

WIGMORE HALL 125

Thursday 8 January 2026
7.30pm

Dame Sarah Connolly mezzo-soprano, piano

Joseph Middleton piano

Members of Britten Sinfonia

Marcus Barcham-Stevens violin

Caroline Dearnley cello

Thomas Hancox flute

Joy Farrall clarinet

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

From *Shéhérazade* (1903)

La flûte enchantée • L'indifférent

André Caplet (1878-1925)

Viens! Une flûte invisible soupire... (1900)

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Syrinx (1913)

Sally Beamish (b.1956)

The King's Alchemist (2013)

I. Cantus • II. Aqua Vitae • III. Pavana • IV. Avis Hominis

Bob Chilcott (b.1955)

Sky Pictures (2021)

Sky Plough • Sky Pictures • Seagulls •

Cloud Language • Cloud River

Interval

John Paul Jones (b.1946)

Her Kind (2025) *world première*

Her Kind • Pygmalion's Bride •

Morning Glories • I Say

Co-commissioned by Wigmore Hall, Britten Sinfonia and
Asko|Schönberg

Helen Grime (b.1981)

Prayer from *Eight Songs of Isolation* (2020)

Mark-Anthony Turnage (b.1960)

I look into my Glass from *Songs of Sleep and Regret* (2020)

Tony Banks (b.1950)

Mad Man Moon (1976) *arranged by Peter Gritton*

Kurt Weill (1900-1950)

It never was you from *Knickerbocker Holiday* (1938)

What good would the moon be? from *Street Scene* (1946)



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La flûte enchantée • L'indifférent
Viens! Une flûte invisible soupire...
Syrinx

As an entrée to this many-flavoured programme, a flute-imbued French group: two of Ravel's *Shéhérazade* songs, Caplet's setting of Victor Hugo, and Debussy's exquisite evocation of Pan's flute. The second of Ravel's 1903 triptych – all settings of Tristan Klingsor, fellow member of Parisian cohort Les Apaches – 'La flûte enchantée' depicts the languorous flute melody of a slave girl's lover, finding its way to her through the night air in its alternating *tristesse* and *joie*. In the final *Shéhérazade* song, 'L'indifférent', there is the swelling sensuousness of a potential encounter, soon thwarted by the seductive young stranger.

Three years younger than Ravel, André Caplet followed other composers such as Delibes, Bizet and Saint-Saëns in setting Victor Hugo's *Viens! Une flûte invisible*. The solo flute weaves its own counter-melody, capturing the character of the shepherd and bird songs referred to by Hugo. Caplet was Debussy's friend, arranger and editor, and the flute's atmospheric launch of *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* was clearly in his mind here. Nearly 20 years after this radical 1894 ballet, Debussy returned to the same haunting, chromatic arabesques for flute in *Syrinx*. Initially written as incidental music for a play, it was soon adopted as a staple of solo flute repertoire. Whereas 'L'indifférent' conveys the near possibility and mutual consideration of an encounter, the nymph *Syrinx* actively evades the advances of the lecherous, half-man, half-goat deity Pan. She turns herself into a water reed in the marshes, which Pan then cuts to create his flute – thus slaying the object of his desire.

© Britten Sinfonia

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The King's Alchemist

In 2013 I wrote a piece for soprano Shuna Scott Sendall and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, to commemorate the tragic Battle of Flodden Field in 1513. The subject was dark, and the resulting music an outcry against the devastation of war. While researching the work, I visited Stirling Castle, the home of James IV. James led the Scottish army to disaster, and was the last British monarch to die on the battlefield. At the castle, I gained a vivid picture of the young king – who was highly cultured, with a passionate commitment to his country. He also, unfortunately, had a young man's sense of invincibility.

