WIGMORE HALL 125



The Score

2025 AUTUMN ISSUE

KIT ARMSTRONG ON HIS DEBT TO BRENDEL, DAME SARAH CONNOLLY ON LED ZEPPELIN, IESTYN DAVIES ON JOHN DOWLAND

Welcome

Dear Friends

Our cover this time features a face not seen a lot at the Hall, the virtuosic pianist Kit Armstrong, in his teens a pupil of the late Alfred Brendel. As the music world mourns the great musician's passing, Armstrong talks about the debt he owes to his mentor, the music-making project he runs from a former church in France and why, aged six, he found inspiration for his first composition in his pet chicken.

Among the artists we talked to for this issue are two British Dames: mezzo Sarah Connolly, whose song recital will include compositions by John Paul Jones of Led Zeppelin and Tony Banks from Genesis; and pianist Imogen Cooper, who has strong views on the future of her discipline.

There are three new residencies featured – four of the Kanneh-Mason siblings (Isata, Sheku, Braimah and Jeneba), the alto Hugh Cutting and American roots-musician Rhiannon Giddens – as well as interviews with the French soprano Sabine Devieilhe and the modern-repertoire JACK Quartet. Check out, too, introductions to our three International Women's Day concerts and the five recitals devoted to the work of John Dowland, discussed fascinatingly by Iestyn Davies.

How did Wigmore Hall do in the past 12 months of fundraising? Our annual Impact Report has all the facts and figures. There's also a rousing interview with Director John Gilhooly, originally published in *The Spectator* in early September, about what he is planning next to champion the art of song.



Helen Hawkins
Editor of *The Score* magazine

Kit Armstrong © Gesine Born
Helen Hawkins © Andrew Ward

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The prodigy who made maths and music add up

BY MARK KIDEL

Kit Armstrong, a Brendel protégé, talks about his twin passions

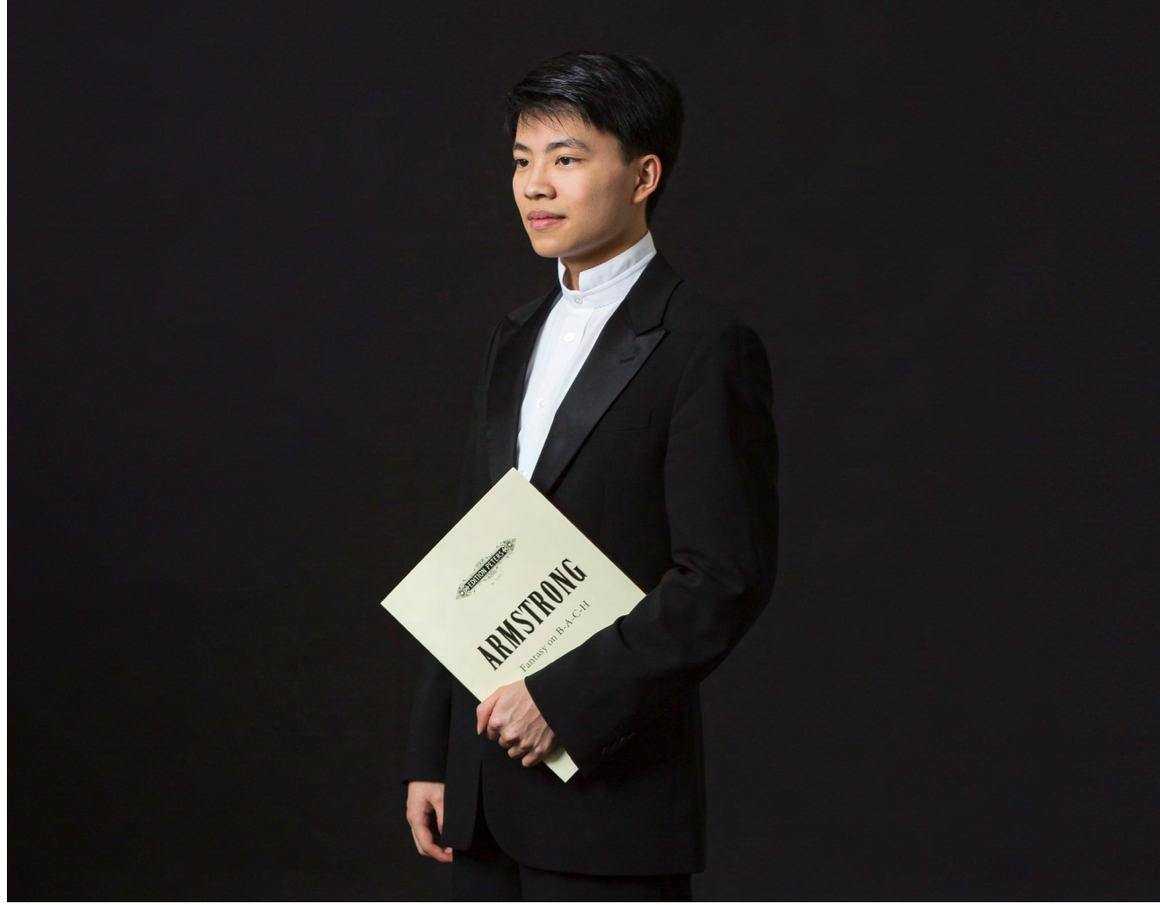
Once upon a time, there was a boy wonder. Although it was widely known that Alfred Brendel, one of the towering musicians of our time, never took on children as students, a cassette of the young prodigy Kit Armstrong playing Chopin made its way to the master, who was so impressed that he made an exception and mentored him with great dedication for 20 years.

