

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 21 November 2022
1.00pm

Masterpiece

The King's Singers

Patrick Dunachie countertenor
Edward Button countertenor
Julian Gregory tenor
Christopher Bruerton baritone
Nick Ashby baritone
Jonathan Howard bass

György Ligeti (1923-2006)

The Alphabet from *Nonsense Madrigals* (1988-93)

Ola Gjeilo (b.1978)

A Dream within a Dream (2022)

Joby Talbot (b.1971)

The Wishing Tree (2002)

Francesca Amewudah-Rivers (b.1998)

Alive (2022)

Paul Drayton (b.1944)

Masterpiece (1987)

Plus additional close harmony arrangements of songs that were announced from the stage:

Paul McCartney (b. 1942)

And I love her (1964) *arranged by Bob Chilcott*

Mel Leven (1914-2007)

Cruella de Vil from *One Hundred and One Dalmatians*
(1961) *arranged by Jim Clements*

Trad/Scottish

Loch Lomond *arranged by David Overton*

Cy Coleman (1929-2004)

The rhythm of life from *Sweet Charity* (1966)
arranged by Peter Knight



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3

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Our programme 'Masterpiece' is, in essence, a chance for us to show off. Not our singing - although we might try to do a bit of that too - but our music library, and our ongoing commitment to commissioning new works from great composers. In so many cases, composers that we've commissioned have come back to us with unexpected, boundary-pushing, genre-defying and sometimes hilarious works. This is something we take as a compliment, and the joy we get from this body of choral pieces is something we want to share with our audience throughout this programme. In addition to showcasing the five works we have commissioned (including two world premières), and a set of bespoke close-harmony arrangements, in this programme we are also celebrating some important musical anniversaries and the vibrant, living and evolving tradition of choral music today.

'The Alphabet' comes from *Nonsense Madrigals*, a set of six pieces written by the Hungarian composer **György Ligeti** between 1988 and 1993. This concert season we are celebrating what would have been Ligeti's 100th birthday. When he wrote these *Nonsense Madrigals*, 'The Alphabet' was designed to be the third out of a total of five, occupying the centre point in the sequence. As it happens, Ligeti ended up writing an 'extra' madrigal in 1993 and so 'The Alphabet' does not occupy this central position in the set, but it still offers a distinct and contrasting atmosphere to the rest of the set. Unlike the other madrigals in the group, which set surreal Victorian children's poems and stories (several from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll), this movement simply articulates the letters 'A' to 'Z' in sequence, bringing to life - and into full-colour - the very building blocks of the English language. From a modest chord containing just two notes for 'A', the movement expands wildly, with the musical language shifting and distorting as each letter brings new qualities and colours to the harmony.

The following work takes us to Scandinavia - an area of the world in which choral singing is part of its history and social fabric. We are pleased to present a brand new commission by the Norwegian composer **Ola Gjeilo** (b.1978), who has become one of today's leading composers of choral and piano music. With works written for many of the world's great choirs, orchestras and pianists, we are thrilled, through The King's Singers Global Foundation, to have commissioned *A Dream Within a Dream*, our first piece by Ola. It comes in three short movements, and sets a thought-provoking poem by the American poet Edgar Allan Poe, whose writing is often infused with themes of mystery, folklore and darkness. This poem questions reality: given how fragile our experiences are with the relentless passing of time, *'Is all that we see or seem but a dream within a dream?'*

The contemporary British composer **Joby Talbot** (b.1971) wrote *The Wishing Tree* for The King's Singers in 2002, setting a beautiful text by the Scottish writer Kathleen Jamie. Talbot has become renowned for his

versatility, writing everything from full-scale ballets like *Alice in Wonderland* and choral cantatas, through to film scores and pop arrangements. Talbot bases *this* piece on a strong rhythmic ostinato in triadic harmony, in which the alternating voice groups invoke a medieval style of composition called the *hocket*. This is contrasted by flowing vocal lines weaving around it, reflecting the unmoving stillness of an ancient tree in the wild and ever-changing Scottish landscape around it. Kathleen Jamie's poem has a strong environmental focus, remarking how even in the ancient and superstitious Celtic tradition of 'wishing trees', humans have so often poisoned the natural world - in this case with coins hammered into the wishing tree's bark. Despite this, as the poem concludes (in the voice of the tree), 'I am still alive; in fact, in bud'.