The court of King James IV was home to some extraordinary individuals, including the brilliant composer Robert Carver; but none so bizarre as John Damian, a European alchemist who charmed the King with promises of creating gold from base metals. Damian, known to many in the court as the 'French leech', was not only given the post of Abbot of Tongland, Galloway, he also had his experiments, along with copious amounts of 'aqua vitae,' (supposedly for these experiments) financed by the King. John also took a hand in court entertainments, and organised the dances for New Year and weddings.

In 1507, possibly to distract the king's attention from his failed attempts at alchemy, Damian tried to fly to France from the battlements of Stirling Castle, and landed in the midden (rubbish tip) below, fortunately only breaking his thigh. He blamed his failure on the fact that he had not been granted the eagles' feathers he ordered, but instead too many hens' feathers, which were attracted to the ground rather than to the sky. There are also accounts of the 'flying abbot' being attacked by birds. John Damian is still recorded at court a few months before the Battle of Flodden.

I was enchanted by this colourful figure, and the trio reflects some aspects of his story. It takes the form of four variations on the French folksong *L'Homme Armé* – a theme used by Carver in one of his masses; and perhaps appropriate to the court of the high-living James IV, who was fond of holding shooting competitions in the beautiful Great Hall of Stirling Castle.

In the first movement, *Cantus*, the theme is stated as sustained harmonics. The second, *Aqua Vitae*, is an unstable scherzo. There follows a *Pavana* – a courtly dance which originated in Italy. Lastly, after a brief reference to the harmonics of the opening, the fourth movement, *Avis Hominis* (Bird Man) builds from overlapping ostinati into a counterpoint made from imagined bird calls and the flapping of wings. The piece ends with an unresolved ascent into the stratosphere.

The King's Alchemist was commissioned by Britten Sinfonia and Wigmore Hall, with funding from Arts Council England. Premièred in December 2013, tonight's performance replaces viola with clarinet.

© Sally Beamish

Sky Pictures

I originally proposed the idea of the song cycle *Sky Pictures* to Dame Sarah Connolly in 2019. My friend, the poet Charles Bennett, and I had already collaborated on a number of projects together, projects which were all created for choirs, so to have this opportunity to write a solo song cycle was something new and very exciting. The piece evolved little by little and Sarah premiered the last two songs, 'Cloud Language' and 'Cloud River' with Malcolm Martineau in Wigmore Hall in September 2020. We completed the cycle in 2021 and the version with added flute, clarinet, violin and cello was made specially for tonight's concert.

As someone who was once a singer myself, I love words and have always tried in my work as a composer to shape vocal phrases that enable the singer to connect viscerally with the narrative. *Sky Pictures* is essentially a cycle in which the singer reflects, both figuratively and physically, tracing a narrative that Charles Bennett introduces here so eloquently.

'I first saw the cloud river whilst exploring the Cambridgeshire Levels, an expanse of wetland and fen, with low, flattened horizons and massive skies. Perhaps a lifetime of reading has overemphasised aspects of decoding, but I felt that vapour trails, kites, clouds, bird-flight and weather-patterns could indicate a series of momentary yet potentially profound insights: that looking up could also function as a means of seeing within. So the song sequence is a series of aerial visions – cloud-words on a blue page of sky.'

© Bob Chilcott

Her Kind

Gill Graham, Creative Director of Wise Music Group publishers, has been a huge presence in my life. She is a great collaborator and enabler of new projects, introducing performers to composers and facilitating performances. Tonight is one such project which began in 2018 when Gill introduced me to composer **John Paul Jones** in The Ram Inn pub, near Glyndebourne where I was performing *Giulio Cesare*.

I knew of John as the legendary bass and keyboard player with Led Zeppelin and found myself (still am) very star-struck. Jump forward to a few weeks ago in the Steinway Studios a few yards from here, who should walk into our rehearsal of John's songs but another guitar legend, Sir Brian May. When they shook hands, I felt a sizzle of electricity as the 1970s Rock guitar world collided seismically in the quietest, most respectful manner!

Initially, Gill encouraged John to write some songs for me and the Britten Sinfonia and he chose four very different, great female feminist writers and poets, one of whom is not known for poetry. She also happens to be my favourite author, Angela Carter.