It was Brendel's enthusiasm, when he first told me about Armstrong, that led me to make a film about their relationship, *Set the Piano Stool on Fire* (2011). Several decades on, the exceptionally gifted Taiwanese-American pianist has not only established himself as something of a star, but has revealed his many-faceted originality in surprising ways. The man I talked to recently on Zoom, very relaxed and about to board a flight in Zürich, is very different from the prodigy I once knew.

Armstrong is perhaps best known in the German-speaking world, where he has been giving recitals and chamber music concerts for some time and has received much acclaim. There was originally, as with other prodigies, a question mark over his future as an adult musician, but his career – not least expertly guided by Brendel and his entourage – has avoided the pitfalls of his being hot-housed as some kind of genius or freak. His highly individual journey owes a great deal, as well, to his myriad talents and interests, gifts that encompass a good deal more than phenomenal intelligence and an outstanding command of the piano.

Growing up in the USA in a non-musical family, Armstrong was drawn to music very early in life, a passion his mother couldn't ignore. He composed his first piece, *Chicken Sonata* (1998), at the age of six, a piece dedicated to his pet chicken after he'd seen that hens responded to his early efforts on the piano. His music and his love of science have flourished alongside each other. Aged only 11, he started studying maths and physics at university level. While a piano and composition student at the Royal Academy of Music, he also took an advanced course in pure mathematics at Imperial College; as a teenager, when I filmed him, he was working for an MSc in pure maths at Paris VI university, and also working on the design of computer games, a passion of his, alongside a talent for making complex origami animals.

The composing has continued steadily until this day, often skirting the edges of tonality and sometimes displaying a touch



Kit Armstrong © Gesine Born

of appealingly eccentric humour. There have been commissions from the likes of Adrian Brendel and Till Fellner, but he admits to an inner drive to compose, though he's aware his sometimes spikey work reaches a limited audience. 'It's something I can't honestly say the world needs,' he confesses with appealing modesty. 'You're selling to a classical audience that didn't sign up for it and who basically already decided what they want to hear. So that's why you get all these pieces, which are the witnesses of a great amount of effort, that get played exactly once.'

