

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 22 July 2025  
7.30pm

## woman.life.song

Gweneth Ann Rand soprano  
Simon Lepper piano

Florence Price (1887-1953)

Some o' These Days (c.1947-52)

Bewilderment (1946)

Laura Bowler (b.1986)

Glue, Gravity, call it what you like... (2022) *London première*

Roxanna Panufnik (b.1968)

If I Don't Know (2003)

### Interval

Judith Weir (b.1954)

woman.life.song (2000, arr. 2020)

1a. On Youth • 1b. Breasts!! Song of the Innocent  
Wild-Child • 1c. Edge • 2. Eve Remembering •  
3. The Mothership: When a Good Mother Sails from  
This World • 4. On Maturity



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## woman.life.song

This recital is a compelling exploration of female creativity and womanhood, through one of their most powerful expressions – song. From lullabies and work songs to the pop song and opera, women throughout history and throughout the world have offered their voices in many different ways, from rejoicing and exploring to explaining and grieving. Tonight's four composers present song in all its richness, celebrating their enthralling and diverse voices.

**Florence Price** is probably best known as the first female African-American composer to have an orchestral work performed by a major symphony orchestra, when her prize-winning Symphony No. 1 in E minor was premièred by the all-white, all-male Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1933. Price had studied piano, organ and composition at the New England Conservatory in the early 20th Century but recognition as a composer was not easy, given segregated America's attitudes towards both women and African-Americans. Nevertheless, Price persisted, continuing to teach and compose throughout her life in her home state of Arkansas, Georgia and, from 1927, in Chicago. Her music inventively weaves together African-American spirituals and folk music with the Western classical tradition in which she had been trained. Shamefully neglected in the years following her death, more and more of Price's exciting music is currently being rediscovered, recorded and performed.

Price's arrangement of *Some o' These Days*, also known as 'Welcome Table', is not dated, but it has been suggested that she wrote it towards the end of her life. The song affirms the self-worth of those who are oppressed, and the tune was to become an anthem for the US Civil Rights movement.

*Bewilderment* is a poignant setting of Langston Hughes's short poem 'Prayer' from *Caroling Dusk* (1927). Price artfully foregrounds the searching bewilderment of her title through repetitions of Hughes's final line: 'I do not know'.

Composer, vocalist and director **Laura Bowler** studied in Manchester, Helsinki and London. She performs her own and other composers' works nationally and internationally, as well as teaching composition at London's Guildhall School of Music and Manchester's Royal Northern College of Music. *Glue, Gravity, call it what you like...* receives its London première tonight and was commissioned by Gweneth Ann Rand. It is an adaptation and setting of words written by Bowler's partner, Sam Redway, in memory of Bowler's mother, for her funeral in 2022. *Glue, Gravity...* is both a celebration of Bowler's mother's vivacious energy and a powerful exploration of grief and loss.

**Roxanna Panufnik** studied at London's Royal Academy of Music and has created a wide range of

captivating music. She is probably best known for her vocal and choral music, including the two community operas *The Silver Birch* (2017) and *Dalia* (2022), both to libretti by Jessica Duchen and premièred at Garsington Opera. Panufnik herself has said, 'I love the human voice'.

Panufnik's song cycle, *If I Don't Know*, setting poems by her frequent collaborator Wendy Cope from the 2001 collection of the same name, was commissioned by Harriet Fraser and premièred in 2004 at the Cheltenham International Festival of Music. The work is both serious and witty, deftly reflecting Cope's words and sentiments in Panufnik's immediately appealing musical language.

Celebrated British composer **Judith Weir** was Master of the Queen's/King's Music from 1914 to 2024. With a catalogue of works in many different genres, she is perhaps best known for her vocal music and operas, which often challenge operatic conventions – such as the remarkable *King Harald's Saga* (1979), an opera for one singer who takes on all eight roles. Weir's music is notable for its invention and clarity, always speaking directly to the listener.

The renowned singer Jessye Norman (1945-2019) believed that there was not enough music in the classical repertoire that had been written by women and that explored women's stories. She approached Judith Weir and three acclaimed American writers with the idea of creating this significant song cycle. Texts in hand, Weir and Norman worked together to create this celebration of a woman's life from youth to old age. Norman gave the first performance of the work in 2000 at Carnegie Hall, New York. The original cycle was for singer and chamber ensemble of 19 players but in 2020 Weir arranged the cycle for voice and piano.

Weir has said that storytelling is one of the most important ingredients of her craft and her delight in telling women's stories is evident in this work which is also a celebration of woman's voice, in both speech and song, using its full range, and encompassing genres from blues and folk to classical. Weir has also explained: 'In musical terms I have attempted to suggest the progression of a life story through harmony which increases in complexity ... as the song-cycle approaches its end'.