© Dame Sarah Connolly

Inspired by the sheer variety and scope of the operatic roles that Dame Sarah has performed, I have chosen poems about four women with intriguingly different characters and stories, written from a woman's point of view by four brilliant writers.

I have been a fan of Dame Sarah Connolly for many years, and it is a great privilege to be asked to compose both for her and the Britten Sinfonia.

© John Paul Jones

Britten Sinfonia would like to dedicate this commission to the memory of Michael Gwinell.

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Prayer

'Prayer' was written in 2020 during the COVID lockdown period, it was commissioned by Oliver Zeffman as one of *Eight Songs of Isolation* for a première recording with Dame Sarah Connolly and the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, conducted by Oliver. I came across Carol Ann Duffy's poem *Prayer* and was struck by the beauty and hope in its many different prayers. It is not a religious poem but one that speaks of finding joy and hope in small things, something that felt vital and important during the period that I wrote this song.

© Helen Grime

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I look into my Glass

This short work for solo piano is an interlude from the cycle *Songs of Sleep and Regret*, composed for Dame Sarah Connolly and Joseph Middleton, and premiered at the 2022 Aldeburgh Festival. Alongside poems by Emily Dickinson, Shakespeare, James Joyce, George Eliot and Stevie Smith, Turnage set Thomas Hardy's *To an unborn Pauper Child*, and the title of this ensuing interlude for Joseph Middleton is another Hardy poem, his despondent reflection on ageing, *I look into my Glass*.

© Britten Sinfonia

Mad Man Moon

The presence of a major première by a composer with distinguished 1970s rock roots prompted me to ask Dame Sarah Connolly whether she wouldn't mind John Paul Jones being joined in this programme by another member of 70s rock royalty. I have long admired the sophisticated, tasteful, harmonically adventurous compositions of Genesis's founder keyboardist **Tony Banks**, and thought his song from the 1976 album *A Trick of the Tail*, *Mad Man Moon*, could arrange well for Sarah and tonight's five piece ensemble. With her enthusiastic approval – and that of Tony Banks too – I asked composer/arranger Peter Gritton to do the honours.

'I felt my overarching challenge was to re-capture the inherent magic of the original Genesis soundworld, minus Phil Collins's percussion,' Peter says. 'With flute, clarinet, violin and cello at my disposal, I found the two wind instruments combined well to reimagine Banks's synth lines, particularly in the central "dream sequence", while the versatility of the two string instruments both homogenised the ensemble by acting as superglue between the piano and woodwind, and provided a range of colours. Throughout the arranging process, I was constantly struck by the beauty of Tony's harmonic language, a highlight being the exquisite return of his subtle verse material after the inventive journeying of the middle section.' This arrangement is dedicated to the memory of Richard Macphail, a longstanding friend both of Genesis and Britten Sinfonia, who died too soon in 2024.

© Meurig Bowen, CEO/Artistic Director, Britten Sinfonia

It never was you • What good would the moon be?

Kurt Weill's first complete musical for the Broadway stage, *Knickerbocker Holiday*, set in 17th-century New Amsterdam, gave the world two of his best-loved ballads: 'September Song' and 'It Never Was You' – despite the overtly political criticism which underlines the work's narrative. The plot concerns Pieter Stuyvesant, the new governor of Manhattan Island, who is less than delighted to find that Tina, the young woman who has been promised to him by her corrupt councilman father, is actually in love with Brom Broek, who stands almost alone in his refusal to accept Stuyvesant's proclaimed New Order. 'It Never Was You', originally the song 'You Can't Buy Love' from Weill's unfinished *Davy Crockett*, was revised and fitted with new lyrics by Maxwell Anderson to become a tender duet for the two lovers, at this point in the musical seemingly defenceless against the machinations of Big Government.