He is hopeful things may change, but meanwhile he has found other ways of pushing the boundaries, through experimenting with the way in which classical music is presented. His recital programmes can range widely beyond the classical canon: he has combined, for instance, works by Liszt, Guillaume de Machaut, Jacques de Senleches and Alkan with Leo Ornstein's proto avant-garde curio *Suicide in an Airplane*. He has also featured lesser-known German Baroque composers such as Johann Kuhnau and Louis Marchand. He recently received excellent reviews for his adventurous double CD of piano versions of works for the clavichord and virginal by the English Renaissance composers William Byrd and John Bull.

Armstrong enjoys experimenting with keyboards and has written a concerto for fortepiano, as well creating piano versions of medieval and Renaissance compositions. His

‘Alfred Brendel showed me another perspective, the sum of his own experiences, rooted in the unchanging past – the idea that I could find fulfilment from the mental space that he inhabited, rather than my own.’



Kit Armstrong and Alfred Brendel © John Batten

adventurous nature has also led him to learn and perform on the organ, featuring works by Bach as well as pieces from the 19th- and 20th-century repertoire.

The Mozart Expedition is another example of his sense of adventure. With members of top string quartets and instrumentalists, he has toured European venues with a band that fills the gap between chamber and orchestral music: a homage to Mozart, featuring works that range from well-known piano concertos to the lesser-known chamber pieces.

Armstrong discovered the convivial exchange chamber music provides when, as a student at the Royal College of Music, his friend and patron Maria Gouvas gathered groups of musicians to explore playing together at her London apartment, not least Mozart’s piano quartets. He recalls these moments of pure joy. ‘It was there I discovered how these works were “as big as the world” – and that they offered performers possibilities that were as vast as a lifetime. There’s hardly any other composer who so decisively inspires me to let my emotions overflow and give voice to this state of mind through a musical instrument.’

There were some, early in Armstrong’s rising-star years, who suggested his devotion to the cold truths of mathematics and his uncanny ability to sight-read piano pieces perfectly and to memorise complex scores with almost supernatural ease might get in the way of his ability to express emotion. Alfred Brendel speaks in the film we made together of his young protégé needing to experience life’s ups and downs at first hand, as well as to seek inspiration from great literature, theatre and art. He spoke tellingly of the need to ‘set the piano stool on fire’. It would seem it’s chamber music, above all, that has enabled the young pianist to start exploring the world of feeling, in intimate communication with others, rather than on the solitary path of a star soloist.

‘For me,’ Armstrong explained to me, ‘chamber music is the only reason really to be a professional musician. I guess there’s some people in the circle of my colleagues who think winning the adoration of about a thousand people is something worth doing. I mean, if one is doing it for recognition then one should not be playing classical music.’ He enjoys the challenge of playing with other people whose ideas about interpretation may be different from his own, overcoming what could easily become self-centred arrogance. ‘There have been collaborations that were actually the most interesting because they showed me, and hopefully everyone else, a different way of making music, a different way of seeing the world and what’s important to one.’

Another side of this wish to explore communication with others is reflected in his projects in Hirson, a town in northern France that has suffered from post-industrial neglect and depression. It was surprising to hear he had bought the church of Sainte-Thérèse, a remarkable art deco building that provides a base for him. It is a space in which he not only presents musical performances but also has initiated brave and ground-breaking musical ventures involving local children and has made sense of a move that might at first have seemed characteristically eccentric.

The recent choral project *La semaine de la voix*, he recalls, started spontaneously. ‘Initially, at the end of our open rehearsals, anybody who wandered by chance into the church would be recruited to sing a canon with us. And actually, we had to stop doing that because there were very soon about a thousand people!’ The demand was clear, and with the help of visiting professional singers Armstrong took the project into seven local schools, in a venture that culminated in 2024 with very well-attended concerts mixing imported professionals with local amateurs.