Francesca Amewudah-Rivers (b.1998) is a true polymath: a recent Oxford graduate who combines her composing with sound design and a flourishing acting career, which has included work at the National Youth Theatre, The Globe and for BBC TV. Fran's unique musical voice draws on many different strands of influence, including musical theatre and DJing experience, as well as her classical music background. This new commission, *Alive*, has words written by Fran herself, inspired by a feeling of deep connection to the physical, natural world around her and a desire to be actively conscious, mindful, and grateful for it. The commission was made with the generous support of The King's Singers Global Foundation - a charitable entity which exists to promote new music and music education.

The piece after which the whole programme is named is *Masterpiece*, by the British composer, pianist and teacher **Paul Drayton** (b.1944). It was written for the group in 1987, and aims to celebrate - or, in some cases, poke fun at - the various styles of composers from throughout Western musical history. The piece starts with a pastiche of JS Bach, and continues through a sequence of composers new and old, eventually finding its way back to Bach, with the aptly-worded: 'Bach again!' Despite never having been recorded and released, *Masterpiece* has become one of our most popular works both live and online.

As is customary in almost all of our concerts, we will end 'Masterpiece' the programme with a selection of close-harmony arrangements. Ever since the earliest days of The King's Singers, there has been a sprinkling of popular, folk and jazz music in even our most serious concert programmes. Many great arrangers have made these adaptations for our unique format of six voices, and we're going to close today's programme with a selection that includes a celebration of 100 years since the Disney Corporation was founded, and of the recent 80th birthday of Sir Paul McCartney (with whom the group worked closely in the 1980s).

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György Ligeti (1923-2006)

The Alphabet from *Nonsense Madrigals*
(1988-93)

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ

Ola Gjeilo (b.1978)

A Dream within a Dream (2022)
Edgar Allan Poe

Take this kiss upon the brow!
And, in parting from you now,
Thus much let me avow —
You are not wrong, who deem
That my days have been a dream;
Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it therefore the less *gone*?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.

I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand —
How few! yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep — while I weep!
O God! Can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp?
O God! can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is all that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?

Joby Talbot (b.1971)

The Wishing Tree (2002)
Kathleen Jamie

I stand neither in the wilderness
nor fairyland

but in the fold
of a green hill

the tilt from one parish
into another.

To look at me
through a smirr of rain

is to taste the iron
in your own blood
because I hoard
the common currency

of longing: each wish
each secret visitation.

My limbs lift, scabbed
with greenish coins

I draw into my slow wood
fleur-de-lys, the enthroned Britannia.

Beyond, the land
reaches toward the Atlantic.

And though I'm poisoned
choking on the small change

of human hope,
daily beaten into me

look: I am still alive—
in fact, in bud.

Texts continue overleaf

Francesca Amewudah-Rivers (b.1998)

Alive (2022)

Francesca Amewudah-Rivers

I see fields
I see flowers
In my mind
When I
Step outside

I hear dreams
I hear voices
In my mind
When I
Close my eyes

And they say

This life
That you're living
Is it everything you hoped and dreamed it'd be?
This life
We've been given
Is it everything and more?

Hold on
Be strong
Don't let the fire that inspires you to go higher
Be gone
You're here
Don't fear
Breathe in the air and say a prayer and don't despair
Cos you're alive

I hear streams
I hear whispers
From the past
That lie
Deep inside

And they say

This life
That you're living
Is it everything you hoped and dreamed it'd be?
This life
We've been given
Is it everything and more?

Hold on
Be strong
Don't let the fire that inspires you to go higher
Be gone
You're here
Don't fear
Breathe in the air and say a prayer and don't despair
Cos you're alive

Do you know how it feels to be alive?

Paul Drayton (b.1944)

Masterpiece (1987)

Johann Sebastian Bach
Moderato, vivace
Vivace, non troppo
Vivace ma non troppo
E molto serio
'I said Sebastian!
Non Johann Cristian (tempo giusto),
Non Wilhelm Friendmann (serioso),
Non Carl Philipp Emanuel!
'Johann Cristian!
'Nein, nein, nein, nein, Johann Sebastian!
'Wilhelm Friedmann!
'Nein, nein, nein, nein, Johann Sebastian!
'Carl Philipp Emanuel!
'Nein, Johann Sebastian Bach!
'Bach!'

