

THE LAST LETTER

BRITTEN SINFONIA

THOMAS GOULD *violin/director*

JONATHAN MCGOVERN *baritone*

SOPHIE HUNTER *narrator*

RICHARD PRYAL *narrator*

NICO MUHLY 'Letter One' from <i>The Last Letter</i> <i>(world premiere of chamber orchestral version)</i>	2 mins
GURNEY 'Reveille' from <i>The Western Playland</i>	4 mins
KELLY ARR. DIVALL <i>Elegy: In Memoriam Rupert Brooke</i>	9 mins
NICO MUHLY 'Letter Two' from <i>The Last Letter</i> <i>(world premiere of chamber orchestral version)</i>	3 mins
GURNEY 'Loveliest of Trees' from <i>The Western Playland</i>	3 mins
STEPHAN 'Nachspiel' from <i>Music for Seven Stringed Instruments</i>	11 mins
INTERVAL	20 mins
GURNEY 'The Aspens' from <i>The Western Playland</i>	3 mins
NICO MUHLY 'Letter Three' from <i>The Last Letter</i> <i>(world premiere of chamber orchestral version)</i>	2 mins
RAVEL ARR. WEINER 'Prelude' from <i>Le tombeau de Couperin</i>	3 mins
NICO MUHLY 'Letter Four' from <i>The Last Letter</i> <i>(world premiere of chamber orchestral version)</i>	4 mins
GURNEY 'Is my team ploughing?' from <i>The Western Playland</i>	4 mins
RAVEL ARR. WEINER 'Forlane' from <i>Le tombeau de Couperin</i>	6 mins
NICO MUHLY 'Letter Five' from <i>The Last Letter</i> <i>(world premiere of chamber orchestral version)</i>	2 mins
GURNEY 'March' from <i>The Western Playland</i>	6 mins
BARBER <i>Adagio for Strings</i>	8 mins

Programme devised by **Dr Kate Kennedy**

NORWICH ST ANDREW'S HALL

Thursday 8 November 2018 – 7.30pm

PRE-CONCERT TALK – 6.30PM

'Music's war poets: an introduction to the evening'
by **Dr Kate Kennedy**

LONDON MILTON COURT CONCERT HALL

Friday 9 November 2018 – 7.30pm

SAFFRON WALDEN SAFFRON HALL

Saturday 10 November 2018 – 7.30pm

PRE-CONCERT TALK – 6.30PM

'Music's war poets: an introduction to the evening'
by **Dr Kate Kennedy**

If you have a mobile phone, please ensure that it is turned off during the performance.

In accordance with the requirements of the licensing authority, persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways.

No camera, tape recorder, other types of recording apparatus, food or drink may be brought into the auditorium. It is illegal to record any performance unless prior arrangements have been made with Britten Sinfonia.

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POETRY AND PROSE READINGS IN THIS EVENING'S PERFORMANCE

Tonight's concert weaves together poetry and prose written during World War One with the music listed on Page 1. The texts that feature are as follows (in order of performance):

SECTION 1

Helen Thomas, excerpts from *As It Was* and *World Without End*

Edward Thomas, 'Out In The Dark'

SECTION 2

Rupert Brooke, 'Fragment'

Frederick Septimus Kelly, 'Letter to Edward Marsh, April 1915'

SECTION 3

Helen Mackay Brown, 'Train' from *Scars Upon My Heart* (ed. Catherine Reilly), published by Little, Brown Book Group

SECTION 4

Leo Sternberg (trans. Peter Appelbaum), "The Relief", part of 'Out of the Trenches', from *Broken Carousel: German-Jewish Poets of the Great War*, edited and translated by Peter Applebaum, published by Lampion Press

INTERVAL

SECTION 4 (CONTINUED)

Wilfred Owen, 'Futility'

SECTION 5

Vera Brittain, *Chronicle of Youth: Vera Brittain's War Diary 1913-1917* (ed. Alan Bishop with Terry Smart), published by Virago Press

Roland Leighton, 'Letter to Vera Brittain, 12 April 1915' from *Letters from a Lost Generation: First World War Letters of Vera Brittain and Four Friends* (ed. Alan Bishop and Mark Bostridge), published by Virago Press (1998)

SECTION 6

Roland Leighton, 'Hedauville, November 1915', from *Vera Brittain, Testament of Youth*, published by Virago Press

Vera Brittain, 'May Morning' from *Because You Died. Poetry and Prose of the First World War and After* by

Vera Brittain, edited and introduced by Mark Bostridge (2008). Copyright Mark Bostridge and T.J. Brittain-Catlin, Literary Executors for the Estate of Vera Brittain 1970, and used by permission.

SECTIONS 7 AND 8

Helen Thomas, excerpts from *As It Was* and *World Without End*

ABOUT TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME

2018 is an opportunity for re-thinking and re-imagining the First World War. While the war has often been seen as the most literary war in history, we have often relied on a far too limited range of texts to represent a multiplicity of voices. The picture becomes more nuanced when we put the composers of the war side by side with the writers, both male and female. This programme takes its inspiration from the relationships disrupted by the war – from Nico Muhly's letters from a disgruntled wife to her captive husband, to the heartbreaking account of Helen Thomas as her husband the poet Edward Thomas left for war, only to be killed.

Helen Thomas never recovered from her loss of **Edward** in the battle of Arras on 9th April 1917. Later in life, having suffered a breakdown from the delayed shock of his death, she was encouraged to write a memoir of their life together, which she had not intended to publish. The account created such interest, and was written with such tenderness and honesty that it was eventually published in two volumes, *As It Was* and *World Without End*.