From Hirson, Armstrong broadcast a series of short daily videos during Covid, under the banner of *Ma Musique, Ma Patrie* and revealed a talent for presenting musical subjects to a general audience. His subjects ranged from an introduction to the medieval composer Jacques de Senleches to an account of Grieg’s *Klokkeklang*, from piano pieces by Fauré to a work by Palestrina. Although he speaks of how he’s broken free from Brendel’s influence, he speaks with awe of his guidance. I can remember the older pianist telling me he must soft-pedal the young prodigy’s career and avoid the pressure for him to be showcased as a miracle-child. The singular path Armstrong has followed, not just one path but many, owes a great deal to Brendel’s sense of what was most appropriate: for him to find his own way and to be true to the essence of his gifts.

‘It’s been more than 20 years,’ Armstrong noted, ‘since I started to know him. I think it’s much more than anything he told me about any one piece of music or about the musical profession. In the Asian middle class of 1970s to 1990s it was considered that scientific studies were the thing to which one should strive. Alfred Brendel showed me another perspective, the sum of his own experiences, rooted in the unchanging past – the idea that I could find fulfilment from the mental space that he inhabited, rather than my own.’

It hasn’t been easy and Brendel’s impact has only gone so far: Armstrong remains rooted in the analytical world of maths and physics. ‘I cannot say,’ he concludes, ‘that I’ve been converted. I still believe in the supremacy of the scientific method.’ As part of his PhD studies in Taiwan, he is today exploring the use of AI in piano performance.

When we were making our film, Brendel spoke to me of Armstrong’s future: ‘With outstanding violinists, their gifts emerge young – they’re often at their peak in their twenties. With pianists, however, the process is more gradual, and the full expression of their talents doesn’t happen until they reach their thirties.’ There’s ample evidence that this is the case with Armstrong, and that, with his unstoppable taste for pushing the boundaries of classical music, we should expect more surprises.

MONDAY 12 JANUARY 2026, 7.30PM

Dame Sarah Connolly: really rocking

BY DAN CAIRNS

The lauded mezzo's next recital will mix old favourites with new songs by John Paul Jones, formerly of Led Zeppelin, and Genesis's Tony Banks

In anticipation of her Wigmore Hall recital on 8 January, at which she will perform the première of *Her Kind*, a song cycle written for her by the former Led Zeppelin bass-player and songwriter John Paul Jones, Dame Sarah Connolly has been giving some thought to the duties and obligations of the solo interpreter of songs. Characteristically, Connolly's views on these tend towards the trenchant.

'It's a question of leaving the audience thinking, "What did that song mean?", rather than presenting a fait accompli. It could be a lighter shade of desperation, rather than wrist-slashing. It could be, say, that the song's narrator will find love again but right now, possibly not. Our job is to present what the composer wanted.'

Connolly recalls a recent masterclass she was giving where the majority of the young students 'deviated from the scores' dynamics – and we're talking Verdi, Strauss, very proscriptive composers who knew about voices. And I said: "You can't just ignore that *subito piano*, it's there for a reason and you need to think about why. It's *in the score*! It's irrelevant what you want to do; what does the composer want you to do?"'

The acclaimed and garlanded mezzo-soprano has long combined a ribald sense of humour with a core of uncompromising steel that calls Lord Emsworth's terrifying sister Lady Constance to mind. She is as known for her salty irreverence as for her tireless and strident evangelising for music education and emerging talent – and quite right, too. That combination of contrasts manifests itself in performances of compelling dramatic intensity, in opera houses and on concert platforms across the world. There's a reason she's a dame, an OBE and a recipient of the King's Award for Music.

Alongside the new work by John Paul Jones, the programme on 8 January, in which Connolly will be accompanied by Joseph Middleton and members of the Britten Sinfonia, will include existing pieces, among them Ravel's 'La flûte enchantée', Kurt Weill's 'What good would the moon be?' and Caplet's *Viens! Une flûte invisible soupire...*, as well as a new bespoke song by Bob Chilcott, *Sky Pictures*, together with recent works by Helen Grime, Sally Beamish and Judith Bingham.

