

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 10 May 2025

In Focus: Roxanna Panufnik
in association with RNCM

RNCM
ROYAL NORTHERN
COLLEGE of MUSIC

11.00am

Winnie Su piano
Isabeau Hansen flute
Jemima Gray mezzo-soprano
Chichi Li piano
Rachel Stonham violin

Heartwood Quartet
Audrey Doyle violin
Bruno Robalo violin
Michaela Jones viola
Jasmine Blackshaw-Britton cello

Roxanna Panufnik (b.1968)

Babylonia for solo piano (2022)
Winnie Su

A Wind at Rooks Haven for solo flute (1997)
Isabeau Hansen

Mine Eye for mezzo-soprano and piano (1999)

Sweet Love Remember'd for mezzo-soprano and piano (2005)
Jemima Gray & Chichi Li

Haodong Wang (b.2001)

In the Summoning of Rain for solo flute (2025) *London première*
Isabeau Hansen

Roxanna Panufnik

Hora Bessarabia for solo violin (2015)
Rachel Stonham

Heartfelt for string quartet (2019)

I. Uzbek Processional

II. Lament for a Bulgarian Dancing Bear

Heartwood Quartet

12.15pm

In Conversation: Manus Carey, RNCM Deputy Principal (Performance and Programmes), leads an informal chat with today's featured composer Roxanna Panufnik.

RNCM Chamber Choir

Stuart Overington director

Andre Chan conductor*

Eve Codman, Katie Shepperdson, Madeleine Wickham-Brown, Emily Ampt, Rosalind Hardie soprano

Louise Wood, Mollie Swain, Kamea Nemeth, Ruby Donnelly, Persie Bell, Heledd Richardson alto

Jacob Parker, Sam Yuen, Oscar Fairclough, Isaac Bentley, Oliver Mollett tenor

Harry Priestley, Alex Yehorychev, Alex Rouault, Colin Wu, Edward Wenborn bass

Archie Freeman violin

Nina Doig violin

Estelle Gonzalez viola

Paula Bowes viola

Elena Edwards cello

Rhys Nicholson cello

Anna Turner oboe

Dovestone Quartet

Georgina Bloomfield violin

Rachel Stonham violin

Paula Bowes viola

Maya Tucker cello

Roxanna Panufnik (b.1968)

Kyrie after Byrd for chamber choir (2014)

O Hearken for chamber choir (2015)

Celestial Bird for chamber choir (2013)

RNCM Chamber Choir & Stuart Overington director

Roxanna Panufnik

& Andrzej Panufnik (1914-1991)

Modlitwa for string sextet (1990-9, rev. 2013)

Archie Freeman, Nina Doig, Estelle Gonzalez, Paula Bowes,
Elena Edwards & Maya Tucker

Yelin Zhou (b.2001)

Atlantis for string sextet (2025) *London première*

Archie Freeman, Nina Doig, Estelle Gonzalez, Paula Bowes,
Elena Edwards & Rhys Nicholson

Roxanna Panufnik

Letters from Burma for oboe and string quartet (2004)

I. Aung-ze Paing-ze • II. Young birds outside cages •

III. Thazin • IV. Kintha dance

Anna Turner & Dovestone Quartet

All Shall Be Well for chamber choir and cello* (2009)

Love Endureth for chamber choir (2012)

RNCM Chamber Choir, Stuart Overington director, Andre Chan conductor* &
Rhys Nicholson cello*

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ENGLAND**



11.00am

Babylonia for solo piano

When Margaret Fingerhut commissioned this piece, we both felt that we'd like to celebrate our Jewish roots. We decided to look into Iraqi Jewish music to conjure up a vanished world. Jews had lived in the region for over 2,000 years until they had to flee the country only a generation ago. We soon came across the beautiful 'D'ror Yikra' – often sung during Shabbat meals, to a haunting Iraqi folk melody.

My piece follows the words of the song, which were written by Moroccan poet, linguist and musician Dunash ben Labrat, in 960 CE. There are biblical references and the first verse draws from Leviticus declaring liberty to everyone. The music opens with hints of the theme to come, played inside the piano evoking the haunting Iraqi Santur. Returning to the keyboard, the theme becomes established and embellished over a rocking accompaniment as the words implore rest, on this Sabbath day.