The programme dramatizes the tension inscribed into the leave-taking in **Helen Mackay Brown's** poem 'The Train'. Women's poetry of the First World War tends to be overlooked, and this urgent, anxiety-ridden poem captures the excruciating experience of saying a protracted goodbye to a loved one. It was published in a groundbreaking anthology of women's war poetry, *Scars Upon my Heart*.

Vera Brittain and **Roland Leighton** represent the unbreachable distance between the young woman waiting at home for letters, and her fiancé, trying to communicate his first experiences of life in the trenches to her. Brittain is perhaps the most famous female writer of the war. Her memoir *Testament of Youth* was a best seller when it was published in 1933. Brittain lost almost everyone she loved: her fiancé Roland Leighton, her brother Edward, and two dear male friends. She then had

KATE KENNEDY

to find a way to continue to live, as the sole survivor. Brittain and Leighton's letters and her diary speak of the naiveté, fear and enthusiasm of a generation beginning to realise the true cost of the war, in a way that it would be impossible to recreate retrospectively.

Words and music combine as soldier-composer **Frederick Septimus Kelly** writes of the death of his dear friend the poet **Rupert Brooke**, and then immediately transcribes the scene into music in his *Elegy*, in which we hear the sparkle of the Aegean sea, and the rustle of the olive grove in which Kelly buried him. Kelly was one of five promising young British composers to be killed during the war. He was a concert pianist, and wrote harmonically adventurous, Wagnerian songs and piano pieces. His *Elegy: In Memoriam Rupert Brooke* is perhaps his greatest achievement. He sailed with Brooke towards Gallipoli. When Brooke suddenly became ill with blood poisoning and died before they had reached the fighting, it was Kelly and another composer, William Denis Browne, who nursed him and finally buried him. Both went on to Gallipoli, Browne being killed in the fighting, and Kelly surviving only to be killed on the Somme some months later.

Wilfred Owen offers the most iconic literary perspective of the war. His death is rendered all the more tragic and ironic by the fact that he died within a week of the armistice. In the short months he had to write his most mature works, he proved himself to be one of the most talented and original voices of the early 20th century. He is paired here with his German equivalent, war poet **Leo Sternberg**, in a translation by Peter Appelbaum. Sternberg was a Jewish writer, who volunteered for the army and spent time on the Russian front. He survived the war, but in another, bitter irony, was forced into exile in 1937.

© Kate Kennedy

Dr Kate Kennedy is the Weinrebe Research Fellow in Life-Writing at Wolfson College, Oxford. She is the Deputy Director of the Oxford Centre for Life-Writing, and she teaches in both the English and Music Faculties. She completed a PhD in 2009 at the University of Cambridge on the work of Ivor Gurney, and her biography *Ivor Gurney – Dweller in Shadows* will be published by Princeton University Press in 2018.

Other publications include: *The silent morning: culture, memory and the armistice, 1918* (Manchester University Press, 2013); 'The First World War: literature, music, memory' (*The Journal of First World War Studies*, Routledge); *The Cambridge Companion to Women Composers* (CUP, forthcoming); *Literary Britten* (a compendium of essays examining Britten's music through his relationship to his texts) (CUP, forthcoming).

She has been awarded a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship to write her next biography, *The Fateful Voyage*, charting the friendship of Rupert Brooke and composers William Denis Browne and F.S. Kelly. The radio version of the book was broadcast on Radio 3 on 24 June 2014 from the City of London Festival, performed by James Gilchrist, Matthew Cammelle and Iain Burnside.

Kate is interested in developing the concept of the recital, experimenting with blending biography and archival research with elements taken from the theatre and the concert platform. Her dramatized recitals *The Fateful Voyage*, *A Music of One's Own*, *The Dark Pastoral*, *Literary Britten* and *To His Love* are performed regularly throughout the UK by leading actors and singers including Fiona Shaw, Sarah Connolly and Simon Russell Beale. *The Dark Pastoral* has also been recorded as a CD (Altara Records).

She writes for *BBC Music Magazine*, and gives talks at literary and music festivals around the country, and at venues such as the Wigmore Hall, the Royal Albert Hall and the Southbank Centre, and is a regular guest on BBC Radio 3, on programmes such as *Essential Classics*, *Composer of the Week*, *Music Matters*, and the *Proms Plus* series. She is the consultant to Radio 3 for their First World War programming, and has appeared on BBC 2 and 4 television.

WELCOME

Photo © Elizabeth Hunt



Nico Muhly's *The Last Letter* for baritone and piano (specially arranged for orchestra for these concerts) was the catalyst for tonight's concert, which opens our concert seasons in Norwich, Saffron Hall, and at Milton Court, the latter as part of the Barbican's *For the Fallen*:

Marking the First World War Centenary. Letter writing was the main form of communication between soldiers and their loved ones during the war, helping to ease the pain of separation. Nico had plenty of letters to choose from: The British Army Postal Service alone delivered around two billion letters during the war, and in 1917 over 19,000 mailbags crossed the English Channel each day, transporting letters and parcels to British troops on the Western Front.

We have weaved in the five movements of Nico's work across a dramatic programme with readings of letters and poetry as well as music by poets and composers from both sides of the conflict. Of course, much is known of the 'war poets' of World War I, but perhaps less well known are the composers of this time. Almost a whole generation of composers including F.S. Kelly, Stephan, Coles, Gurney, Butterworth and many more, volunteered to fight and many did not survive or were permanently affected by the conflict.