Connolly describes *Her Kind*, Jones's setting of Anne Sexton's poem of the same name



Dame Sarah Connolly © Andrew Crowley

‘It’s a question of leaving the audience thinking, “What did that song mean?”, rather than presenting a fait accompli.’



plus settings of writers such as Carol Ann Duffy, Maya Angelou and Angela Carter, as ‘lyrical, bending towards atonal. There are flashes of chord progressions that remind me of Led Zeppelin. You wouldn’t necessarily know that in a classical context, but because I know Led Zeppelin really well, I can hear these traces, like a flavour in a stew. He’s a serious composer and has been for some time now’.

The pair were put in touch with each other by the publisher and promoter Gill Graham, and met for a drink at a pub near Glyndebourne, Connolly just about managing to conceal her sense of starstruck fan-girl astonishment. ‘I liked him immediately. But in my twenties I loved Led Zeppelin, so it was a bit overwhelming. He said he’d like to write some songs for me, and I was like, “Oh my word”. Then he came to a Wigmore Hall recital because I wanted him to be sure mine was a voice he wanted to write for. I said to him: “I won’t be offended if you decide my voice is too fruity or whatever.”’

Bob Chilcott earned Connolly’s undying gratitude as he began working on *Sky Pictures*, a setting of the Harlem Renaissance writer Effie Lee Newsome’s poem. ‘Bob asked me what my comfortable range was, unlike some composers in the past who I shan’t mention [giving every sense that she is about to do just that].’ A heartbeat of a pause. ‘Well, I will mention John Tavener. Darling John, he wrote this piece called *Gnosis*, and it was up the top, B flats and Cs. And I just went, “Are you serious? You know I’m a mezzo? What’s going on? I don’t want anything above a G, thank you very much. Not in a very still and quiet piece.” I’d have had to wrap my larynx around the top of my head.’

Connolly will admit to taking occasional liberties herself. At a recital of Liszt and Mendelssohn *frère et sœur* at Wigmore Hall in July, the first song she had programmed was ‘Tröstung’. ‘And when we were rehearsing it, I said to Julius [Drake]: “That’s not someone trying to be happy, it’s bloody miserable. Can we move it on a bit, give it a little bit of uplift? You know, two or three notches on the metronome.” So, yes, I will bend the rules with tempi in Lieder, within reason.’

The second curveball in Connolly’s recital is her interpretation of the song ‘Mad Man Moon’, from Genesis’s 1976 album *A Trick of the Tail*, which was written by the band’s keyboardist, Tony Banks. Ever unconventional (and amen to that), Connolly is gearing up for another rock-star collaboration. ‘I’m trying to persuade Tony to come and play the piano himself, because I really think it needs that driving rhythm. And if Tony can’t play, then I’m going to, because I know how to play jazz and pop.’ It’s quite an image: a Dame of the British Empire, mounting the stage at this most hallowed of halls, and channelling her inner Jerry Lee Lewis. Rock on.

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THURSDAY 8 JANUARY 2026, 7.30PM

Dame Sarah Connolly © Andrew Crowley



Kanneh-Mason siblings © Jake Turney

It’s a family affair

BY MARK PULLINGER

A quartet of Kanneh-Masons are embarking on their first Wigmore residency

The Kanneh-Masons are no strangers to Wigmore Hall. Indeed, pianist Isata, the eldest of the seven siblings, has memories of playing there when she was 11 or 12 years old as part of the Jaques Samuel Pianos Competition. She made her ‘official’ Hall debut in 2019 in a duo programme with cellist brother Sheku – a Sunday morning coffee concert. Since then they have returned many times, always to sell-out houses. This season, along with sister Jeneba and brother Braimah, the Kanneh-Masons have the honour of receiving a Wigmore Hall residency, with four recitals running through to June.

Sheku recalls that first duo recital. ‘We had been preparing for ages,’ he tells me, ‘and I’d also been to watch lots of concerts there. We’d played it in lots of other places, and it was feeling good. But when we came

out for that first Wigmore Hall recital, I was like, wow, it sounds so nice. It gives you a lot of confidence and freedom, that feeling where you sound better than you have ever sounded before.’