The remaining five verses of the song alternate between Longing and Anger, from the yearning descending notes in the theme for *A. Longing, for a sign that better times to come* to a sense of danger and unpredictability ensuing in *D. Anger, again at foes but praying for unity*. The final verse, *E. Longing, for a glorious future* is regal in its wisdom and beauty, and has a majestic and stately feel to it. It sounds like it is heading for hope and a happy ending but we end in quiet, bittersweet contemplation – in memory of the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi Jews who had to leave the country, never to return. And it is to them, that I dedicate this piece.

A Wind at Rooks Haven for solo flute

Mel Cox was murdered by the IRA in the late 1980s. This setting of *A Wind at Rooks Haven* was commissioned by his sister Olivia Cox-Fil for their father's 80th birthday in October 1997. It's a beautiful poem – but conjures a sparse landscape. Hence a very spacial feel in the music which is created by having just a 'sad, lovely' flute accompanying but also small phrases where voice or flute are playing on their own. There is a lot of word-painting and the bird-like figurations in the flute represent the rook.

Mine Eye for mezzo-soprano and piano Sweet Love Remember'd for mezzo-soprano and piano

Mine Eye and *Sweet Love Remember'd* are Shakespeare sonnet settings. The first was a romantic Valentine's Day tribute to my partner of the time, and the second was commissioned by Dora Black for her husband Jack, on the occasion of their 50th Wedding anniversary.

Hora Bessarabia for solo violin

Hora Bessarabia uses the famous Romanian and Hungarian Doina and Hora form – I fell in love with Track 2 on Jordi Savall's *Balkan Spirit* CD. The Doina is usually slow and highly ornamented, whereas the Hora is wildly fast and virtuosic – a great opportunity to show dexterity off!

Doina 1 – with great love and soul is to be played with great beauty and soul – the echoes I've added are to create a feeling

of space and open country. *Hora 1 – mischievously* starts at quite a steady pace but, in true gypsy musical style, accelerates towards the end. *Doina 2 – angelically* sees harmonics give the cymbalom arpeggios an ethereal touch. But soon this gentle atmosphere is shattered by *Hora 2 – dangerously*, as a fiendish Bulgarian pulse takes over the Hora – 11/16 (2+2+3+2+2) with one bar even venturing into 15/16... The piece ends explosively – as if the player has spontaneously combusted from sheer speed.

Heartfelt for string quartet

Music, for me, is all about the heart. The court musicians of 17th-century Uzbekistan used to set the tempo of their performances by first feeling their pulse. This would ensure that their music would have a 'stately' start, however ebullient their dance music became. Whilst listening to some examples, I imagined a grand and regal caravan of camels and carriages, travelling down the Silk Road.

In *1. Uzbek Processional*, each stage of the convoy has its own music – for this I use 'Shashmaqam' dance rhythms and snatches of authentic melodies. *2. Lament for a Bulgarian Dancing Bear* was inspired by Witold Szabłowski's evocative and sometimes harrowing book *Dancing Bears*, which describes rescues of maltreated animals from their exploitative owners, when bear dancing became illegal in Bulgaria. I have used the slow rhythm of an Eastern European brown bear's heartbeat on just one note (F sharp) which runs all the way through the piece. The movement ends happily as the bear's heartbeat elevates in joy, as he is rescued.

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In the Summoning of Rain

Rain is not only a natural phenomenon but also carries symbolic meanings across cultures. It is often associated with life, growth, and renewal, yet it can also evoke feelings of sadness, loss, and isolation.

Growing up in Northern China, I often eagerly awaited the arrival of summer rainstorms. As a child, I would listen to the sound of raindrops hitting various surfaces for hours, fascinated by the contradictions within rainfall – how it could be both isolating and cleansing, peaceful yet invigorating. Over time I developed complex and personal feelings toward rain.

In my piece, *In the Summoning of Rain*, I aim to capture this sense of anticipation, secrecy, tension, and obsession through the act of calling for rain. In this imaginative ritual, the music begins with a soft, ritualistic chant, creating an atmosphere of mystery and quiet tension. As the invocation builds, the music grows more insistent and obsessive, reflecting the growing urgency and longing of the ritual. The tension mounts, but the rain remains elusive, refusing to fall despite the intensifying summons. Only at the very end, after a secret 'sacrifice', does the atmosphere shift, and the first raindrops finally arrive – just as the music abruptly cuts off.

