

# WIGMORE HALL

Friday 30 May 2025  
1.00pm

## A Countertenor Songbook

Andrew Watts countertenor  
Gavin Roberts piano

HK Gruber (b.1943)	3 Single Songs (1974-6) <i>Rauchlied • 3 Mai 1973 • Die Oete Leier</i>
Thea Musgrave (b.1928)	Orlando's return to London...as a WOMAN from <i>ORLANDO - an Escapade</i> (2021, rev. 2023) <i>world première</i>
Raymond Yiu (b.1973)	Chinese Whispers (2025) <i>world première</i>
Joseph Howard (b.1993)	Opium songs (2021, rev. 2025) <i>So they gave me opium • Wax and wail</i>
Louise Drewett (b.1989)	How I Heard (2021) Lament (2023) <i>world première</i>
Geoffrey King (b.1992)	For Your Convenience - a guide to London's Loos (2022)



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Through conversations and lifelong friendships, the Countertenor Songbook was born. This is a collection of works that have been written for me and have spanned over 30 years in establishing new works for the countertenor voice. I am grateful to all those who have written works for me and today we showcase some new works to add to this project.

I first met with **Gruber** himself after the première of Olga Neuwirth's opera *The Feast of the Lambs* in Vienna in 1999. Over several drinks and many a fine lunch, he suggested I sing his 3 *Single Songs*. I have long admired 'Nali' and he has always been a part of my repertoire. These songs lend an insight into the composer's angst for 'writing a thing' and how he lived his daily life.

**Thea Musgrave** recently celebrated her 96th birthday and we met on the internet. If there were to be a silver lining during the COVID-19 pandemic it would be this meeting. This introduction came from Gill Graham of Wise Music as Thea was keen to write a version of *Orlando* based on the novel of the same name by Virginia Woolf and Gill had suggested I should sing *Orlando*. After three years of weekly Zoom chats and Zoom drinks, Thea and I met in New York when I was fortunate enough to be singing with the New York Philharmonic. This extraordinary work is finished and the première for *Orlando – an Escapade* is lightly pencilled for 2026. This aria is an adaptation of Act II scene ii where Orlando has suddenly and mysteriously changed into a woman and must now learn how to deal with this new life. She remembers her desolation when, as a very young man, 'his' passionate affair with Sasha was suddenly broken off without any explanation. She is determined that this kind of thing will never happen again.

I met **Raymond Yiu** on an opera writing course in Aldeburgh and it was an instant friendship. This is the third work that Ray has written for me alongside his extraordinary *Symphony* that was premiered at the BBC Proms in 2015. Ray writes:

'When I chose the topic of the impact of Beethoven in China for an orchestral commission from a certain Asian orchestra for its Beethoven 250 celebration in 2020, little did I expect the complications that would ensue. My programme notes for the première were censored, and eventually I felt compelled to make changes to the work itself to avoid scrutiny from authorities which could cause inconvenience to family members and friends. However, my conscience would not rest without making peace with the episode. So I decided to set multiple "versions" – as if in a game of Chinese whispers – of the censored paragraph of the said programme notes, interlacing them with a poem on truth by Stephen Crane (itself seeming ironic in our present, post-truth era), snippets of the Schiller poem *Ode to Joy*, and a headline from a September 2020 article in the now shut-down Hong Kong pro-democracy newspaper *Apple Daily* about Beethoven's famous setting of that poem being banned in China.'

The Countertenor Songbook has also added to my 'partners in crime' by working with Gavin Roberts who I met at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. Gavin introduced me to these final three composers. The first work by each was commissioned by the St Marylebone Festival with generous support of the RVW Trust. The second songs

from Joseph and Louise were commissioned through my organisation MAX – Musician and Artist Exchange. I was immediately drawn to the writing of these three amazing composers and as people too. **Joseph** writes:

'These two songs are settings of texts by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. The first is drawn from a letter she wrote to Robert Browning in 1846, in which she rationalises her daily use of opium. The second is a poem that vividly imagines the sensory and psychological effects of the drug.

Opium use was widespread in the 19th Century, and though it was often glamorised in literature and art, it was typically justified within the Victorian moral framework as acceptable only when taken for health reasons. Barrett Browning herself suffered chronic illness, and her dependency on opium was framed as medical necessity – though her writings suggest a more complex, personal relationship with the substance.

These songs trace a progression from a conversational tone into an increasingly drawn-out, submerged atmosphere, in which sounds and images appear almost as if in slow-motion.'

