

Saturday 25 May 2024
7.30pm
Milton Court Concert Hall

GUILDHALL
SCHOOL

Guildhall Session Singers

Mike Roberts artistic director

Clare Wheeler music director

Digital Programme

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guildhall-programmes.co.uk/session-singers-may2024



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Programme

Mike Roberts & Sarah Grange *Prayer for Tomorrow*

Eleanor Fineston-Robertson *BUBBLE*, a film by Yulia Saraswati

Josef Kurtz *JOSEF KURTZ - NATURE OF EVIL CHANGES*

Olivia Underwood *Take (Bamboo)*

Jasmine Meaden *Time*

Max Ratzky *If I (Could Have)*

Tom Arnold *She Walks in Beauty*

Erin Snape *Conversations*

Bronte Tucker *A Nordic Chant*

Rosemary Moss *Landlines*

Geoffrey Harper *Like a Rose*

Sam Moss *A Melody for Macclesfield Forest*

Kevin Rodgers *Words*

Richard MacKlin *Miserere Mei*

Liam Fuller *Fire Burn*

Sioul Blaphate *Loneliness*

Indira Zhangabayeva *Inside You*

Chester Tribbley *By Candlelight*

Jonathan Goldsmith *Kite Fight*

Welcome

The official launch concert of Guildhall Session Singers, a new professional vocal ensemble founded by the Electronic and Produced Music Department. Under the artistic direction of **Mike Roberts** and musical direction of **Clare Wheeler**, this concert will feature a variety of specially composed works by current EPM students and staff.

Special thanks to **Armin Zanner** for his support of this new ensemble.

Mike Roberts artistic director

Clare Wheeler music director

Sam Dinley producer

Barney Medland EPM department manager

Notes

Mike Roberts & Sarah Grange *Prayer for Tomorrow*

Musically this piece is ‘inter-cultural’ – integrating diverse musical traditions from around the globe to create a subtly unique language. The melodies are based on two scales/modes (or maqams) – ‘Bayati’ and ‘Rast’ – that are used in Jewish, Islamic and Christian sung prayer.

The harmony is derived from Eastern European ‘Iso-Polyphony’ (particularly prevalent in Albania, Bulgaria, etc.) where a constant drone pitch (the ‘iso’) forms the basis around which various layers of melodic exploration create complex close harmonies. Throughout, the ‘iso-drone’ part is shared across the parts so that no one part carries the burden of this crucial yet servile role.

The drone is sung to the word ‘friendship’ in various languages. Where ‘Amen’ is used, singers can individually choose whether to sing the Arabic, Hebrew or English derivative – or simply sing an ‘Ah---’. So, ‘Amen’, ‘Amin’, ‘Ah-men’, or ‘Ah---’; the result being a mystical blend of agreement.

Eleanor Fineston-Robertson *BUBBLE*, a film by Yulia Saraswati

The soundtrack was directly inspired by the images within the film; and was specifically written for performance by the Guildhall Session Singers.

“Tiny cat and Blob spend a lot of time inside their tiny bubble. In their bubble, they have many days filled with fun times, but they also have equally many days where chaos ensues. Time goes by, colours become monochromatic, and tiny cat becomes bigger and louder, breaking more precious things with its giant tail – forcing Blob to finally react and do something he has never done before.”

Josef Kurtz *JOSEF KURTZ - NATURE OF EVIL CHANGES*

Olivia Underwood *Take (Bamboo)*

Poem by Sakutarō Hagiwara.

This poem speaks alludes to the unrelenting pace of life, like the unyielding bamboo which continues to grow no matter what. It’s simplistic description of a quiet bamboo forest belies a deeper perspective, about the silent power of time and how, regardless of our individualistic sense of reality, life will continue, silently and steadily.

Jasmine Meaden *Time*

I wrote this piece to reflect on my experiences of growing up and leaving school. I had in mind the church I used to sing choral concerts in at Christmas, and how it holds such a strange place in my memory of only those few times I visited, but how it is still there, nonetheless. After initially writing it for only voices, I later arranged it for strings, which you will hear in the repeat of the second section. I was influenced by harmonies in jazz arranging, and how chords are stacked on top of each other, and put these melodies to my own lyrics which I wrote first.

Max Ratzky *If I (Could Have)*

If I (Could Have) is composed to a setting of two poems by D.H. Lawrence, combined into one whole piece. *The End* and *Last Words to Miriam* are poems dealing with loss, regret, and the complexity of broken down relationships; something perhaps universal which we have all experienced at one point or another.

The music opens with a guitar loop recorded in the key of the piece, setting the melancholic and contemplative mood. The tenors and altos come in with alternating lines to build up the tension, which is then further explored with the introduction of the basses and sopranos. There is a moment of more upbeat, optimistic reflection in the middle, but this is soon reversed as we revisit the introductory theme towards the end.