Handel!
George Frederic Handel!
Maestoso, grandioso e pomposo!
George Frederic Handel, Frederic Handel
George Fred
Ha-a-a-a-a-a-a-ndel
George Frederic Handel

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Wolfgang Amadeus, Amadeus Mozart
Andante espressivo, molto grazioso
Wolfgang Amadeus
Così fan tutte
Le nozze di Figaro
Don Giovanni
Idomeneo
Andante molto espressivo
Die Zauberflöte
Die Entführung aus dem Serail
By Mozart

Ludwig van Beethoven, Ludwig van Beethoven
Beethoven, Beethoven!

Sforzando, subito piano, agitato, appassionata

Ludwig, Ludwig, Ludwig Von!
Ludwig, Ludwig, Ludwig Van!
Ludwig, Ludwig, Ludwig Von!
Ludwig, Ludwig, Ludwig Van!

Von! Van!

Beethoven
Beethoven
Beethoven, Beethoven!

Subito piano!

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy
Felix Mendelssohn, Felix Mendelssohn
Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy
Alla Victoria, Victoria und Albert
Allegretto con molto sentimento
Allegretto con molto sentimen...delssohn!

Johann Strauss!
Eins, zwei, drei, eins, zwei, drei
Eins, zwei, drei, eins, zwei, drei
Josef Strauss, Eduard Strauss
Johann Strauss, Levi Strauss
Die Fledermaus, the Gypsy Baron too
Der Kaiser-Walzer and the Danube Blue
Tempo di valse, tempo di valse,
Tempo di valse viennoise
Morgenblätter, Wiener Blut mit Wiener
Philharmoniker
Wiener Blut und Wiener Schnitzel mit Liebfraumilch...
...in the Biergarten!
Willi Boskovsky: esitando
Herbert von Karajan: accelerando!
Waltzes und polkas, operettas
Presto, vivace, coda!
Die Fledermaus of Johann Strauss a tempo di valse
(Donner und Blitzen, Tritsch-Tratsch)
Accelerando, vivace, con moto, prestissimo
Amen to the waltzes of Johann Strauss!

Claude Debussy
Pour le piano les arabesques très fluids
Et aussi la fille aux cheveux de lin
Au clair de lune
La plume de ma tante est sur le bureau de mon oncle
Les yeux de mon oncle sont sur la fille aux cheveux
de lin!
La mer
Monsieur Debussy, Monsieur Debussy

César Franck, Holst, Liszt, Bach
Bull, Balfe, Boyce, Brahms, Bloch, Bruch
Berg, Bax, Wolf, Weill, Grieg, Glück

Wagner! Wagner!
Herr Richard Wagner!

Bartók, Britten, Bruckner, Bizet, Schubert, Chopin
Schumann, Schönberg, Mozart, Mahler, Verdi,
Weber
Haydn, Handel, Poulenc, Purcell, Tippett, Tallis,
Telemann...

Wagner, Wa-a-a-a...
Ha, ha, ha, ha! (Ho, ho, ho, ho!)
Wagner!

Beethoven, Berlioz, Borodin, Benedict
Mendelssohn, Massenet, Messiaen, Meyerbeer
Monteverdi, Shostakovich, Szymanowski,
Sammartini

Frescobaldi, Pergolesi, Palestrina, Paganini
Cavalli, Clementi, Corelli, Spontini
Sibelius, Scarlatti, Stravinsky, Bellini
Busoni, Viotti, Vivaldi, Martini
Mussorgsky, Menotti, Mascagni, Rossini
Respighi, Puccini

William Byrd
Cage!
And everyone from Stockhausen to Gershwin
And Bach again, Bach again, Bach again!
Bach, again Bach, again Bach, again Bach!

Text of 'The Wishing Tree' by Kathleen Jamie from The Tree House, Picador, 2004. Printed with permission. Text of 'Alive' by Francesca Amewudah-Rivers, printed with permission. All texts kindly provided by the artists.