and Monostatos Die Zauberflöte for Wild Arts.



Caroline Parker

With such companies as Krazy Kat Theatre and Hot Coals Theatre and The Bone Ensemble Caroline has consulted/directed tweaking their visual creations. Finding and evolving the funny, and clear physical storytelling. In the cabaret circuit Caroline performs in her unique style signed songs, she recently gave a TEDx talk on 'Singing Without Her Voice'.

Makes music accessible to deaf people and sign language accessible to hearing people by rendering well known recorded songs such as Kate Bush's

Biographies

Wuthering Heights and Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody in sign, dance and mime. Utilising her physical theatre skills to express songs like you've never seen before. At the 2012 Paralympic Opening Ceremony she signed the closing number 'I am What I Am' alongside Beverly Knight. As an actress she has recently worked with Derby Theatre playing Big Goat in The 3 Billy Goats Gruff, before that she played Duchess of York in Shakespeare's Richard II. Previously to that Dogberry in Ramps on the Moon's Production Much Ado about Nothing, also Oliver Twist playing Fagin. TV appearances include Moving On BBC, Doctors BBC, Murphy's Law BBC, Stuart a Life Backwards BBC/HBO, Switch BBC. This is Caroline's first work within the Opera genre and hopes this is the first of many. She is absolutely thrilled to be working on this amazing production.

Cha'nel Kaa-Luke

Cha'nel Kaa-Luke (she/they) is a 22-year-old Deaf Māori wahine who stands as an advocate for indigenous Deaf youth across Aotearoa New Zealand. Navigating confidently across Māori, mainstream, Deaf, Hearing, and queer worlds, Cha'nel recognises that our differences can often be our greatest strengths.



Cha'nel is a prominent advocate for Deaf rights, access, and inclusion across the many facets of Aotearoa New Zealand such as the Arts, Education, Governance and their communities.

Biographies



Daryl Jackson

Since gaining 2.1 BA Hons in Deaf Studies with Interpreting English/BSL and Linguistics. He has long since freelanced as a sign language consultant, translator, advisor, script supervisor, television presenter/reporter and actor. He frequently does in-vision translating for numerous TV channels and websites.

Sign language monitor for actors in Theatre, TV actors in TV Drama/Film and presenters in programmes and websites. Was a lecturer at Wolverhampton University teaching Interpreting and is a Sign Theatre lecturer for Reading University and is visiting lecturer for seminars and teaching Interpreting and Sign language. A one to one tutor for Interpreter who want to improve their translation skills and does various workshops.

Ellen Booth

Ellen believes that art, culture and community have the power to make any and all humans feel something a little deeper so we can be kinder and more caring to every citizen on this planet. As a Producer & Project manager - she champions work and projects that celebrates difference, working to create more opportunities for the Deaf and Disabled community. Creating environments in which everyone is welcome. With 10 years of experience gained from direct





Biographies

collaborations with artists & companies and working within National Portfolio Organisations such as South East Dance in Brighton, Curve Theatre in Leicester, FABRIC in Birmingham and International Arts Festivals such as Brighton Festival, Edinburgh Fringe and Birmingham International Dance Festival. Working across art forms and locations - outdoor, indoor and site specific. Her work spans producing and engagement, stage and production management and access championing. You can check out more about Ellen on her website: www.ellenbooth.com



Joanne Roughton-Arnold

New Zealand soprano, Joanne Roughton-Arnold, discovered her vocal talent while a postgraduate violinist at Trinity College of Music. She completed an MMus (Voice) at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire before going on to study with renowned operatic soprano, Nelly Miricioiu and international vocal coach, David Harper.

She is co-founder, CEO and Creative Director of formidAbility, and currently holds a Developing Your

Creative Practice grant from Arts Council England to develop as an arts leader and bring formidable disabled talent into the mainstream. She is the soprano soloist on the soundtrack for Rising Phoenix, Netflix' award-winning feature-length documentary on the Paralympics. She is passionate about showcasing New Zealand music to international audiences. In 2015 she commissioned Dame

Biographies

Gillian Whitehead and Fleur Adcock CNZM OBE to write *Iris Dreaming*, a one-woman chamber opera based on the life of celebrated NZ writer and feminist, Iris Wilkinson. She gave the world premiere at the 2016 Grimeborn Festival, followed by the NZ premiere at the Adam Chamber Music Festival, broadcast by Radio NZ. Her operatic credits include *Semele* in research and development on Roberto David Rusconi's *Dionysos* (ROH), *Annina La Traviata* (Chelsea Opera Group), *La Zia Madama Butterfly* (Opera Holland Park Christine Collins Young Artist), *Bella The Midsummer Marriage* (Regents Opera Orchestral Workshop) and Sarah Whitehead in Malcolm Williamson's *English Eccentrics* under Lionel Friend (Royal Birmingham Conservatoire).