Opening with Maya Angelou's joyous words, set to insistent rhythms, the cycle moves through a wealth of emotions, a glorious collaboration between the five women involved in its making. As one of the writers, Estés, has said: 'Almost any time that women do something that's really extravagant – big – like this, it's historic.' The work ends with Angelou's moving words: 'Surely I have learned to live with some grace, some compassion, some mercy and some style. Will these lessons serve me as I face the next adventure?'.

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## Florence Price (1887-1953)

### Some o' These Days (c.1947-52)

*Spiritual*

I'm gonna sit down at the welcome table,  
I'm gonna sit down at the welcome table some o' these  
days.

I'm gonna sit down at the welcome table,  
I'm gonna sit down at the welcome table, Oh!  
I'm gonna feast on milk an' honey,  
I'm gonna feast on milk and honey some o' these days  
I'm gonna feast on milk an' honey,  
I'm gonna feast on milk and honey some o' these days.

I'm gonna tell God all o' my troubles,  
I'm gonna tell God all o' my troubles some o' these days.  
I'm gonna tell God all o' my troubles,  
I'm gonna tell God all o' my troubles.  
Oh! some o' these days.  
Oh! some o' these Oh  
I'm gonna tell God all o' my troubles.  
I'm gonna tell God all o' my troubles some o' these days.

### Bewilderment (1946)

*Langston Hughes*

I ask you this:  
Which way to go.  
I ask you this:  
Which way to go.

I ask you this  
Which sin to bear,  
I ask you this:  
Which sin to bear.

I ask you this:  
Which crown to put upon my hair  
I ask which crown to put upon my hair

I don't know,  
I don't know.  
I don't know.

Lord God, I do not know.

## Laura Bowler (b.1986)

### Glue, Gravity, call it what you like... (2024)

*Laura Bowler and Sam Redway*

There are  
There are  
There are  
many versions of her  
her through out  
through out  
her life  
This is  
This is the one  
I met  
No buildings or countries bear her name.  
No symphonies came from her pen.  
No cities were sacked in her honour.  
No buildings or countries bear her name.  
No symphonies came from her pen.  
No cities were sacked in her honour.

But  
Call it what you like,  
Glue, Gravity or balloon clinging to the ceiling after  
rubbing it on your head.  
Static electricity  
She has it.

She has that ability,  
that centripetal force  
To bring together  
To make bricks and mortar more than empty places  
To make home.  
She has that quality to turn the strangest of strangers  
into oldest of friends.

A cheese and tomato oatcake,  
a never refused snifter of whiskey in tea,  
A smile,  
A smile smiling down at the corners.

She has an overflow of whatever that is.  
That magic particle,  
filler of stomachs and silences and gasps between  
people,  
anything for anyone asking and often without asking  
and oh  
and oh  
That laugh  
That laugh

*Song continues overleaf. Please turn the page as quietly  
as possible.*

That golden thread between fragments  
That spark she leaves in us  
Whatever you call that  
That quality of all the above  
that quality of all the above  
that quality of all the above  
That quality

She had it.  
She was it.  
She had it.  
She was it.

Hear that  
She  
She  
That campfire for lonely travelers  
She had passed into the past tense  
And what of us left behind.  
Missing a piece  
Lying in pieces  
Lying in  
Lying in pieces

But  
Call it what you like,  
Glue, Gravity or balloon clinging to the ceiling after  
rubbing it on your head  
Static electricity  
She had it.

No buildings or countries bear her name  
No symphonies came from her pen  
No cities were sacked in her honour.  
But in her honour  
We pieces and fragments  
Press our edges together  
Pull each other in  
For her  
For

## Roxanna Panufnik (b.1968)

### If I Don't Know (2003)

Wendy Cope

#### *After the Lunch*

On Waterloo Bridge,  
where we said our goodbyes,  
The weather conditions bring tears to my eyes.  
I wipe them away with a black woolly glove,  
And try not to notice  
I've fallen in love.

On Waterloo Bridge I am trying to think:  
*This is nothing.*  
*You are high on the charm and the drink.*  
But the jukebox inside me is playing a song

That says something different.  
And when was it wrong?

On Waterloo Bridge with a wind in my hair  
I am tempted to skip.  
*You're a fool.*  
I don't care.  
The head does its best  
but the heart is the boss.

I admit it before I'm halfway across.