In 1946, Weill, already a leading composer on Broadway, and always conscious of the need to renew both himself and American musical theatre, presented his *Street Scene*, which he deemed first to be a 'dramatic musical' and later, a 'Broadway opera'. It depicted 24 hours in the lives of two couples living in a tenement block somewhere in under-privileged New York, and Weill was keen to adapt his musical language to the exigencies of the story line and Langston Hughes's realistic lyrics. Nonetheless, the song 'What Good Would the Moon be?' – which Weill called a *cavatina*, one of many conventional operatic names he used for various numbers in the show – is a typical Broadway ballad, sung by Rose, one of the two leading women, who, resisting her boss's advances (and the lure of promised luxury), chooses true love over financial security.

© Philip Mayers

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

From *Shéhérazade* (1903)

Tristan Klingsor

La flûte enchantée

L'ombre est douce et mon maître dort,
Coiffé d'un bonnet conique de soie,
Et son long nez jaune en sa barbe blanche.
Mais moi je suis éveillée encore
Et j'écoute au dehors
Une chanson de flûte où s'épanche
Tour à tour la tristesse ou la joie,
Un air tour à tour langoureux ou frivole
Que mon amoureux chéri joue,
Et quand je m'approche de la croisée,
Il me semble que chaque note s'envole
De la flûte vers ma joue
Comme un mystérieux baiser.

The enchanted flute

The shade is soft and my master sleeps,
a cone-shaped silken cap on his head,
and his long yellow nose in his white beard.
But I am still awake, listening to the song of a flute outside that pours forth sadness and joy in turn, a tune now languorous now lively, which my dear lover plays, and when I draw near the casement, each note seems to fly from the flute to my cheek like a mysterious kiss.

L'indifférent

Tes yeux sont doux comme ceux d'une fille,
Jeune étranger,
Et la courbe fine
De ton beau visage de duvet ombragé
Est plus séduisante encore de ligne.

The indifferent one

Your eyes are soft like a girl's, young stranger, and the delicate curve of your handsome down-shaded face is still more attractively shaped.

Ta lèvre chante
Sur le pas de ma porte
Une langue inconnue et charmante
Comme une musique fausse;
Entre! et que mon vin te réconforte...

Your lips sing at my door an unknown charming tongue, like music off-pitch; enter! and let my wine refresh you...

Mais non, tu passes
Et de mon seuil je te vois t'éloigner
Me faisant un dernier geste avec grâce
Et la hanche légèrement ployée
Par ta démarche féminine et lasse.

André Caplet (1878-1925)

Viens! Une flûte invisible soupire...

(1900)

Victor Hugo

Viens! - une flûte invisible
Soupire dans les vergers. -
La chanson la plus paisible
Est la chanson des
bergers.

Le vent ride, sous l'yeuse,
Le sombre miroir des
eaux. -
La chanson la plus joyeuse
Est la chanson des oiseaux.

Que nul soin ne te tourmente.
Aimons-nous! aimons
toujours! -
La chanson la plus charmante
Est la chanson des amours.

Come! An unseen
flute sighs...

Come! - An unseen flute sighs in the orchards.
The most peaceful song is the song that shepherds sing.

The wind beneath the ilex ruffles the waters' dark mirror.
The most joyous song is the song that birds sing.

Let no worry torment you.
Let us love! Let us always love!
The most sweet song is the song that lovers sing.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Syrinx (1913)

Sally Beamish (b.1956)

The King's Alchemist (2013)

- I. Cantus
- II. Aqua Vitae
- III. Pavana
- IV. Avis Hominis

Bob Chilcott (b.1955)

Sky Pictures (2021)

Charles Bennett

Sky Plough

A furrow of chalk
is drawn across the sky.
(*I am the glinting needle, twinkling star*)
As if the silver nib of a deft pen
wrote with white ink
on a blue page.

A polished arrow glides,
like a swan on a still pond.
Along the sweet track of its intention,
it's lofted on soft air,
like a bright leaf.