We are hugely grateful for the help and guidance of Dr Kate Kennedy who has written extensively on the music and poetry of the Great War, and who has devised an illuminating and powerful musical and literary journey. Alongside violin/director Thomas Gould, we are delighted to welcome the baritone Jonathan McGovern and readers Sophie Hunter and Richard Pryal, who will bring the music, poetry, letters and lives of these extraordinary individuals to life, portraying heart-breaking stories and the miraculous capacity of human spirit to create great art which somehow transcends the horror and futility of war.

David Butcher

David Butcher
Chief Executive & Artistic Director

ON STAGE TONIGHT

VIOLIN 1

Thomas Gould
Marcus Barcham Stevens
Róisín Walters

VIOLIN 2

Miranda Dale
Nicola Goldscheider
Alexandra Caldon

VIOLA

Clare Finnimore

CELLOS

Caroline Dearnley
Ben Chappell

DOUBLE BASS

Ben Russell

OBOE

Tristan Cox

HARP

Tamara Young

PIANO

Mark Knoop

NICO MUHLY (b. 1981)

The Last Letter (2015, arranged for Chamber Orchestra 2018)

The Last Letter is a collection of five songs written for the baritone Benjamin Appl. When we met to discuss the possible texts, Ben proposed setting letters sent between soldiers and their loved ones during the First World War. I love found texts; it seems much easier than navigating the thorns of poetry.

The first song exists in a foggy landscape, with a lazily anxious sequence of pitches from the piano. The voice repeats the text *'Please, tell me your name, as I have forgotten it'* over a chorale-like structure.

The second one is a breathless love song: obsessive, repetitive and almost out of control.

The third, in which a woman is asking for a conjugal visit from her husband, takes the first movement's piano figuration and makes it fast, cluttered and hungrily ecstatic.

The fourth section is a heartbreaking letter from a woman divorcing her husband and placing their children in an orphanage. The piano establishes a steady, deliberate pattern, over which the voice describes simultaneous devastation: economic and emotional.

The last song breaks the form, and sets a translation of the same poem by Schiller as used by Schubert (*'Die Götter Griechenlands'*), describing a deserted landscape. The piano agitates a sequence of 13 chords in a large cycle, and the songs end with a fragment of the introduction, floating over bell-like chords.

Programme note © Nico Muhly



Photo © Ana Cuba

E-NEWSLETTER

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TEXT

Nico Muhly: The Last Letter

One

Dear Molly,

A happy Christmas. I am sending this to my aunt to forward to you as I do not know the address. Please tell me your name as I have forgotten it.

Two

Jack – my own – my only love – how I look for your next letter – how much longer shall I have to wait?

Dearheart, I want you – my life – Jack – how changed it is when you are by my side – what different air I seem to breathe into my lungs! Jack – Jack – oh! Hasten the day, the moment when I shall be by his side again – Jack, my Jack – my same, same heartmate, Goodnight my love – God bless you my own. How you would have smiled if you could have met me up the road today – Yes! you would then – to have seen me pushing David in his pram to Brayfield all on my own – Jack, if only – but then how can I say, how can I express all that is in my heart? My love, my own, at such moments, Jack, when my love has looked, has seen into the very depths of my soul – My Jack – My, 'Our' sacred love – when my very soul has been revealed to him – Jack – you know – How it grows and grows – My heart – surely it will burst – Jack – Jack – I want you ---- Oh! Let me feel you crushing my very life into yours – Jack – Jack – I live for you – always, always my own.

Three

Dear Leader of the Company!

I have a request to make of you. Although my husband has only been in the field for four months, I would like to ask you to grant him a leave of absence, namely, because of our sexual relationship. I would like to have my husband just once for the satisfaction of my natural desires. I just can't live like this any more. I can't stand it.

It is, of course, impossible for me to be satisfied in other ways, firstly, because of all the children and secondly, because I do not want to betray my husband. So I would like to ask you very kindly to grant my request. I will then be able to carry on until we are victorious.

With all reverence, Frau S.

Four

Dear Husband!

This is the last letter I am writing to you, because on the 24th I am going to marry another man. Then, I don't have to work any longer. I have already been working for three years as long as you are away from home. All other men come home for leave, only you POWs never come. I will give the children to the orphanage. I don't get a rat's ass about a life like that! All wives whose husbands are POWs will do the same and get rid of the children. Three years of work are too much for the women. 20 marks for benefit and 10 marks per child are not enough. One cannot live on that. Everything is so expensive now. One pound of bacon costs 8 mark, a shirt 9 mark.

Your wife...

Five

Fair world, where are you? Return again,
Sweet springtime age of nature!
Alas, only in the magic land of song
Does your fabled memory live on.
The desolate fields mourn,
No god reveals himself to me;
Of that warm, living image
Only a shadow has remained

1–4: *Love Letters of the Great War*, ed. Mandy Kirkby

5: 'The Gods of Greece', Friedrich Schiller,
tr. Richard Wigmore

IVOR GURNEY (1890–1937)

The Western Playland (pub. 1926)

I: Reveille

II: Loveliest of Trees

III: Golden friends

IV: Twice a week

V: The aspens

VI: Is my team ploughing?

VII: The far country

VIII: March

Britten Sinfonia will be performing songs I, II, V, VI and VIII from the cycle in these performances

Few composers in the early part of the 20th century escaped the tragedy of war, but Ivor Gurney's story is more tragic than most. A talented young musician, Gurney sang as a chorister in Gloucester Cathedral from 1900 to 1906 and went on to win a scholarship to study at London's Royal College of Music with Charles Villiers Stanford. For Stanford, who counted the likes of Vaughan Williams, Frank Bridge, Herbert Howells and John Ireland among his pupils, he believed Gurney to be 'the biggest of them all', a student who promised so much but whom he deemed 'unteachable'. Howells would later recall an image of Gurney in his early years at the RCM, his composition folder 'bulging with works of many kinds. There were piano preludes thick with untamed chords; violin sonatas strewn with ecstatic crises; organ works which he tried out amidst Gloucester's imperturbable pillars'. Gurney was just 23 when he suffered his first nervous breakdown, and although he composed prolifically during the years of the First World War, enlisting as a soldier took its toll on his already fragile mental health and he spent the last 15 years of his life in an asylum.