#### *Being Boring*

If you ask me 'What's new?'  
I have nothing to say  
Except that the garden is growing

I had a slight cold but it's better today.  
I'm content with the way things are going.  
Yes, he is the same as he usually is,  
Still eating and sleeping and snoring.

I get on with my work.  
He gets on with his.  
I know this is all very boring.

There was drama enough in my turbulent past:  
Tears and passion I've used up a tankful.  
No news is good news, and long may it last.  
If nothing much happens, I'm thankful.

A happier cabbage you never did see,  
My vegetable spirits are soaring.  
If you're after excitement stay well clear of me.

I don't go to parties,  
Well, what are they for,  
If you don't need to find a new lover?  
You drink and you listen and drink a bit more  
And you take the next day to recover.

Someone to stay home with was all my desire.  
And now that I've found a safe mooring,  
I've just one ambition in life:  
I aspire To go on and on being boring.

#### *Bloody Men*

Bloody men are like bloody busses  
You wait for about a year  
And as soon as one approaches your stop  
Two or three others appear.

You look at them flashing their indicators,  
Offering you a ride.  
You're trying to read your destinations.  
You haven't much time to decide.

If you make a mistake,

There is no turning back.  
Jump off and you'll stand there and gaze  
And the cars and the taxis and the lorries go by  
And the minutes, the hours, the days.

#### *If I Don't Know*

If I don't know how to be thankful enough  
for the clusters of white blossom on our mock orange,  
which has grown tall and graceful,  
come into its own like a new star just out of ballet school,

And if I don't know what to do about those spires of  
skyblue dellphinium,—  
And what about the way they look together?

And what about the roses,  
or just one of them that solid pinkypeachy bloom that  
hollows towards its heart?  
Outrageous.  
I could crush it to bits.

A photograph?  
A dance to summer?  
I sit on the swing and cry.

The rose.  
The gardenful.  
The evening light.

It's nine o'clock and I can still see everything.

#### *An Unusual Cat-Poem*

My cat is dead.  
But I have decided not to make a big tragedy out of it.

#### *By the Round Pond*

You watch yourself.  
You watch the watcher too –  
a ghostly figure on the garden wall.  
And one of you is her,  
and one is you,  
if either one of you exists at all.

How strange to be the one behind the face,  
To have a name and know that it is yours,  
To be in this particular green place,  
To see a snail advance,  
to see it pause.

You sit quite still and wonder when you'll go.  
It could be now.  
Or now.  
Or now.  
You stay.

Who's making up the plot?  
You'll never know.  
Minute after minute swims away.

#### *The Uncertainty of the Poet*

I am a poet.  
I am very fond of bananas.  
I am bananas.  
Nananananas.  
I am very fond of a poet.  
I am a poet of bananas.

I am very fond,  
A fond poet of 'I am, I am'  
Very bananas,  
Fond of 'Am I bananas, Am I?'  
A very poet.  
Bananas of a poet.

Am I fond?  
Am I very?  
Poet bananas!  
I am.  
I am fond of a 'Very'.  
I am of very fond bananas.

Am I a poet?

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## Interval

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**Judith Weir** (b.1954)

**woman.life.song** (2000)

### 1a. On Youth

*Maya Angelou*

The stride of young legs and the stretch of limber arms  
were my wealth. My clear and powerful eyesight and my  
acute hearing were my treasures. I confess that the  
coins in my purse were scarce or altogether not there,  
and others may have thought me poor, but when my old  
grandmother threw a clump of raw peanuts on the floor  
of the hot oven, and as the air became perfumed with  
the friendly aroma of roasting nuts and my uncle, sitting  
happily in the dark corner, began to hum the old songs  
of the spirit: the aroma of the nuts, the sound - the  
heavy silk sound of the ancient spirituals, a glass of cold  
milk in my hand, my young body - obedient to my will -  
made me rich beyond measure and my heart was filled  
with gladness.

### 1b. Breasts!! Song of the Innocent Wild-Child

*Clarissa Pinkola Estés*

I have been waiting,  
and I have been waiting,  
and all over the world,  
I would use them to proudly point with,  
are millions, just like me...  
We are all waiting -  
just waiting and waiting,  
for the most important thing...  
Breasts!!

[Oh, Breasts!!]  
Oh when shall I receive my breasts?  
Will they be like  
the tiny hearts of birds beating?  
Or, sonorous,  
even ponderous,  
like majestic bells  
swaying and  
ringing across the land?  
Oh, Breasts!!  
They will be so beautiful...  
Do you suppose,  
even though mine do not yet show,  
that they are all ready,  
and just waiting,  
deep inside of me?  
And if I squeeze my waist, like this,  
or if I tense my wrists together,  
will they  
- just -  
- pop -  
- out?!! -  
visible at last?