© Haodong Wang

Roxanna Panufnik (b.1968)

Babylonia for solo piano (2022)

A Wind at Rooks Haven for solo flute (1997)

Mine Eye for mezzo-soprano and piano (1999)

William Shakespeare

Mine eye hath played the painter and hath steeled
The beauty's form in table of my heart;
My body is the frame wherein 'tis held.
And perspective it is best painter's art,
For through the painter must you see his skill,
To find where your true image pictured lies,
Which in my bosom's shop is hanging still,
That hath his windows glazed with thine eyes.
Now see what good turns eyes for eyes have done:
Mine eyes have drawn thy shape, and thine for me
Are windows to my breast, wherethrough the sun
Delights to peep, to gaze therein on thee.
Yet eyes this cunning want to grace their art,
They draw but what they see, know not the heart.

**Sweet Love Remember'd for mezzo-soprano
and piano** (2005)

William Shakespeare

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possesses'd,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least:
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Haodong Wang (b.2001)

In the Summoning of Rain for solo flute (2025)

Roxanna Panufnik

Hora Bessarabia for solo violin (2015)

Heartfelt for string quartet (2019)

I. Uzbek Processional

II. Lament for a Bulgarian Dancing Bear

2.00pm

Kyrie after Byrd for chamber choir

When ORA came to me, asking for a *Kyrie* that related to Byrd's *Mass for 5 Voices*, I immediately went to YouTube to listen to Byrd's original. I loved the way that the melody of the first 'Kyrie eleison' almost immediately transposes and capitalized on this harmonically by taking my version through several quite chromatic changes and adding an extra bass voice, thereby extra harmonic potential. I've kept the 'Christe eleison' as a calmer and more ethereal section, floating gently back into the chromatic 'Kyrie', which almost forgets itself in harmonic and dramatic propriety but suddenly takes stock of itself and ends with quiet reverence.

O Harken for chamber choir

This piece was a raffle prize at Westminster Abbey Choir School Summer Fete in 2015. The prize was won by Pamela Carrington, who selected these words and asked me to write something for the choir and their Director, James O'Donnell, requested an *Introit* that was 'pithy' and celebratory. The music starts with layers of summoning 'O harkens' followed by a more ethereal section depicting the making of prayers in the text. Then it ends as it starts, with a flourish.

Celestial Bird for chamber choir

This piece was written for VOCES8 as a thank you for participating in a recent CD. It's written very much with them in mind – their 'Sweet and luminous' voices soared through my imagination as I composed. When I read this stunning poem for the first time, I heard a Celtic folk-influenced style of music – I discovered after setting it that Jessica Powers had Scottish and Irish ancestry (she later became a Carmelite nun in Wisconsin, renaming herself as Sister Miriam). I have heard her described as an 'artist, painting words' – which fits my overt style of word-painting in music. The piece is dedicated to VOCES8 with love and thanks and lasts about 5 minutes.

Modlitwa for string sextet

In 1990 the Polish poet Jerzy Pietrkiewicz, a close friend of my father's, showed him a prayer that he had written to the Virgin of Skempe. My father set the second verse to music but left the first to be narrated as he didn't want to obscure the beauty of the words with music. It is a beautifully poignant and simple setting which Jerzy asked me, nine years later, to 'complete' by setting the narrated words to music, also. The outer sections are by my father and the inner one by me.

My father often likened the sound of stringed instruments to the human voice – referring to the 'singing qualities' of particularly the cello. It is for this reason that I have given much of the melody to what is traditionally a bass instrument in its string versions.

Letters from Burma for oboe and string quartet

When the Summer Music Society of Dorset commissioned this piece, for Douglas Boyd and the Vellinger Quartet, I had a look at what else was to be programmed with it. I noted Janáček's *Intimate Letters* and wondered whether I could compose some 'Letters' of my

own. Then I came across a remarkable book *Letters from Burma* – 52 letters written by the famous dissident Aung San Suu Kyi to a Japanese newspaper, between November 1995 and December 1996. They describe every aspect of Burma – its culture, scenery, religion, politics etc. – copious inspiration for a new composition!