**Louise** writes:

'*How I Heard* sets a poem by Clare Shaw of the same name, published by Bloodaxe Books in their third poem collection *Flood*. The collection is an account of Clare's experience of the flooding in their hometown, Hebden Bridge, in 2015.

*Lament* takes inspiration from the Gaelic tradition of laments. I adapted and collated texts from the traditional Gaelic poems 'Lament for the Old Woman of Beare' and 'Beautiful Margaret', with reference to translations by Eleanor Hull (1860-1935) and Alexander Carmichael (1832-1912). Two alternating, Gaelic-inspired musical worlds correspond to fragments from each poem, providing shifting perspectives on personal loss.'

**Geoffrey** writes:

'The Abbey of Thélème first appears in François Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. With a name derived from the Greek for "divine will", the inhabitants of Thélème have no vows or offices save to uphold the core principle "do what you will".

In 1937, the pseudonymous Paul Pry invented the Thélème Club, a Mayfair gentlemen's club, as the setting for an overheard dialogue on where one might find relief, a friendly face, or even "full service" on the streets after too many pints.

Paul Pry's overheard conversation, which forms the text of *For Your Convenience*, is one of the few surviving attempts to map this lost psychogeography; today's song cycle attempts to reenchant his words and revisit the thrill and mystery of losing oneself in a city.

I am really looking forward to the next instalment of the Countertenor Songbook and to passing on these songs to others.

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## HK Gruber (b.1943)

### 3 Single Songs (1974-6)

*Bletschacher, Kurt & Christa Schwertsik, Fritz Unger*

#### Rauchlied

##### Augustin

*(setzt sich auf eine Bank,  
zündet sich seine Zigarette  
an und bläst Rauchringe in  
die Luft)*

Vielleicht - ph!  
Vielleicht - phh!  
Vielleicht - phhh!  
Gelingt mir auch,  
Gelingt mir auch  
Einmal do ein Ding  
Wie ein - ph!  
Wie ein - phh!  
Wie ein - phhh!  
Ein Ring aus Rauch,  
Ein Ring aus Rauch,  
Ein Zigarettenrauchring...

#### Smoking Song

##### Augustin

*(sits down on a bench,  
lights a cigarette and  
blows smoke rings in  
the air)*

Perhaps – puff!  
perhaps – puff!  
perhaps – puffed!  
I'll also manage,  
I'll also manage  
one day to make  
a – puff!  
a – puff!  
a – puffed!  
a smoke ring,  
a smoke ring  
with my cigarette ...

### 3 Mai 1973

Was ist schwerer, frag ich  
mich,  
Als eine Oper zu schreiben?  
Jetzt weiss ich es erst,  
Jetzt weiss ich es erst:  
Nicht an Dich zu denken fällt  
mir wahnsinnig schwer,  
Nicht denken an Dich.  
Ich sitze im Garten und der  
Mai duftet sehr  
Und ich denk' nur an Dich.  
Warum fällt es mir so leicht,  
Diesen Mai nicht zu sehen?  
Jetzt weiss ich es erst,  
Jetzt weiss ich es erst:  
Es ist leichter, diesen Mai zu  
vergessen, als Dich!  
Jetzt weiss ich es erst,  
Jetzt weiss ich es erst.

### 3 May 1973

What is harder, I ask  
myself,  
than writing an opera?  
Now I know the answer,  
now I know the answer:  
not thinking of you I find  
incredibly difficult,  
not thinking of you.  
I sit in the garden and  
May is most fragrant  
and I think only of you.  
Why do I find it so easy  
not to see this May?  
Now I know the answer,  
Now I know the answer:  
It is easier to forget this  
May than to forget you!  
Now I know the answer,  
now I know the answer.

## Die Oete Leier

Es ist die oete  
Leier,  
Olles wird  
teurer.  
Es ist die oete  
Leier,  
Olles wird  
teurer.

Die Wurst wird  
teurer,  
Der Durst wird teurer,  
Der Quarg'l wird  
teurer,  
Der Sparg'l wird  
teurer,  
Sie Schnapskarten,  
Landkarten,  
Platzkarten, Strandkarten,  
Sternwarten,  
Mausarten,  
Zwergarten, Unarten,  
Hauswarten, Speckschwarten.

Es ist die oete  
Leier,  
Olles wird  
teurer.  
Es ist die oete  
Leier,  
Olles wird  
teurer.