In the wake of its stroke
the sky unzips her skin.
(*I am the glinting needle, twinkling star*)
Along the cool line of its white scar,
the quiet seeds of clouds
are given birth.

On a sky of blue paper
it dawdles an opening line.
I breathe the ease of summer slowly in,
as if I were a field,
sown with fine weather.

Sky Pictures

Remember your love of clouds,
and the shadows they made on the hill?
So much weather's gone by,
since we lay with our heads together
and watched them pass.

Perhaps I've wasted my life,
looking for your face in the sky.
Hoping to see you smile.
Waiting for light on the hillside,
light in my heart.

How did it come to this?
You with your head in the clouds,
wandering far and wide.
While I watch the weather each day,
feet on the ground.

After a lifetime of weather,
of shadows or light on the hill,
I lie on the ground today,
as a cloud that looks like you
passes by with a smile.

Seagulls

Hyacinth. Cornflower. Lavender.
Indigo. Lazuli. Cerulean.
Madder. Cyan. Zaffre.
Aquamarine.

I saw a drift of seagulls
swerve on a thermal:
a loose white spiral,
they sauntered
round an indolent circumfluence,
as if they rode and rested
on a weave of air.
Stable and yet provisional
gathered by its own escape,
the waft of their unravelment
was a gift of white wings in a blue sky –
and I sensed the warm thrum
of a self-spun gyroscope
as it kept me steady with turbulence.

Cloud Language

After a lifetime reading,
I've started to see the sky
as a blue page.

I've started to see the clouds
as soft, white words
that speak of weather.

I wish I'd spent my time
reading the sky instead
of reading books!

Perhaps I'd see my life
as a long summer's day,
where a blackbird sings.

Perhaps I'd see myself
as a soft, white word
on a page of sky.

Perhaps I'd see you in our garden,
putting down your book,
and looking up to read me.

Cloud River

And then I saw
two long ribbons of white cloud
gather around each other
until they became
a river across the sky.

If I could make
a boat that sailed on air,
I'd wander down that river,
letting my craft meander
on a waft of white.

Imagine stepping into,
stepping onto, a river in the sky!
Something being said without words.
A journey down a length
of weather-music.

And then I saw how my breath,
my wint'ry breath was a cloud.
A cloud I was breathing out.
As if I spoke cloud language.
As if my words had made
a cloud to speak to me always.

Breathe in. Breathe out.
How insubstantial we are!
A cloud of air and water,
we make our brief journey
across the blue.

Interval

John Paul Jones (b.1946)

Her Kind (2025)

Her Kind

Anne Sexton

I have gone out, a possessed witch,
Haunting the black air, braver at night;
Dreaming of evil, I have done my hitch
Over the plain houses, light by light;
Lonely thing, twelve-fingered, out of mind.
A woman like that is not a woman, quite.
I have been her kind.

I have found the warm caves in the woods,
Filled them with skillets, carvings, shelves
Closets, silks, innumerable goods;
Fixed the suppers for the worms and the elves:
Whining, rearranging the disaligned.
A woman like that is misunderstood.
I have been her kind.

I have ridden in your cart, driver,
Waved my nude arms at villages going by,
Learning the last bright routes, survivor
Where your flames still bite my thigh
And my ribs crack where your wheels wind.
A woman like that is not ashamed to die.
I have been her kind.

Pygmalion's Bride

Carol Ann Duffy

Cold, I was, like snow, like ivory
I thought *He will not touch me*,
But he did.

He kissed my stone-cool lips.
I lay still
As though I'd died.
He stayed.
He thumbed my marbled eyes.
He spoke –
Blunt endearments, what he'd do and how.
His words were terrible.
My ears were sculpture,
Stone-deaf shells.
I heard the sea.
I drowned him out.
I heard him shout.

He brought me presents,
Polished pebbles, little bells.
I didn't blink, was dumb.
He brought my pearls and necklaces and rings.
He called them *girly things*.
He ran his clammy hands along my limbs.
I didn't shrink,
Played statue, shtum.