Ultimately, we're back where we started. Despite the emotional journey and various injuries sustained, it's all in the past. We can't undo what's been done in many cases, no matter our wishful thinking, and at its core this is what the piece is really about.

Tom Arnold *She Walks in Beauty*

She Walks in Beauty is inspired by the poem of the same name by Lord Byron – seeking to capture the essence of Byron's evocative language and the serene beauty he so masterfully depicts.

Byron led a life marked by both public admiration and private turmoil – with his works often reflecting these tumultuous personal experiences, his deep connection to nature, and his appreciation for beauty in all forms.

She Walks in Beauty not only pays homage to Byron's poetic genius but also seeks to evoke the timeless charm and emotional depth that his poem so beautifully conveys.

Erin Snape *Conversations*

This is a piece about words and people, inspired by the energy of William Finn's musicals (*Falsettos* and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* in particular). Please look around at the hall we're in and the people around you, and please don't take it too seriously.

Bronte Tucker *A Nordic Chant*

For my piece, I drew inspiration from folk and Nordic influences, particularly the concept of 'kulning', a traditional Swedish cattle herding call. This technique deeply resonated with me and can be heard during the soprano solo introduction, and reoccurs at various moments throughout the composition. I aimed to capture the essence of Nordic music by incorporating elements of yoik, and I experimented with syllables and breath to create an overarching chant. The piece is percussive, spiritual, and grounded, gradually building into a rich symphony of sound and rhythm.

Rosemary Moss *Landlines*

The piece is very loosely inspired by Cornish folk tale of Bolster the Giant who had a doomed love for human Agnes. This setting is an interpretation of experience of members of Agnes' village watching the giant walk away into the landscape, prompting a meditation on scale, smallness, vastness and ways of extending beyond the self and mundane routine.

I was interested to explore the relationship between solo voice and cyclical, continuous melodies with interacting textural choral elements which stretch and play with and against the voice with ideas of scale, distance and fidelity.

Geoffrey Harper *Like a Rose*

Falling in love is a journey. It can have moments where you feel lost or confused, but also be the most fulfilling and gratifying part of a person's life. Ultimately, it seems that all anyone really wants is to love and be loved. In this piece I wanted to explore what it might mean to celebrate being in love, accepting the difficulties and hardships that come with it, and starting on this journey together. Here one of the partners compares the other to a rose, both pure and bold but also wary of the thorns that can cause them harm.

Sam Moss *A Melody for Macclesfield Forest*

Growing from a single melodic line, *A Melody for Macclesfield Forest* is a folk inspired piece based on the ancient woodland on the edge of the Peak District. From its history as a Royal Forest, to its use as a plague village boundary, to its contribution to materials during the Second World War, Macclesfield Forest has been at the heart of the local area for hundreds of years. This piece encapsulates the purity and enchanting pull of the long standing forest, that for time immemorial has drawn people in.

Kevin Rodgers *Words*

Words is a 'lied' setting of Sylvia Plath's poem of the same name, written in February 1963, a mere ten days before her death. The poem deals with the impossibility of controlling the words we speak or write after their utterance and is filled with Plath's customarily unsettling imagery (axes, skulls, riderless horses), made more unsettling by their tragic context.

This piece, written for solo soprano and piano, asks the other singers to function as a Greek chorus, underlining and commenting on the text as the music progresses.

Richard MacKlin *Miserere Mei*

Perhaps it was the dim light of the icebox that put William Carlos Williams in mind of the Holy Week service of Tenebrae - evoking Allegri, consciously or otherwise, having descended on the forbidden fruit that lay within, inspiring the text I have set here - the truth is, we simply cannot know.

Regardless, as this choral miniature's plaintive coda rings through the hall - "forgive me" - you will no doubt perceive a metatextual lilt to the setting; for whilst we can confidently assert that mercy's quality is not strained, the same cannot be said for my vocal writing. Forgive me.

Liam Fuller *Fire Burn*

Arguably a fusion song, *Fire Burn* takes urban drum loops, lush orchestration and gospel choral elements, resulting in a bombastic song inspired by the title themes of James Bond. The choir is instructed to be "Shaken, not stirred!"

Sioul Blaphate *Loneliness*

Alright, rock and rollers, we're slowing things down for a moment. This next one goes out to all of you nursing a broken heart tonight. If love's got you down, let the haunting voice of Aldi Ho in *Loneliness* by Sioul Blaphate remind you that you're not alone. So, sit back, relax, and let those tears flow.