Teurer wird der  
Lustgewinn.  
Teurer wird das  
Doppelkinn.  
Teurer die  
Schlagbohrmaschine,  
Und die Aufblaskonkubine.

Es ist die oete  
Leier,  
Olles wird  
teurer.  
Es ist die oete  
Leier,  
Olles wird  
teurer.

Teurer wird das  
Austauschherz.  
Teurer wird der  
Liebesschmerz.  
Teurer wird die  
Pediküre  
Und die  
Opernstarwalküre.

## The same old story

It's always the same old  
story,  
everything gets more  
expensive.  
It's always the same old  
story,  
everything gets more  
expensive.

Sausages get more  
expensive,  
thirst gets more expensive,  
curd cheese gets more  
expensive,  
asparagus gets more  
expensive,  
playing cards,  
maps,  
place cards, beach cards,  
observatories, mouse  
species,  
dwarf species, rudeness,  
caretakers, bacon rind.

It's always the same old  
story,  
everything gets more  
expensive.  
it's always the same old  
story,  
everything gets more  
expensive.

Pleasure gain gets more  
expensive.  
Double chins get more  
expensive.  
Percussion drills get  
more expensive,  
and inflatable concubines.

It's always the same old  
story,  
everything gets more  
expensive.  
It's always the same old  
story,  
everything gets more  
expensive.

Pangs of love get more  
expensive,  
Heart transplants get  
more expensive,  
Pangs of love get more  
expensive,  
Gala Valkyries get more  
expensive.

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

Es ist die oete  
Leier,  
Olles wird  
teurer.  
Es ist die oete  
Leier,  
Olles wird  
teurer.

It's always the same old  
story,  
everything gets more  
expensive.  
It's always the same old  
story,  
everything gets more  
expensive.

Teurer wird die  
Eifersucht.  
Teurer wird die  
Kleintierzucht.  
Teurer wird auch Safari  
In die Wüste Kalahari.

Jealousy gets more  
expensive,  
Small animal breeding  
gets more expensive,  
Safaris get more expensive  
Into the Kalahari Desert.

Es ist die oete  
Leier,  
Olles wird  
teurer.  
Es ist die oete  
Leier,  
Olles wird  
teurer.

It's always the same old  
story,  
everything gets more  
expensive.  
It's always the same old  
story,  
everything gets more  
expensive.

Die Wurst wird  
teurer,  
Der Durst wird teurer,  
Der Quarg'l wird  
teurer,  
Der Sparg'l wird  
teurer,  
Sie Schnapskarten,  
Landkarten,  
Platzkarten, Strandkarten,  
Sternwarten,  
Mausarten,  
Zwergarten, Unarten,  
Hauswarten, Speckschwarten.

Sausages get more  
expensive,  
thirst gets more expensive,  
curd cheese gets more  
expensive,  
asparagus gets more  
expensive,  
playing cards,  
maps,  
place cards, beach cards,  
observatories, mouse  
species,  
dwarf species, rudeness,  
caretakers, bacon rind.

Die Speckschwarten,  
Schnapskarten,  
Hauswarten, Landkarten,  
Unarten, Platzkarten,  
Zwergarten, Strandkarten,  
Mausarten,  
Sternwarten,  
Die Sternwarten,  
Speckschwarten,  
Mausarten,  
Schnapskarten,  
Strankarten, Hauswarten,  
Zwergarten, Landkarten,  
Platzkarten, Unarten,

Bacon rind, playing cards,  
Caretakers, maps,  
Rudeness, place cards,  
Dwarf species, beach cards,  
Mouse species,  
observatories,  
Observatories, bacon  
rind,  
Mouse species, playing  
cards,  
Beach cards, caretakers,  
Dwarf species, maps,  
Place cards, rudeness,

Es ist die oete Leier.

It's the same old story.