With the help of Burmese music expert John O'Kell, I discovered a stunning traditional Burmese folk song *Aung-ze paing-ze* – a laudatory song of benediction about the power and valour of the King. The piece is influenced not only by this melody but by its *appoggiaturas* ('grace notes'), *portamentos* (subtle 'glissandos') and quarter-tones (pitches between the 12-tone scale used in Western music traditions).

The first movement is a straight transcription of part of the song in the oboe, with a new accompaniment in the strings. 2. *Young Birds outside Cages* (which follows the first movement without a gap) was inspired by Suu Kyi's harrowing depiction of children trying to touch their parents who are political prisoners behind bars. She describes them as 'young birds fluttering helplessly outside the cages that shut their parents away from them'; the string quartet represents the cold and relentless bars of a cage and the oboe is the child/bird trying to get through. 3. *Thazin* is the name of a Burmese orchid – it is an 'exceedingly romantic' national symbol and a great excuse for me to be equally romantic, with use of little grace note figurations and maybe less-than-subtle glissandos. 4. *Kintha Dance* is a composite of all of Suu Kyi's descriptions of dance throughout the book. At various points small and clumsy chordal interruptions occur in the string quartet – this is my analogy for the current oppressive regime trying and failing to quench the vivid and irrepressible Burmese spirit.

All Shall Be Well for chamber choir and cello

I've been longing for an opportunity to work with *Bogurodzica* (pronounced Bo-goo-ro-dgee-tsa), a 14th-century plainsong hymn which Polish knights sang as they went into battle. So when The Exultate Singers commissioned a piece for their concert, celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Berlin Wall coming down, this seemed the perfect chance. I have also had my eye on Julian of Norwich's (also 14th-century) *Divine Revelations* – especially the profoundly comforting words spoken to her by God in chapter 32: 'All things shall be well.'

When I looked closely at these two texts together, I noticed that they seemed to form a conversation. The knights' pleas for safety in victory and 'paradise' (i.e. Heaven) after life are answered by God's/Julian's comforting assurance '...that all manner of thing shall be well. Have faith, and have trust, and at the last day [i.e. the day you die] you shall see it all transformed into great joy.'

I have tried to represent this conversation with two choirs in stereo, over a solo cello – the latter often taking the main melodies and sometimes contributing gusto to the lower-pitched bass lines.

From the last four lines of *Bogurodzica* ('Hear the prayer we offer') all Polish and Middle English words change into modern English as the conversation becomes more ardent and cohesive, concluding in 'Paradise' and 'great joy'.

Love Endureth for chamber choir

This setting of Psalm 136 (135) was commissioned as part of a psalm series by *Soli Deo Gloria*, devoted to promoting music in the Biblical tradition, for Westminster Cathedral Choir. The original brief referred to the 'old Hebrew psalms' which planted the idea in my mind to bring a strong Jewish flavour to both the music and the words. I have used two fragments of Spanish Sephardic chants (from both this psalm and the previous one) and, half way throughout the piece, substituted the English response for its Hebrew equivalent 'Ki L'olam chasdo' – 'For forever His mercy'.

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Roxanna Panufnik (b.1968)

Kyrie after Byrd for chamber choir (2014)

Liturgical text

Kyrie eleison.	Lord, have mercy.
Christe eleison.	Christ, have mercy.
Kyrie eleison.	Lord, have mercy.

O Harken for chamber choir (2015)

Biblical text

O harken thou unto the voice of my calling, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I make my prayer.

Celestial Bird for chamber choir (2013)

Jessica Powers

O Sweet and luminous Bird,
Having once heard Your call, lovely and shy,
I shall be hungry for the finished word.
Across the windy sky

Of all voiced longing and all music heard,
I spread my net for Your bewildering wings,
But wings are wiser than the swiftest hands.
Where a bird sings

I held my heart, in fear that it would break.
I called You through the grief of whip-poor-wills,
I watched You in the avenues that make
A radiant city on the western hills.