What Gurney might have gone on to do with his career, had his health not so quickly deteriorated, remains a tantalising prospect. Even in his comparatively short creative lifetime he composed more than 300 songs, with many more works thought to have been lost or destroyed along the way. Gurney was also a prolific poet, and his songs glow with the admiration of a fellow writer, someone with an innate grasp of how to handle a text and a flair for marrying words with music. When Gurney first heard Vaughan Williams' cycle on poems by A. E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad*, in 1907, he was immediately hooked. He composed his own settings of Housman's 'Loveliest of Trees' and 'Is my team ploughing?' the following year. These would eventually become part of a larger cycle, *The Western Playland*, which was published in 1926 – three years after the publication of another

Housman cycle, *Ludlow and Teme*. The latter has become one of Gurney's best-known works, while *The Western Playland* remains relatively neglected in performance, perhaps thanks to the copious – and somewhat confusing – revisions that Gurney saw fit to make between his first draft and the revised score he submitted for publication. More than a decade separates some of the songs in this cycle but its dramatic variations in style – from heartfelt romanticism ('Reveille'), to quaint English pastoralism ('Golden friends') and occasionally unforgiving harmonies that border on modernism ('Twice a week') – are partly what make the cycle so compelling.

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TEXT

Gurney: The Western Playland
Poems by A.E. Houseman

Reveille

Wake: the silver dusk returning
Up the beach of darkness brims,
And the ship of sunrise burning
Strands upon the eastern rims.

Wake: the vaulted shadow shatters,
Trampled to the floor it spanned,
And the tent of night in tatters
Straws the sky-pavilioned land.

Up, lad, up, 'tis late for lying:
Hear the drums of morning play;
Hark, the empty highways crying
"Who'll beyond the hills away?"

Towns and countries woo together,
Forelands beacon, belfries call;
Never lad that trod on leather
Lived to feast his heart with all.

Up, lad: thews that lie and cumber
Sunlit pallets never thrive;
Morns abed and daylight slumber
Were not meant for man alive.

Clay lies still, but blood's a rover;
Breath's a ware that will not keep.
Up, lad: when the journey's over
There'll be time enough to sleep.

Loveliest of Trees

Loveliest of trees, the cherry now
Is hung with bloom along the bough,
And stands about the woodland ride
Wearing white for Eastertide.

Now, of my threescore years and ten,
Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

And since to look at things in bloom
Fifty springs are little room,
About the woodlands I will go
To see the cherry hung with snow.

The Aspens

Along the field as we came by
A year ago, my love and I,
The aspen over stile and stone
Was talking to itself alone.
"Oh who are these that kiss and pass?
A country lover and his lass;
Two lovers looking to be wed;
And time shall put them both to bed,
But she shall lie with earth above,
And he beside another love."

And sure enough beneath the tree
There walks another love with me,
And overhead the aspen heaves
Its rainy-sounding silver leaves;
And I spell nothing in their stir,
But now perhaps they speak to her,
And plain for her to understand
They talk about a time at hand
When I shall sleep with clover clad,
And she beside another lad.

Is My Team Ploughing?

"Is my team ploughing,
That I was used to drive
And hear the harness jingle
When I was man alive?"

Ay, the horses trample,
The harness jingles now;
No change though you lie under
The land you used to plough.

"Is football playing
Along the river-shore,
With lads to chase the leather,
Now I stand up no more?"

Ay, the ball is flying,
The lads play heart and soul;
The goal stands up, the keeper
Stands up to keep the goal.

"Is my girl happy,
That I thought hard to leave,
And has she tired of weeping
As she lies down at eve?"

FREDERICK SEPTIMUS KELLY (1881–1916)

Elegy: In Memoriam Rupert Brooke (1915)

(arrangement for string quartet by Richard Dival)

Ay, she lies down lightly,
She lies not down to weep:
Your girl is well contented.
Be still, my lad, and sleep.

“Is my friend hearty,
Now I am thin and pine,
And has he found to sleep in
A better bed than mine?”

Yes, lad, I lie easy,
I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man’s sweetheart,
Never ask me whose.

March

The Sun at noon to higher air,
Unharnessing the silver Pair
That late before his chariot swam,
Rides on the gold wool of the Ram.

So braver notes the storm-cock sings
To start the rusted wheel of things,
And brutes in field and brutes in pen
Leap that the world goes round again.

The boys are up the woods with day
To fetch the daffodils away,
And home at noonday from the hills
They bring no dearth of daffodils.

Afield for palms the girls repair,
And sure enough the palms are there,
And each will find by hedge or pond
Her waving silver-tufted wand.

In farm and field through all the shire
The eye beholds the heart’s desire;
Ah, let not only mine be vain,
For lovers should be loved again.

Although born in Sydney, Australia, Frederick Kelly moved to England at the age of twelve and was schooled at Eton College, before going on to study History at Balliol College, Oxford. In academia he struggled, graduating with a fourth-class degree, but in music – and in rowing – he excelled. He represented Oxford at the 1903 Boat Race and later went on to become an Olympian, competing at the 1908 London Olympic Games, where he and his crew took gold in the rowing eights. Kelly had been dissuaded by his parents from studying music at university, but it remained a preoccupation throughout his time at Oxford, and after graduating he returned to the piano and to composition with new zeal. He continued to compose even while serving as part of the Royal Navy Division during the First World War, but was sadly killed in battle at the Somme in November 1916, leaving behind just a handful of scores, most of them for piano or chamber ensemble.