Oh, Breasts!!  
you are what I dream about - yet, wait...  
Does a beloved ocean have breasts...?  
Does an ocean even need them?  
No, an ocean has its crests, and every current needed for  
dreaming.  
Does a butterfly have breasts?  
No, but still everyone thrills  
to the sunlight through her wings.

Oh, Breasts!!  
If I had breasts I would wear them  
ever so smartly,  
or flash them in disdain, or lift them up in joy -  
but I would never flaunt them,  
nor stuff them,  
and especially, never fluff them...  
except on special ceremonial occasions...  
when I would wear ruffles [cut]  
"down to here",  
every chance I got!

Oh, Breasts!!  
the testers of my patience  
Everyone has them, but me...  
Chines, Zulus and Haitians  
Hawaiians, Aleuts and Transylvanians,  
Balinese, Russians and Romanians...  
Everyone, but me...

Oh, Breasts!!  
In fairytales, they say  
giantesses have breasts so long  
they can throw them over their shoulders.  
Will mine be like that?  
Will they be like two young candles glowing  
in every dark and gloaming?  
or like sweet and tasty [dark] cherries swelling from the  
branches,  
or maybe they'll be cone-shaped like shy little tulips,  
or maybe they'll be mellow like ripe and dusky melons,  
or maybe they'll be "this big" and take up all the room -  
in any room I'm in.  
Will having breasts change my voice?  
Will breasts make me taller?  
When will I receive them?  
for with breasts, I am certain that,  
- I will rule the world! -

Come! O Lady of my body,  
for I am blessed amongst women -  
untie the ribbons of my body,  
so it can swell in the way it is meant to...  
Oh, Moulder of Breasts,  
Untier of Ribbons,  
Singer to Flowers Unfolding,  
please, please, come to me soon?  
Breasts!  
Tempestuous,  
Breasts!!  
Holy Mothers of every living creature,  
holy with desire,

holy and on fire!  
[Holy breasts!]  
Breasts-to-be!  
Be alive!  
Now!!  
MMM-mmm-mmm.

## 1c. Edge

*Toni Morrison*

He was a boy - just a boy -  
and I was a very young girl.  
In blazing light and shadows trimmed in gold  
we took the risk of love  
the grist of love  
the dreamy, steamy mist of love.  
For he was a boy - just a boy -  
and I was a very young girl  
racing to the edge of love  
the bed of love  
the love-me- til-I'm-dead of love.  
He was a boy - just a boy -  
and I was a very young girl.

We were new to time  
and dreams were real.  
We could play out the line  
[Get] to the edge of life  
the bed of life  
the love-me-til-I'm-dead of life.  
For he was a boy - just a boy -  
and I was a very young girl.

## 2. Eve Remembering

*Toni Morrison*

I tore from a limb fruit that had lost its green.  
My hands were warmed by the heat of an apple fire red  
and humming insight  
I devoured sweet power to the core.  
How can I say what it was like?  
The taste! The taste undid my eyes  
And led me from gardens planted for a child  
To wildernesses deeper than any master's call.

Now these cool hands guide what they once caressed;  
Lips savor what they have kissed.  
My eyes now pool their light  
Better the summit to see;  
Better the summit to see.

I would do it all over again:  
Be the harbor and set the sail,  
Loose the breeze and harness the gale,  
Cherish the harvest of what I have been,  
Better the summit to scale.  
Better the summit to be.

## 3. The Mothership: When a Good Mother Sails from This World

*Clarissa Pinkola Estés*

### 3a. (Stave I)

Sanctu, Sanctu, Sanctu.

Down at the shores,  
the long lines are forming,  
the old ones patiently waiting  
for the journey over water  
back to their "truest home".

My mother is my heart.  
My mantra for years has been,  
"Don't die, don't die, my Dearie,  
my good mother."  
But now I must bow to your angels,  
and say to you,  
"Lean on me."

Lean  
on  
me.

I will row us past the ripping tides,  
I am strong and younger than you.  
I will take you to that far horizon line,  
beyond which,  
I cannot go.

Ohhhh... Ohhhh

Lean  
on  
me.  
Lean  
on  
me -  
till the last  
moment,  
[my love.]  
"Don't cry,  
don't cry",  
says someone,  
not myself.  
"Do not be afraid.  
Am I not here  
beside you?  
Do not fear;  
you are under my protection."  
Whose voice is this?  
Whose voice is speaking?  
Is it myself? or my mother?  
or our dearest Madre Maria,

*Song continues overleaf. Please turn the page as quietly  
as possible.*

La Virgin de Guadalupe?  
She Who Holds Me, holds my mother,  
holds me as I hold you,  
my smaller, and smaller mother...  
you take on more and more the shades of water,  
your soul sparkling against the night sky.