Thea Musgrave (b.1928)

Orlando's return to London...as a WOMAN from  
*ORLANDO - an Escapade* (2025)  
*Thea Musgrave and Virginia Woolf.*

And what awaits me?  
Am I to be clothed in ignorance and poverty,  
those dark garments of the female sex?  
So what are my choices?  
I must leave the rule and the discipline of the world to  
men?  
And so I must forget having martial ambition;  
forget the love of power and all the other manly desires?  
And all I do is wonder about what I must not do.  
But what will I do? What will I be allowed to do?  
Ah—Look, look! The river Thames! We are close to  
Greenwich!  
Yes! It was here I met Sasha.  
Oh Sasha, how I loved her. And she loved me. I know it.  
But then the dark night. The monstrous downpour.  
The violent surges of flood. The ice had melted and the  
Russian ship was gone.  
Sasha was gone. Gone without a word. She had left me.  
I was alone and in total despair.  
But now I wonder how could she have left without a  
word?  
Was she held captive? Men controlling her.  
Telling her what she should do, and who she may love.  
Yes, yes! Now I understand. That is what happened.  
I will not let that happen to me.  
I will choose whom I love and choose the life I will lead.  
Yes! Yes! I will decide.

Raymond Yiu (b.1973)

*Chinese Whispers* (2025)  
*Raymond Yiu, Stephen Crane and Apple Daily*

Beethoven's *Ninth*  
*Symphony* was loved by  
the revolutionaries in...

"Truth", said a traveller,  
"Is a rock, a mighty  
fortress;  
"Often have I been to it,  
"Even to its highest tower,  
"From when the world  
looks black."

As Beethoven's works were  
promoted by  
revolutionaries and  
socialists, his *Ninth*  
*Symphony* was celebrated  
by the People's Republic of  
China.

"Truth," said a traveller,  
"Is a breath, a wind,  
"A shadow, a phantom;  
"Long have I pursued it,  
"But never have I touched  
"The hem of its garment."

As the century unfolded,  
Beethoven's works were  
promoted and criticised by  
bourgeoisie,  
revolutionaries and  
socialists. The *Ninth  
Symphony* was performed  
in Nineteen Fifty-Nine to  
celebrate the founding of  
the People's Republic of  
China before his music was  
banned during the Cultural  
Revolution.

你的威力能把人類,(nǐ de  
wēi-lì néng bǎ rén-lèi,)  
/Your power can make  
humans,

重新團結一起(chòng-xīn  
tuán-jie yī-qǐ,)  
/Reunite together

在你溫柔翅膀之下, (zài  
nǐ wēn-róu chì-bǎng zhī  
xià,)  
/Under your gentle wings,

一切人類成兄弟。(yī-qīe  
rén-lèi chéng xiōng-dì.)  
/All men become  
brothers.

As the century unfolded,  
Beethoven's works were  
promoted and criticised in  
equal measure by different  
groups – bourgeoisie,  
revolutionary, capitalist or  
socialist. The *Ninth  
Symphony* was chosen to  
be performed in Nineteen  
Fifty-Nine to celebrate the  
founding of the People's  
Republic of China before  
his music was banned by  
the Party during the  
Cultural Revolution.

And I believed the second  
traveller;  
For truth was to me  
A breath, a wind,  
A shadow, a phantom,  
And never had I touched  
The hem of its garment.

As the century unfolded,  
Beethoven's works were  
promoted and criticised in  
equal measure by different  
groups according to their  
own, often mutually  
contradictory agendas –  
bourgeoisie or  
revolutionary, capitalist or  
socialist. For one instance,  
the *Ninth Symphony* was  
chosen to be performed by

all-Chinese forces (and  
sung in Chinese) in  
Nineteen Fifty-Nine to  
celebrate the tenth  
anniversary of the  
founding of the People's  
Republic of China. Seven  
years later, with the  
'Destroy the Four Olds,  
Cultivate the Four News'  
campaign in Nineteen  
Sixty-Six which ushered in  
the Great Socialist Cultural  
Revolution, Beethoven's  
music, like all other  
Western culture, was  
banned by the Communist  
Party as bourgeois and  
undesirable.

Thirtieth of September,  
Twenty Twenty,  
The "Ode to Joy"  
Becomes a Forbidden  
Song.

Joseph Howard (b.1993)

Opium songs (2021, rev. 2025)

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

So they gave me opium

*...it might strike you as strange that I who have had no  
pain—no acute suffering to keep down from its angles  
— should need — [opium in any shape]*

*... I don't take it for 'my spirits' in the usual sense; you  
must not think such a thing—But I have had  
restlessness till it made me almost mad: at one time I  
lost the power of sleeping quite—and even in the day,  
the continual aching sense of weakness has been  
intolerable— ...as if one's life, instead of giving  
movement to the body, were imprisoned... within it, and  
beating and fluttering to get out, at all the doors and  
windows.*

So [they] gave me opium— ...and ever since I have been  
calling it my amreeta draught, my elixir, — [because]  
the tranquillising power has been wonderful... — it  
would be dangerous to leave off [the calming remedy,  
Mr. Jago says —]

*...And after all the lotus-eaters are blessed beyond [the  
opium-eaters; and the best of lotuses are such  
thoughts as I know.]*

Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment  
have ended.