It is little surprise that there is a poignancy to much of the music Kelly composed during his two years in service, but his *Elegy* of 1915 holds a special place in the wartime repertoire. Kelly served alongside the poet Rupert Brooke (best known for his poem ‘The Soldier’) during the first two years of the war and was by Brooke’s side when he died of sepsis in April 1915. A few days later, he would be among the burial party who interred him in an olive grove on the Greek island of Skyros. ‘*For the whole day I was oppressed with the sense of loss*’, Kelly wrote in his diary, ‘*but when the officers and men had gone and when at last the five of us, his friends, took a last look in silence – then the sense of tragedy gave place to a sense of passionless beauty, engendered both by the poet and the place.*’ Kelly’s *Elegy*, subtitled ‘*In Memoriam Rupert Brooke*’, was completed shortly afterwards. Like his diary entry, this serene tone poem bears few of the scars that Kelly and his comrades suffered at the hands of the war. Rather, with its luminous string writing and rich, sustained textures, Kelly’s *Elegy* exudes a deep sense of acceptance and calm, its ethereal solo writing as idyllic and otherworldly as the olive groves in which Brooke was laid to rest.

Britten Sinfonia is grateful to the Estate of Fra Richard Dival and the Music Archive of Monash University for permission to perform Richard Dival’s quintet version.

RUDI STEPHAN (1887–1915)

'*Nachspiel*' from *Music for Seven Stringed Instruments* (1907–11)

Today, Rudi Stephan's name is little known, but at one time he was fêted as one of the most promising composers of his generation. Born in the southern German city of Worms, not far from Mainz, Stephan studied composition at Frankfurt's Hochschule, before moving to Munich, where he became renowned for shunning his teaching and following his own instincts. This self-assuredness shines through in his music, which reveals the influences of many – Wagner, Debussy, Berg, Hindemith and even Rachmaninov – while remaining defiantly distinct. It is at once both luxuriously post-romantic and cuttngly modernist, and appears to segue effortlessly between the two, from opulence to austerity from one phrase and the next. But his biographer, Karl Holl, believes this confidence was little more than an act: 'Creation, like life as a whole, did not come particularly easily to him... he produced his music slowly and with difficulty, almost warily.' It is little surprise then that his music is couched in such variety, his thoughts and ideas shifting and developing over the many years each work spent in development.

One can only imagine where Stephan's career might have taken him had he lived beyond the First World War. As it is, he was killed by a Russian sniper while fighting on the Galician Front in September 1915, aged just 28. Worse still, most of Stephan's modest but promising collection of manuscripts were destroyed when the Worms City Archive was bombed by Allied forces during the last months of the Second World War. What remains are typically dense, often abstract scores with utilitarian names – his rather bluntly titled *Music for Seven Stringed Instruments* a case in point. '*Nachspiel*' ('Epilogue') is the second of its two movements, a work that flits between abrasive modernism and poignant melodicism with Stephan's characteristic ease. At times, we might be listening to Schoenberg, or the more pointillist textures of Webern's early works. At others, as in the brooding central section which Stephan scores for solo cello and shimmering strings, we hear echoes of Debussy and even of Brahms. Completed in 1910 and therefore still untouched by the ravages of war, there is something poignantly portentous about '*Nachspiel*', its effect today somehow coloured by the knowledge of Stephan's tragic and untimely passing.



MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)

Le tombeau de Couperin (1917)

(arrangement for oboe and string quartet by Robert Weiner)

I: *Prélude*

II: *Forlane*

III: *Menuet*

IV: *Rigaudon*

Britten Sinfonia will be performing movements I and II in these performances.

When Ravel was enrolled into the Paris Conservatoire in 1889, he looked set to become one of the institution's young stars, winning first prize in its prestigious piano competition in 1891. Unfortunately, his success was short-lived: he failed to win any further awards and was dismissed from the Conservatoire in 1895. Two years later, he returned to the Conservatoire once more, this time to study composition with Gabriel Fauré and counterpoint with André Gédalge, and in the years that followed he learned to combine his love for the piano with his growing proficiency as a composer. Many of his major works, particularly in his early years, would be composed for the piano and later orchestrated for larger ensembles. As his former pupil Roland-Manuel recollected, this process became something of a trademark: *'This metamorphosis of piano pieces into symphonic works was a game for Ravel, a game played to perfection, so that the transcription outdid the charm of the original.'*

Le tombeau de Couperin was composed in 1917 for solo piano, but Ravel returned to the score two years later to arrange four of its six movements for orchestra. Originally conceived as a monument to the music of the Baroque and the likes of François Couperin (hence the title), it instead became a memorial to Ravel's friends who had died in service during the First World War, during which Ravel served as a truck and ambulance driver and witnessed the atrocities at first hand. Later asked why a work with such morbid associations appears to be so light-hearted, Ravel responded: *'The dead are sad enough in their eternal silence.'* Indeed, three of the four movements that make up the orchestral suite are dances, and Ravel specifically inverted the final movements to finish with a Rigaudon – the liveliest of the lot. In this respect, the music seems to evoke the life and spirit of the people to whom it is dedicated, rather than dwelling on the tragic circumstances of their death.