He let his fingers sink into my flesh,
He squeezed, he pressed.
I would not bruise.
He looked for marks,
For purple hearts,
For inky stars, for smudgy clues.
His nails were claws.
I showed no scratch, no scrape, no scar.
He propped me up on pillows, jawed all night.
My heart was ice, was glass.
His voice was gravel, hoarse.
He talked white black.
So I changed tack,
Grew warm, like candle wax,
Kissed back, was soft, was pliable,
Began to moan, got hot, got wild,
Arched, coiled, writhed, begged for his child,
And at the climax screamed my head off,
All an act.
And haven't seen him since,
Simple as that.

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

Morning Glories

Angela Carter

At the corner shop, they put an old lady out to air every morning.

She sits on an upright chair.

She wears cracked smoked spectacles.

She is so old she has lapsed into a dreaming plant life;

She carries the same weight in the world

As the morning glories which grow beside her

And will fade by lunchtime.

She is kept quite clean.

A child comes out occasionally to comb her hair.

The old lady never soils her spotless apron

Because she never moves.

From habit, she whispers

Irrashyaimase

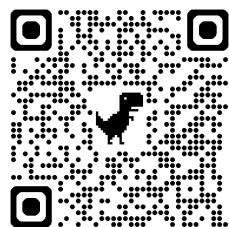
The shopkeeper's welcome, to passers by,

In a dry voice, like the rustle of a paper bag.

Her teeth are rimmed with gold.

I Say

Maya Angelou



The original poem 'Phenomenal Woman' by Maya Angelou can be viewed by scanning the QR code here.

Helen Grime (b.1981)

Prayer (2020)

Carol Ann Duffy

Due to copyright reasons, we are unable to reproduce the text for the following song.

Some days, although we cannot pray, ...

Mark-Anthony Turnage (b.1960)

I look into my Glass from *Songs of Sleep and Regret* (2020)

Tony Banks (b.1950)

Mad Man Moon (1976)

Tony Banks

Was it summer when the river ran dry,
Or was it just another dam.

When the evil of a snowflake in June
Could still be a source of relief.

O how I love you, I once cried long ago,
But I was the one who decided to go.

To search beyond the final crest,
Though I'd heard it said just birds could dwell so high.

So I pretended to have wings for my arms
And took off in the air.

I flew to places which the clouds never see,
Too close to the deserts of sand,

Where a thousand mirages, the shepherds of lies
Forced me to land and take a disguise.

I would welcome a horse's kick to send me back
If I could find a horse not made of sand.

If this desert's all there'll ever be
Then tell me what becomes of me.

A fall of rain?

That must have been another of your dreams,
A dream of mad man moon.

Hey man,
I'm the sand man.
And boy have I news for you:
They're gonna throw you in gaol
And you know they can't fail
'Cos sand is thicker than blood.
But a prison in sand
Is a haven in hell,
For a gaol can give you a goal
And a goal can find you a role
On a muddy pitch in Newcastle,
Where it rains so much
You can't wait for a touch
Of sun and sand, sun and sand.

Within the valley of shadowless death
They pray for thunderclouds and rain,
But to the multitude who stand in the rain
Heaven is where the sun shines.

The grass will be greener till the stems turn to brown
And thoughts will fly higher till the earth brings them down.

Forever caught in desert lands one has to learn
To disbelieve the sea.

If this desert's all there'll ever be
Then tell me what becomes of me.

A fall of rain?

That must have been another of your dreams,
A dream of mad man moon.

Due to copyright reasons, we are unable to reproduce the texts for the following two songs.

Kurt Weill (1900-1950)

It never was you from *Knickerbocker Holiday*

(1938)

Maxwell Anderson

I've been running through rains

And the wind that follows after ...

What good would the moon be? from *Street*

Scene (1946)

Langston Hughes

I've looked in the windows at diamonds,

They're beautiful, but they're cold. ...

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