Yet since I knew You not, I sought in vain.
I called You Beauty for its fleet white sound.
But now in my illumined heart
I can release the hound

Atlantis

What would happen if you knocked on the door of an unknown world? Would you be greeted by a stunning view or the fear of death, or both?

Atlantis is written for string sextet. The original inspiration for this piece was a documentary that introduced me to the mysterious island of Atlantis. The myth reminds me of times that I faced unknown places and people, as well as the importance of holding an adventurous spirit in your journey through life.

© Yelin Zhou

Of love upon whose bruising leash I strain.
Oh, he will grasp You where You skim the sod,
Nor wound Your breast, for love is soft as death,
Swifter than beauty is, and strong as God.

Roxanna Panufnik

& Andrzej Panufnik (1914-1991)

Modlitwa for string sextet (1990-9, rev. 2013)

Yelin Zhou (b.2001)

Atlantis for string sextet (2025)

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Letters from Burma for oboe and string quartet (2004)

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III. Thazin
IV. Kintha dance

All Shall Be Well for chamber choir and cello (2009)

Polish traditional and Julian of Norwich

Bogurodzica (Verse 1)

Bogurodzica, Dziewica,
Bogiem sławiona Maryja,
Twego syna, Gospodzina,
Matko zwolena, Maryja.
Zyszczy nam, spuści
nam,
Kyrie eleison.

Julian of Norwich (in middle English)

All thing shal be wele.
... al manner of thing shall be wele
Take now hede faithfully and trosting, and at the last end thus halt verily sen it in fulhede of joye.

Bogurodzica (Verse 2)

Twego dzieła Krzciciela,
Boż·cyze,
Usłysz głosy, napełn myśli
człowiecze.
Słysz modlitwę, jaż nosimy,
A dać raczy, jegoż
prosimy;
A na świecie zbożny pobyt,
Po żywocie rajski przebył.

Julian of Norwich (in middle English)

All thing shal be wele.
... al manner of thing shall be wele
Take now hede faithfully and trosting, and at the last end thus halt verily sen it in fulhede of joye.

Kyrie eleison.

Mother of God (Verse 1)

Mother of God, Oh Virgin,
Glorified Mary by God,
Your son, our Lord,
Chosen Mother, Mary,
Conquer for us, bestow
upon us,
Lord have mercy.

Julian of Norwich (in modern English)

All things shall be well.
... all manner of things shall be well.
Have faith, and have trust, and at the last day you shall see it all transformed into great joy.

Mother of God (Verse 2)

For the sake of your Baptist, God's son,
Hear our voices, fulfill mankind's intentions.
Hear the prayer we offer
And grant us what we ask of him:
A pious stay on earth
And after life, Paradise.

Julian of Norwich (in modern English)

All things shall be well.
... all manner of thing shall be well.
Have faith, and have trust, and at the last day you shall see it all transformed into great joy.

Lord have mercy.

Love Endureth for chamber choir (2012)

Biblical text

Praise the Lord, for he is good: *for His steadfast love endureth for ever.*

Praise ye the God of gods: *for His steadfast love endureth for ever.*

Praise ye the Lord of lords: *for His steadfast love endureth for ever.*

Who alone doth great wonders: *for His steadfast love endureth for ever.*

Who made the heavens in understanding: *for His steadfast love endureth for ever.*

Who established the earth above the waters: *for His steadfast love endureth for ever.*

Who made the great lights: *for His steadfast love endureth for ever.*

The sun to rule over the day: *for His steadfast love endureth for ever.*

The moon and the stars to rule the night: *for His steadfast love endureth for ever.*

Ki L'olam chasdo, Ki L'olam chasdo (For forever His mercy)

Who smote Egypt with their firstborn:

Who brought Israel from among them:

With a mighty hand and a stretched out arm:

Who divided the Red Sea into parts: And brought out Israel through the midst thereof:

And overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea:

Praise the Lord, for he is good: *for His steadfast love endureth for ever.*

Praise ye the God of gods: *for His steadfast love endureth for ever.*

Praise ye the Lord of lords: *for His steadfast love endureth for ever.*

Give glory to the God of heaven: *for His steadfast love endureth for ever.*

Give glory to the Lord of lords: *for His steadfast love endureth for ever.*