Borrowing from the traditional structure of a Baroque dance suite, the work opens with a graceful Prelude, in which Ravel's modern, impressionistic harmonies are

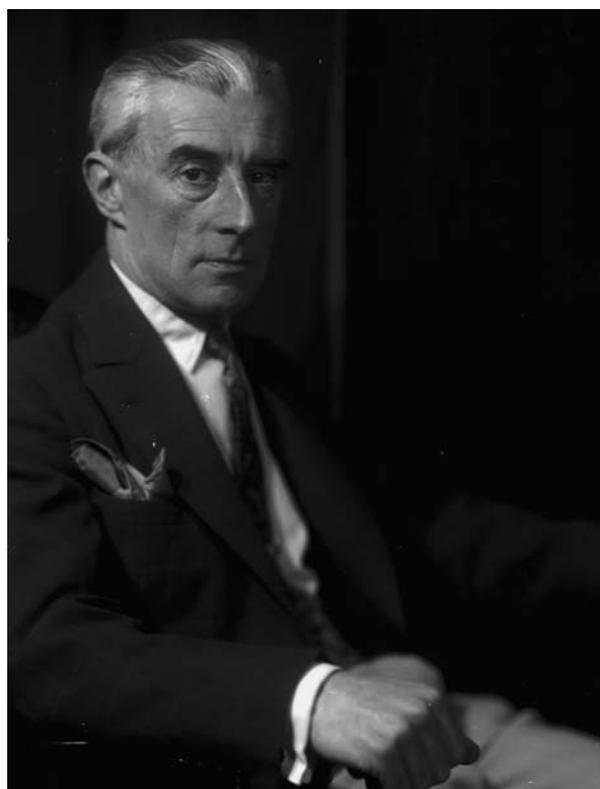


Photo by Vera Prasilova Scott (1926) © Rice University

embellished with melodic ornamentation straight out of the 18th century. This is followed by a lively Forlane, a traditional Venetian dance that was often used in place of the 'sinful' tango – a dance sometimes considered too vulgar for court events. The Minuet forms the work's expressive centrepiece, the oboe used poignantly to highlight the melancholic melodic line in its outer sections. At the movement's centre, however, Ravel unleashes a chain of anguished chromaticisms above a persistent droning bass, creating the only moment of unguarded, outspoken grief in the suite. This is soon swept away, however, by the onset of the Rigaudon that closes the work: a lively, exuberant movement that sets the brass free and carries the music homewards with the spirit of life and freedom.

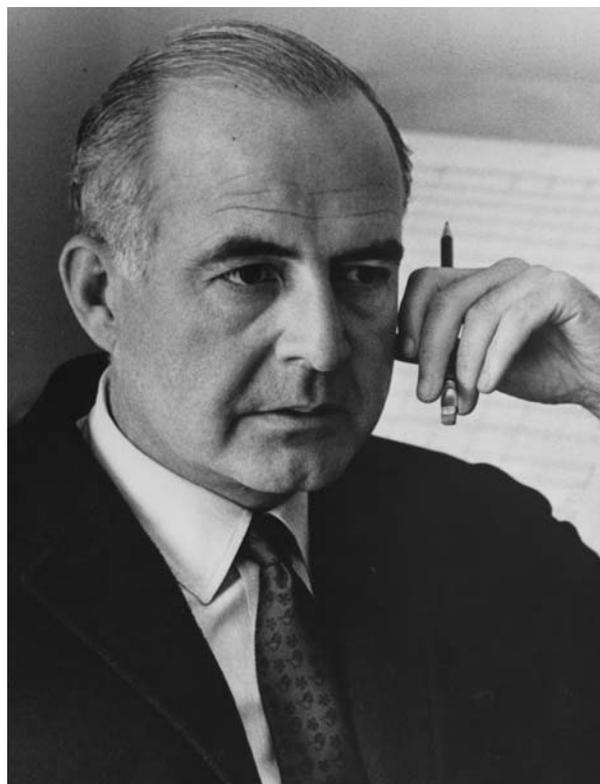
SAMUEL BARBER (1910–1981)

Adagio for Strings (1936)

Samuel Barber has become celebrated above all for just one work – his *Adagio for Strings* – although his catalogue of music, while not as extensive as some of his contemporaries, extends from solo piano music and instrumental chamber works to symphonies, concertos and operas. He was twice awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Music, in addition to the American Prix de Rome, and in 1966 he was commissioned to write a new opera to mark the opening of the Metropolitan Opera's new home at the Lincoln Center (the production was a flop, but this was largely due to Zeffirelli's direction, rather than Barber's music).

Barber's relative neglect from the 20th-century canon probably owes much to his musical style. While many of his contemporaries forged new harmonic paths through atonality and serialism, exploring bold new levels of dissonance, rhythmic vitality and texture, Barber seemed to content to follow his own path, one which owed more to the dying strains of Romanticism than to the radical new soundworld of the 20th century. That is not to say that Barber's music is not innovative and dramatic, nor that his often complex and dissonant harmonies can be considered ordinary, but the rich, full textures of his works with their predilection for sweeping, generous melodies sets them apart from many of the more experimental trends of his age.

It is precisely this expansiveness and lack of pretension that has made the *Adagio for Strings* so popular. Originally written as the third movement of his *String Quartet*, Op. 11 in 1936, Barber later made an orchestral arrangement of the *Adagio* in response to a request from Toscanini for music to be performed at the Salzburg Festival. Barber sent the score to Toscanini in January 1938 and it was later sent back without comment, leaving Barber under the impression that Toscanini had not been impressed. But Toscanini had already memorised the score and in November that year, the *Adagio* received its first performance under his baton in a live radio broadcast from the Rockefeller Center in New York to huge public acclaim. Solemn, elegiac and deeply expressive, building to an intense climax at its centre, the *Adagio* has come to be regarded as one the most mournful pieces of music ever written, used to mark occasions of great solemnity and poignancy across the world. Unfortunately for Barber, the work's huge success was also its downfall, and while the public embraced Barber's easy style, the critics launched a backlash against its perceived lack of



modernism and 'dull' musical palette. While it has made Barber's name famous today, sadly it did little to boost his critical reception during his lifetime.