Indira Zhangabayeva *Inside You*

Inside You is a choral piece that delivers a message about the importance of listening to the inner voice within us. This composition serves as a reminder that the divine and the answers we seek are all nestled within our own hearts. The choral voices come together in a harmonious blend, symbolizing the unity and clarity that can be found when we turn inward.

Inside You is an invitation to recognize and trust the wisdom that resides within. As the choir brings this piece to life, may we all be inspired to connect with the inner voice that guides us toward truth, healing and love.

Chester Tribley *By Candlelight*

Haunting and wistful, *By Candlelight* takes you on a fleeting, dreamy journey, aimed at evoking deep emotional introspection, while soothing the mind. Drawing inspiration from the popular choral works of Eric Whitacre, the ethereal harmonies and gentle crescendos create a tranquil atmosphere, allowing listeners to lose themselves in its serene, evolving textures and melodies.

Jonathan Goldsmith *Kite Fight*

“Kites rise highest against the wind, not with it”

Kite fighting is an intense, artistic sport where players aim to cut an opponent's kite line. It's a game of creative design and physical control, where opponents often coat their strings with glass and abrasive materials to destroy each other's kites. The sport is popular all over the world, particularly during festivals in Nepal, Brazil and the USA. As a passionate Kite flyer myself, I began researching this sport and fell in love with the incredible images of thousands of kites flying from every rooftop, glistening through the sunlight, warping shadows on the ground. The mix of beauty and violence inspired me to create a song. I've used Latin and electronic influences, while showcasing the range of our Session Singers – both physically and stylistically. From scat sounds, to humming, wind sounds and reaching a top C on the soprano, this new ensemble can fly higher than a kite!

Guildhall Session Singers

Soprano

Alex Moss
Anni Delger
Francesca Confortini
Tara Minton

Tenor

Amy Hollingsworth
Issy Owen
Evie Atkin
Jack Ross

Piano

Caroline Tyler

Bass

Simon Little

Alto

Nicole Petrus-Barracks
Martha AB
Isobel Doncaster
Nel Begley

Bass

Joe Lee
Thomas Jesty
Will Inscoc
Aidan May

Drums

Dillon Harrison

Guitar

Max Ratzky

Mike Roberts artistic director

Mike's professional portfolio spans multiple genres from Drum and Bass to Contemporary Classical, Jazz to Sonic Art, Electronic Chillout to Choral Part Music. As a commercial producer and writer, Mike has worked for the BBC, Telemagination, Brookes Lapping, Universal Music and The Jim Henson Organisation among others. As a sonic artist he has been commissioned by The National Trust, Musicity and the Barbican Centre. More conventionally, Mike has written for Helen Shapiro, Joyce DiDonato, The King's Singers and worked with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Wigmore Hall and Barbican Film. Founding an Electronic Music Principal Study at Guildhall School in 1997 with just himself and 2 students, Mike has overseen the development of this important area into the unique Electronic and Produced Music Department we see today, with over 130 students and 40 staff across 7 pathways.

Clare Wheeler music director

With a background in both Classical music and Jazz, Clare toured with The Swingles for 11 years, and is now embarking on other musical ventures. Growing up in Kenya, she has sung in African Gospel Choirs, as well as Gospel Choirs in UK, Jazz Vocal Ensembles, Classical Chamber Choirs, Symphonic Choirs and of course The Swingles. She is a solo jazz singer, improviser, composer and arranger, as well as a workshop leader and educator.

Clare taught music theory and harmony at the Academy of Contemporary Music before joining 5-time Grammy winning vocal group, 'The Swingles' in 2007. She performed with the group, writing music and making albums for eleven years, having the chance to sing with artists such as Rumer, Jamie Cullum and Labrinth, as well as performing in some of the world's most prestigious music venues and working with legendary conductors.

She has been a guest host of the BBC Radio Two show *The Choir*, as well as arranger and vocal coach on the BBC One show *Pitch Battle* in 2017, working in the final with vocal group 'Scot Soul' and soul legend Chaka Khan.

As a singer Clare performs all over the world, as a soloist, in choirs and vocal ensembles, singing Early Music, Jazz, Gospel, Contemporary Classical and Pop, following her love of music from across all genres, from singing backing vocals for Jacob Collier's Prom Performance in 2018 with the Metropol Jazz Orkester to brand new original tri-lingual, tri-genre setting of *Te Deum* by John Featherstone across Europe.

Clare writes prolifically for vocal and instrumental ensembles, runs workshops and masterclasses, as well as adjudicating vocal competitions around the world. In September 2019 she joined the Guildhall School Jazz Department, where she is Faculty Chair of Jazz Voice, teaches improvisation, aural and transcription, vocal jazz and directs the Vocal Jazz Ensemble. She is passionate about empowering singers to achieve their potential within solo or ensemble contexts.