## Wax and wail

And larger and larger they waxed still,  
And longer still and longer;  
And they shrieked in their pain, 'Come, come to us,  
We are stronger, we are stronger.'

Upon the ground I laid mine head,  
And heard the wailing sound;  
I did not wail, I did not writhe —  
I laid me on the ground.

## Louise Drewett (b.1989)

### How I Heard (2021)

*Clare Shaw*

I heard rain like conversation,  
I heard the warning, more to come.  
I heard the front door slamming

...I heard my phone insisting...

...I did not hear the siren.  
I heard a sound like anger  
And all night long, the river.

I heard rumours of disaster.  
Like pain, I heard the water  
And I heard the school was under

And I could not get warm...

...I heard warning, I heard warning –  
Yes I saw the river rising  
But I did not see this coming

### Lament (2023)

*Anonymous*

Ebb tide has come to me.  
I travel grounds, I travel heights,  
I travel groves and the marshes and the woods,  
From the base of the mountains to the crest of the hills.  
O happy Isle of Ocean  
The floodtide leaps to meet the eddying wave.  
I watch the passes, I traverse the hollows,  
I cannot see my love, not a glimpse,  
On the top of the mountain nor the edge of the waters.  
I visit the stream, I visit the rivers and the rockshelves and  
the caves,  
To try to see your form, to try if I can hear your voice.  
Not those sunny sands  
The surf's roar sounds up.

## Geoffrey King (b.1992)

### For Your Convenience - a guide to London's Loos (2022)

*John Poole from Paul Pry*

#### 1. Prologue

For your convenience: a learned dialogue, instructive to  
all Londoners & London visitors, overheard in the  
Thélème Club and taken down verbatim by Paul Pry.  
(frontispiece)

#### 2. St Christopher's Place

St Christopher's Place – that engaging little passage at  
the middle of the street, full of antique shops and second-  
hand bookshops. In the cul-de-sac at the end of that  
passage you would have found full service. (4)

#### 3. Portman Square

And in a street on the right, just below Marylebone Lane  
and going towards Portman Square – in that street is a  
public yard provided with one of those zinc or iron  
enclosures painted a grateful green. (4)

#### 4. A Little Friendly Advice

Places of that kind which have no attendants afford  
excellent rendezvous to people who wish to meet out of  
doors and yet escape the eye of the Busy, or the  
observation of the Dicks. (9-10)

#### 5. Interlude

#### 6. In the Provincial Towns of England

In the provincial towns of England, a safe tip is to look for  
a statue of Queen Victoria. Wherever you see that, you  
may be pretty sure that a refuge is nearby, if not, as often  
happens, right at the august feet. (21)

#### 7. In France

In France, it is done differently. There, whatever the style  
or size, whether a real building or a mere enclosure, it is  
treated in the same way and it is placed unashamedly in  
main streets, clear to the public view. And lest the  
traveller should miss it, it is marked with signs which by  
long usage have become associated with it. (20-21)

#### 8. The Mysteries of a City

I have once or twice found places which I have never been  
able to find again. I know they were not figments. I know  
they were solidly there. But somehow or other, though I  
have tried to recollect the turns I made, my feet have  
never recaptured the ritual steps that directed me  
originally. I do not doubt their existence, but I cannot  
assert it. (45-46)

#### 9. Reprise

For your convenience: a recapitulation, instructive to all  
Londoners & London visitors (frontispiece)

## 10. Recap

Taking the main and visible stations from Ludgate Circus, which has one itself, we proceed up Fleet Street and find a station at the foot of Fetter Lane. Then between the Law Courts and St Clement Danes. Then at Wellington Street. Approaching Waterloo Bridge, then Charing Cross station or the Trafalgar Subway. Also at the bottom of Villiers Street in Embankment Gardens. Then Charing Cross Road by the Garrick Theatre. Then Leicester Square. Then Piccadilly Circus subway. Then Oxford Circus, and near it, Great Marlborough Street. Then Green Park Gate by the Ritz. Tottenham Court Road has provision outside Warren Street Station, and Euston Road at the junction with Great Portland Street. Marylebone Road, just opposite Toussaud's. (68-69)