Come, let me hold you  
and birth you  
through this storm.  
[You, who brought me through the door of your body.  
Now, I am bringing you through the door of my spirit,]  
and I will -  
see you -  
through...  
I will see you through...  
to the new morning, I say -  
to my beloved Big Momma, [I say - ]  
to mi madre pequeña, [I say - ]  
to the mother of my bones, [I say - ]  
to the mother's magic touch  
making all colors jump, [I say - ]  
to the Ma of nightlight rooms, I say -  
I will see you through,  
I will see you through,  
to the new morning, I say -

to the mother of the lightning sky, [I say - ]  
to the mother of the serpent strike, [I say - ]  
to the mother of remedios,  
mi verba buena mother, [I say - ]  
to the mother who speaks with the spirits, I say -  
I will see you through  
to the new morning, [I say - ]

to the omah of the blood red roses, [I say - ]  
to mother midnight nurse, [I say - ]  
to the mother of the body's pleasure, [I say - ]  
to the most beloved chocolate-grand-ma'am, I say -  
I will see you through  
[to the new morning, I say - ]

to the frugal mother, turning her socks over  
so the mended holes will not show, [I say - ]  
to the mother, the lover,  
who made thunder under the sheets, [I say - ]  
to the Madonna of the grottos  
of the ever-full sink and stove, I say -  
[I will see you through  
to the new morning, I say - ]

to the kitchen-table terrorists, [I say - ]  
to the mothers of las velas santas, the candles lit  
for the hopes of loved ones, [I say - ]  
[to the mother] who loved, in spite of so much, I say -  
I will see you through...

[to the dragon-keeper of the family photographs, I say - ]  
to the mother of harsh lessons, [I say - ]  
to the sacred heart ringed with thorns, [I say - ]  
to my mother's heart broken open forever, [I say - ]

I will see you through  
[to the new morning, I say - ]

to the little mouse mother  
whose ears hear every secret thing, [I say - ]  
to the  
most infinitely  
tender  
little old face,  
with the eyes of a child, I say -

I will see you through...  
and I will see you  
in the new morning, [I say - ]  
...just...  
...one...  
...tiny...  
...bedazzle...  
...from now...

### 3b. (Stave II)

When I say, "My mother has died",  
I mean my "most beloved".  
Leave me to myself now,  
for I am a ship who's  
lost her riggings;  
suddenly  
come unmoored.

Oh, my mother has died;

My mother has died;

She has earned her resting now,  
waiting only, and proudly so,  
for her sails  
to be taken down.

I, the daughter,  
mend my mother's sails now;  
I seek her  
worn and broken  
threads of light,  
reweaving her dazzling linen...

The sails of the mother  
are [to be] fitted to the daughtership;  
raised up on the mainsail,  
and the final touch -  
the red ragged flag - hers -  
will be flying at the topmast of my ship.  
I'll be let down into the waters,  
I, the daughter, will glide again,  
but this time, under the sails  
inherited from my mother,  
and all the mothers  
before her.



Ay, Mother, let me tell you  
my treasured dearie-dear,  
one [last] thing I have learned  
from your spirit passing through me,  
as sparkling shadow passes darkening shadow,  
on this open night-sea journey:  
I am learning to navigate  
by the mysterious farthest stars -  
the ones that the great wake of your passing  
has revealed to me...  
...for the very first time...

I will see you in the morning, I say  
my sweet little mother, my most excellent omah,  
"I will see you in the new morning", I say,  
to someone who is weeping...  
Muchisimas gracias, mi mamá;  
Be with The Aeternal Mothers now,  
I will see you in the morning, I say,  
...just...  
...one...  
...tiny...  
...bedazzle...  
...from...  
...now...

Sanctu, Sanctu, Sanctu.

## 4. On Maturity

*Maya Angelou*

The years are broken across my body like thin crystal.  
Their shards reach my knees in pretty, shiny piles and I  
know each one with a dainty intimacy. Some were  
friends, and I pick them up and hold them to my ear like  
seashells, and they whisper to me of great love, of  
promises, of debts paid. Some were hateful and they  
speak without the intent to conceal, of the blows of  
death, the loss of love, friendship betrayed and golden  
youth ravaged by the weight of time. There appears an  
image of wisdom. Surely I have learned [how] to live  
with some grace, some compassion, some mercy and  
some style. Will these lessons serve me as I face the  
next adventure?