Mat Spencer

As Managing Director of Midlands based Avion Technical Services Ltd, Mat prides himself on ensuring everyone participating in an event has an enjoyable experience without boundaries. As an experienced technical project manager, Mat is excited to be part of



this project, continuing to learn about integration of accessible arts in a variety of forms. Since leaving further education at Kidderminster College with a BTEC National Diploma in Production Arts, Mat began to shape his company into the multi-disciplinary production company that now supports events around the world. Having now grown a successful team around him, Mat is in the fortunate position to be able to focus his energy on projects for which he has a real passion and enthusiasm.

Biographies



Mo Pickering-Symes

Mo helps blind and partially-sighted people access art, cultural experiences and live performance. She audio describes live theatre, dance, physical theatre, opera, cabaret, circus, festival events, museum exhibitions and storytelling. She also describes still 2D art and video works. Clients have included Paraorchestra, Stopgap Dance Company, Kinetic Light, (with Rationale), Moxie Brawl, Paul O'Donnell, the Millennium Centre Cardiff, Sadler's Wells,

Greenwich Dance, Birmingham International Dance Festival and Birmingham Festival, Appetite, Nottingham Playhouse, Birmingham Rep, Derby Theatre, and museums. Mo has also delivered AD training online to UK-based and North America-based organisations. She was vice-chair of the Audio Description Association for four years and continues to work with them to support and inspire everyone associated with AD in the UK and world-wide. Examples of Mo's work, and testimonials, can be found at www.audiomo.uk

Nigel Foster

Nigel Foster studied at the Royal Academy of Music and Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London with Roger Vignoles, Graham Johnson and Iain Burnside. He has since been appointed a Steinway Artist.

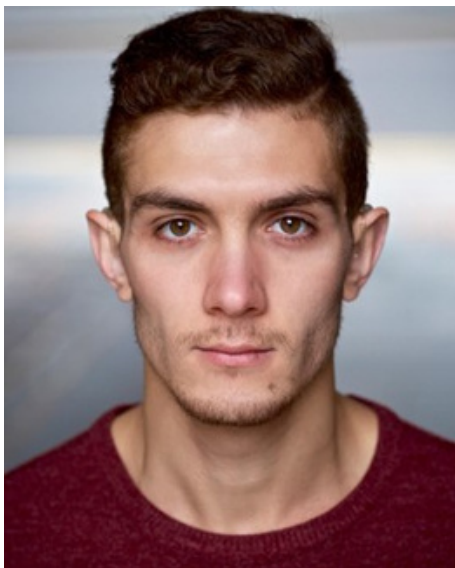
An association with Sir Georg Solti led to





Biographies

work with Renée Fleming, Roberto Alagna and Angela Gheorghiu, and he now plays for singers including Roderick Williams, Lotte Betts-Dean, Julien Van Mellaerts and Nicky Spence. Nigel founded and directs the London Song Festival, which showcases the Song repertoire and provides a performance platform for young singers. He has performed in song recitals across Europe and in Asia, New Zealand and north and south America, and has given masterclasses and led workshops in the Song Repertoire in the UK, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, Germany, Luxembourg, and the USA. His CD of songs by Betty Roe, with Robin Tritschler, Madeleine Mitchell and others received five-star reviews, and his CD of Russian Romances with Iestyn Morris, issued last year, is the first time these songs have been recorded by a countertenor. He has broadcast on BBC Radio 3, appeared on television in several European countries and features on the soundtrack of the French film 'L'Homme est une Femme Comme les Autres'.



Petre Dobre

Petre Dobre, originally from Romania and now based in Glasgow, is an actor and director for stage and screen. He graduated from Royal Conservatoire of Scotland with a BA Performance in BSL/English in 2018 and uses visual vernacular to create powerful storytelling, combining movement, facial expressions and iconic BSL signs.