Programme notes by Jo Kirkbride
(unless otherwise credited)

Programme designed and typeset by
Hugh Hillyard-Parker, Edinburgh

THOMAS GOULD

One of the most versatile and original violinists of his generation, Thomas Gould has forged an unusually varied career that encompasses directing, leading, playing concertos, chamber and new music, and also working in jazz and other non-classical genres.

Thomas has always had a particular passion for directing from the violin, and has worked in this capacity with Sinfonietta Rīga (recording Beethoven's Violin Concerto and Vaughan Williams's *The Lark Ascending*), Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Cologne Chamber Orchestra, ACO Collective and Britten Sinfonia, with whom he has recorded Dimitri Sitkovetsky's transcription of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. Currently leader of Britten Sinfonia (an orchestra he has been with since 2006), Thomas also led Aurora Orchestra from 2005 to 2016.

As a concerto soloist Thomas has performed with orchestras internationally including the LA Phil New Music Group, Orchestra Of St Luke's, West Australian Symphony Orchestra, and in the UK, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Hallé, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Royal Scottish National Orchestra. As well as the mainstream concerto repertoire, Gould has become known as an interpreter of new music, including solo works by Hans Abrahamsen, Thomas Adès, James MacMillan, Nico Muhly and Max Richter. Thomas was formerly on the Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) scheme.

As a chamber musician and recitalist, Thomas has enjoyed partnerships with pianist Alasdair Beatson, cellist Adrian Brendel, accordionist Ksenija Sidorova, the Artea String Quartet (with whom Thomas has recorded quartets by Mendelssohn and Schubert on Champs Hill Records), and has performed as a guest with the Nash Ensemble. Thomas is a regular participant at IMS Prussia Cove and Dartington International Summer School.

Jazz is a more recent strand to Thomas's career, and during 2017–18 he presented a series at Kings Place called the 'Gould Standard'. Recent collaborators include pianist Gwilym Simcock and saxophonist Tim Garland, and for five years Thomas played in the successful swing band 'Man Overboard Quintet', recording two albums for Champs Hill Records. Another recent collaboration outside classical music is with techno music pioneer Jeff Mills. 2018 sees the release of a new quintet jazz



Photo © Simon Weir

album called *Hourglass* featuring the music of Johannes Berauer.

Thomas is a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music, where he studied between 2001 and 2006 with Joji Hattori and György Pauk. He plays a 1782 G.B. Guadagnini violin.

JONATHAN MCGOVERN

This season Jonathan McGovern makes his anticipated role debut as Don Giovanni in Michael Boyd's new production for Garsington Opera. Elsewhere he returns to Staatsoper Hamburg as Papageno under Kent Nagano as well as making his company debuts with both Welsh National Opera as Prince Andrei in Prokofiev's *War and Peace* and Staatstheater Klagenfurt as Pelléas. In concert he sings *Dido and Aeneas* at the Concertgebouw under Christian Curnyn, Fauré's *Requiem* with the Orchestre Philharmonique Royal de Liège conducted by Hervé Niquet, and Nico Muhly's *The Last Letter* for his debut with Britten Sinfonia. Further ahead Jonathan looks forward to adding the role of Eugene Onegin to his expanding repertoire.

Recent highlights have included outstanding debuts as Pelléas in Barrie Kosky's new production for Komische Oper Berlin and Papageno for Staatsoper Hamburg in Jette Steckel's new production under Jean-Christophe Spinosi and for Garsington Opera under Christian Curnyn. Elsewhere, Jonathan has sung the title role in Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* and Calixto Bieito's new production of *Johannes-Passion* for Teatro Arriaga, Bilbao as well as Robert Carsen's production of *Les fêtes vénitiennes* with Les Arts Florissants under William Christie on tour in Toulouse and New York.

On the concert platform recent successes have included Junior in Bernstein's *A Quiet Place* with Ensemble Modern under Kent Nagano in Berlin, Dortmund and Dresden, as well as Beethoven's *Choral Fantasy* at the Verbier Festival under Charles Dutoit, *Carmina Burana* at the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma, the NDR Podium der Jungen under Andrew Litton and Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* with the Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra under Daniel Cohen.

A gifted recitalist, Jonathan has performed with pianists Malcolm Martineau, Graham Johnson, Simon Lepper, James Baillieu, Timothy End and James Cheung. In recent seasons he has appeared at the Wigmore Hall, Musée d'Orsay, deSingel, the Oxford Lieder Festival, London English Song Festival and the Lichfield Festival.



Photo © Gerard Collett

SOPHIE HUNTER

Sophie Hunter studied foreign languages at Oxford University before moving to Paris, where she trained at the Jacques Lecoq Theatre School. She has recently returned from New York, where she has been working as a director in theatre collaborating with Jim Jarmusch and Rupert Goold.

Sophie was one of the original Screen International Stars of Tomorrow, having beaten Audrey Tautou to the role of Isis in Guy Chambers' *Isis Project* – a beautiful album and sort of homage to Serge Gainsborough and Jane Birkin.

Sophie's credits include Mira Nair's *Vanity Fair*, Stephen Poliakoff's *Friends and Crocodile*, and *Macbeth*, directed by Rupert Goold.