‘I think it’s perfectly designed for chamber music,’ Isata agrees. ‘And if you play in tune, it sounds very in tune,’ Sheku adds. ‘There’s something about the resonance and the sort of sympathy with intonation that I find particularly nice there.’

Of the four programmes they present this season, Isata is especially looking forward to the June recital with Sheku, Jeneba and Braimah. ‘I don't think we’ve done a concert of that particular format, just the four of us, before. Jeneba and I are playing four hands, which is something that we haven’t actually done much, so that’s going to be exciting. And then I’m looking forward to coming back to the Shostakovich Second Piano Trio, because it’s one of the first trios we played together. We attempted the fourth movement when we were really young – obviously it was ridiculously too hard – but it’s a piece that we've always come back to, and to play it in Wigmore Hall for the first time will be special.’

‘I’m looking forward to my solo recital in December, because it’s also a programme that is very special for me. I’m playing pieces I am really passionate about: Ravel’s *Gaspard de la nuit*, which I’ll be coming back to, and two Beethoven sonatas I am learning for the first time, plus two pieces by Dobrinka Tabakova, *Nocturne* and *Halo*. The title of the programme is *From Darkness into Light*. I quite enjoy having a programme with a theme, and I’m also planning on talking to the audience as well, which I haven’t done at Wigmore Hall before, but whenever I’ve seen people speak from the stage there, I have always really appreciated it.’

‘I am definitely looking forward to the concert with the Shostakovich Trio,’ Sheku says. ‘And we’ll also be playing the Ravel Sonata for Violin and Cello with Braimah. It’s amazing how Ravel writes for the two instruments so colourfully – the voices and the harmonies, they’re implied in such a beautiful way. Then Isata and I have a duo recital in March playing Mendelssohn, Schumann, Nadia Boulanger and Rebecca Clarke.’

The Clarke is a transcription for cello of her Viola Sonata. ‘With the cello it’s often the other way around,’ laughs Sheku. ‘Violists are always taking our repertoire, so I think it’s only fair that we can take this one. It’s a beautiful sonata, a brilliant piece that I’ve not played before.’

I wonder whether family connections make for more cohesive music making. ‘Yes,’ replies Isata cautiously, ‘but not necessarily just because we’re related, but because we’ve played together for many years, which I think is a connection you can build with both a family member or a non-family member. We certainly know each other’s playing very, very well, so many things are unspoken, intuitive at this point. I am aware of Sheku’s style of playing, and the way we are in conversation as musicians feels very natural.’

‘If you have a feeling of trust with someone you’re playing with onstage,’ explains Sheku, ‘then of course that frees you up and gives you a lot of confidence. That’s a nice feeling that I have with Isata.’



Sheku and Isata Kanneh-Mason © James Hole

I ask each of them which of the other's musical qualities they especially admire. 'It's the way the phrases are sung,' begins Isata. 'Sheku's way of getting into the depth of the phrase and the harmony – particularly the bass lines – highlights them to me. I'm made aware of them by the way he plays and the way the phrase is sung through his cello. Sometimes I feel like I'm taking too much time in a phrase because of the nature of the instrument, but then I hear Sheku play that phrase on the cello and I realise I could sing it with a lot more depth. It gives me a licence to expand.'

'I admire Isata's range of articulations,' Sheku responds, 'but also her range of colours, which is something I really enjoy playing with. Also, there's nothing I do that she wouldn't be able to catch in the moment of performing, which is something a lot of people who have played with Isata also say. Of course, the piano parts in these sonatas for cello and piano are extraordinarily difficult, and so to be able to have another ear aware of what's happening around you, reacting and creating, is very special.'

SATURDAY 20 DEC 2025, 7.30PM
MONDAY 2 MAR 2026, 7.30PM
TUESDAY 16 JUN 2026, 7.30PM

Shining new light on her roots

BY DAVID HUTCHEON

Rhiannon Giddens is refocusing America's musical history

'For me,' the North Carolina-born Rhiannon Giddens told the *Airmail* news website in 2021, 'it's always: Is there a story that needs to be told that illuminates important pieces of our culture? If so, I'll do it.'