After graduating, he worked at Macrobert Arts Centre, developing his skills as Director Trainee for one year and in the second year as Associate Director. He is passionate to create work for all ages which is accessible



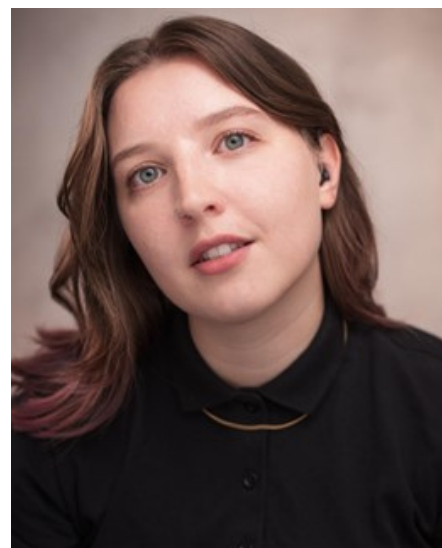
Biographies

to both deaf and hearing alike. He has worked with many companies including, Solar Bear, Vanishing Point, Imagine, Wonder Fools, Bookbug (Scottish Book Trust) and 48 Hour Film. He has recently become a new Associate Artist with Company Chordelia.

Rhiannon May

Rhiannon is the first deaf actor & BSL user to hold a regular role in a BBC series, starring as Cara Connelly in Silent Witness for four seasons. Her screen work also includes a leading role in The Riley Sisters, shown at the BFI London Film Festival, and an appearance in the BBC's LGBTQIA+ short film Silent Pride. On stage, she has performed in The Princess and the Pauper with the Hordern Ciani / Swanage Rep Theatre

Company, and created a Crash Landing: A Theatrical Sensory Experience at the International Deaf and Disabled Arts Festival 2022.



Ruth Bertram

Ruth has an illustrious background in arts management, from City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Polyphony Arts. Juggling producing work, artist management, social media and more, she is an asset to any project!

Committed to a transformed arts industry that works for everybody, she is very proud to be

Biographies

producing this groundbreaking project. Ruth is a very proud Brummie, coming from a musical family, and grew up singing in lots of choirs – giving her many opportunities to sing at prestigious venues in the UK and abroad. She enjoys cooking and baking, and looking after her 20-ish plants and kitten, Dizzy.

Ruth Montgomery

Through her work as a professional musician, Ruth proves that music is not just auditory in nature. Born deaf in a musical family and having studied at the Royal Welsh College of Music for her B.Mus honours degree in music and flute performance, she is a flautist, music teacher and workshop practitioner.

As a visionary artist and Clore Leadership fellow, she has also developed professional relationships with arts, music, and media organisations nationally and

worldwide. Ruth founded Audiovisability in 2016, and successfully registered as a charity in 2021, to bridge the gap between deaf and hearing artists, primarily by using visual arts and music. Audiovisability is a charity that brings the highest quality of classical music to deaf people. Audiovisability recognises the innate talent of deaf musicians and artists through the forging of partnerships, music education, and innovative thinking.





Biographies



Zach Waddington

Zach Waddington is a theatrical producer, facilitator and access Coordinator based in Chester. His previous access work includes work with the Liverpool based company, DaDaFest on their winter programme and Ruston lecture series. He also works closely with Storyhouse as their youth theatre assistant. As a disabled, trans and queer creative he has had a fantastic time working with this wonderful access driven company who have worked so passionately to create the show you will see today.



Workshops

Community Workshops

formidAbility are offering creative community workshops in each touring city, crafted by Ruth Montgomery and delivered in collaboration with Joanne Roughton-Arnold.

Participant in these workshops will learn about:

- identifying and removing barriers so that everyone is free to do their best creative work,
- imaginative ways to make your work accessible for audiences and participants,
- evaluating your work and gathering feedback so you can report to funders on how you used their investment and the impact your work is having on others.

Conservatoire Workshops

Our Conservatoire workshops - led by members of our Creative team - aim to revolutionise how artists in education form their creative process when actively planning access into their work. Participants will be guided all the way from warm-up to evaluation, being asked to think about how people with differing access needs experience musical performances.

Participants will consider how to provide access to music in innovative artistic ways; during the workshop they will be offered the opportunity to use an actor as a visual score and will create soundscapes which provide context to the environment of pieces of music. They will also be encouraged to reflect on other ways that they can broaden their existing ideas of what musical performances look like.

Thank you from us!

Song in Sign grew from the seed of an idea that Joanne had two years ago. Bringing our vision to full production has been a labour of love, and it couldn't have happened without a circle of wonderful people who believe in our vision of a more inclusive sector. There are far too many to name here, but you know who you are!

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