RICHARD PRYAL

Richard trained at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

Recent theatre includes: *The Plough and the Stars* (Royal National Theatre), *An Enemy of the People* (Chichester Festival Theatre), *Caught and Hamlet is Dead. No Gravity* (Arcola), *She Stoops to Conquer* (Bath Theatre Royal), *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Rose Theatre, Kingston), *Macbeth* and *Comedy of Errors* (Grosvenor Park Open Air Theatre), *Romeo & Juliet* (Bury St Edmunds), *Three Sisters* (Young Vic), *Farm Boy* (59e59 Theater, New York), *The Tempest* and *Love's Labours Lost* (Oxford Shakespeare Co.), *Translations* (Leicester Curve), *The Ugly One* (Norwich Theatre Royal), *The Merchant of Venice* (Changeling Theatre Co.), *Tamburlaine* and *Edward II* (Rose Theatre, South Bank).

Films include: *Narcopolis* (T-Squared Film), *Zebra Crossing* (Exile Media Group), *The Baseline* (Finelight Films), *She Stoops to Conquer* (Sky Arts) and *Stardust* (Paramount & MARV Pictures).

Television includes: *Killing Eve*, *Manhunt*, *London Spy*, *David Copperfield*, *A Passionate Woman* and *Murder Rooms*.



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Britten Sinfonia's OPUS competition is an open call for scores in the search for the most exciting new compositional talent. Now in its sixth year, OPUS2018 offers unpublished composers of any age the chance to receive a professional commission as part of Britten Sinfonia's award-winning At Lunch series. This year composers have been challenged to write for a piano quintet and folk singer, set to a Gaelic text.

For the first time ever Britten Sinfonia will open up the finalists' workshop day to the general public. Join Sir James MacMillan, an ensemble of Britten Sinfonia principal players, folk singer Hannah Rarity and five shortlisted composers from across the UK for a day exploring the creative process behind writing for a chamber ensemble. Each composer will have 40 minutes to refine their piece under the guidance of the musicians and mentor Sir James MacMillan. Audiences are invited to observe these sessions and will be able to download the scores for each piece so they can follow the music during each session. There will also be an opportunity to put your questions to Sir James MacMillan in an audience Q&A, a talk about support available for composers from Harriet Wybor (PRS for Music), and the opportunity to vote for the Audience Prize.

At the end of the day our panel of judges will announce the both the winner of the Audience Prize and the overall winner of the OPUS2018 Competition.

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CAROLINE DEARNLEY *cello*

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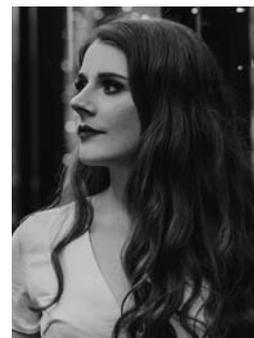
SIR JAMES MACMILLAN *composer mentor*

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Sir James MacMillan

Photo © Philip Gatward



Hannah Rarity

Photo © Eily Lucas

BRITTEN SINFONIA

Britten Sinfonia is one of the world's most celebrated and pioneering ensembles. The orchestra is acclaimed for its virtuoso musicianship, an inspired approach to concert programming which makes bold, intelligent connections across 400 years of repertoire, and a versatility that is second to none. Britten Sinfonia breaks the mould by not having a principal conductor or director, instead choosing to collaborate with a range of the finest international guest artists from across the musical spectrum, resulting in performances of rare insight and energy.

Britten Sinfonia is an Associate Ensemble at the Barbican in London, and became Resident Orchestra at Saffron Hall in 2016. The orchestra also has residencies across the east of England in Norwich and Cambridge (where it is an Ensemble-in-Residence at the University) and performs a chamber music series at Wigmore Hall. Britten Sinfonia appears regularly at major UK festivals including the Aldeburgh Festival, Brighton Festival and the BBC Proms.

A growing international profile includes regular touring to North and South America and performances in many of Europe's finest concert halls. The orchestra made its debut in China in May 2016 with a three-concert residency in Shanghai, as well as performances in Beijing and Wuhan. In 2018 Britten Sinfonia made its debut at the Sistine Chapel, with The Sixteen.

Founded in 1992, the orchestra is inspired by the ethos of Benjamin Britten through world-class performances, illuminating and distinctive programmes where old meets new, and a deep commitment to bringing outstanding music to both the world's finest concert halls and the local community. Britten Sinfonia is a BBC Radio 3 broadcast partner and regularly records for Harmonia Mundi and Hyperion.

In 2018–19, Britten Sinfonia collaborates with artists including Thomas Adès, Sir Mark Elder, Brad Mehldau, Sophie Bevan, Allan Clayton and Roderick Williams with premieres from composers including Joby Talbot, Nico Muhly, Luke Styles and Edmund Finnis.

Central to Britten Sinfonia's artistic programmes is a wide range of Creative Learning projects within both schools and the community including the talented youth ensemble, Britten Sinfonia Academy and annual composition competition, OPUS, offering unpublished composers of all ages and backgrounds the chance to receive a professional commission.

In 2013 Britten Sinfonia was awarded its second Royal Philharmonic Society Music Award for Ensemble, also having won the Chamber Music Award in 2009. Britten Sinfonia recordings have been Grammy-nominated, and have received a Gramophone Award, an ECHO/Klassik Recording Award, a BBC Music Magazine Award and most recently in 2017 the prestigious Diapason d'Or de l'Année for James MacMillan's *Stabat Mater*, with The Sixteen. In 2014 Britten Sinfonia was nominated for an Olivier Award for its collaboration with the Richard Alston Dance Company.

“ Britten Sinfonia keep reinventing the chamber orchestra. ”
The Telegraph 2016



Photo © Alex Beer

BRITTEN SINFONIA

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