As she prepares for her Wigmore Hall residency, the composer, singer and pioneer in modern traditional music is promising a deep dive into American history.

Rhiannon Giddens © EbruYildiz



The *American Songwriter* magazine called Giddens 'one of the most important musical minds currently walking the planet'; she has won Grammys and a BBC Radio 2 award for folk; created a ballet inspired by Shakespeare; acted in the television drama *Nashville* and hosted her own music series; she is also the only former singing hostess for the restaurant chain Macaroni Grill to have played banjo on a Beyoncé album and received a Pulitzer for an opera.

That merely skims the surface of her achievements, however, so what can London expect? The first date, on 11 September, may have held a few clues: appearing alongside her were the Italian multi-instrumentalist Francesco Turrisi, with whom she recorded the Grammy-winning folk album *They're Calling Me Home*, and Seckou Keita, who played the harp-like West African kora. The Senegalese is best known for collaborating with the Welsh harpist Catrin Finch, their instruments drawing out connections between their respective cultures.

Perhaps she will stick to tunes from her recent album, *What Did the Blackbird Say to the Crow*, a collection of fiddle and banjo music, or will pick from its predecessor, *You're the One*, for which she wrote 12 new songs. 'Blues, jazz, Cajun, country, gospel, and rock – it's all there,' she told *Rolling Stone*. 'I wanted the songs to reach people who might dig them but don't know anything about what I do.' In other words, expect the unexpected.

Giddens admits to having been 'a nerd' at high school, a mixed-race child with white, black and Native American roots, her eyes set on becoming a physicist until she was led astray at a choral summer camp. 'I fell in with musical theatre kids,' she laughs, 'and got introduced to Sondheim.' Her next step was studying opera at Oberlin College in Ohio, but when she returned home, she was drawn to neighbourhood contra dances.

'It's a European thing, like in the Jane Austen movies,' she explained as she told the American arts magazine *Believer* about their history, 'but in the States it gets combined with other things, and then you get quadrilles and these start to turn into square dances in places like Kentucky and North Carolina. And the players for these dances are African-American, because the dance musician is a servant position.'

Immersing herself, she started playing the banjo and learning about its roots in Africa. 'I was told my entire life that the banjo was invented by white people in Appalachia. It was invented by enslaved Africans in the Caribbean.' Spreading the word, she founded her own Biscuits and Banjos Festival to help African-Americans discover their ancestors' contribution to musical styles often seen as the preserve of white communities. 'We were always there,' she says.

Giddens herself came to international attention when the Carolina Chocolate Drops, 'an old-time string band' she co-founded in 2005, won the Traditional Folk Grammy with their 2010 album *Genuine Negro Jig*. Impressively, their attitude was just as important as their music. 'Tradition is a guide, not a jailer,' Giddens said at the time. 'We play in an older tradition but we are modern musicians.'

That success brought increased demands. Released in 2015, her solo debut, *Tomorrow Is My Turn*, revealed her roots, featuring songs

'Tradition is a guide, not a jailer, we play in an older tradition but we are modern musicians.'



Rhiannon Giddens © KAREN COX

by Dolly Parton, Nina Simone and Patsy Cline. Her next album, *Freedom Highway* (2018), adapted documented memoirs from the slavery era. At the same time, however, she was writing the music for *Lucy Negro, Redux*, a ballet based on the argument that the Dark Lady from Shakespeare's sonnets was African, as well as hosting the *Aria Code* podcast, in which she discussed operatic pieces in the archives of the New York Met.

From this, it was a short jump to writing – along with Michael Abels – the opera *Omar*, the true story of a Muslim cleric from Senegal who was enslaved and transported to Charleston in 1807. Covid postponed its première until 2022, and it was awarded a Pulitzer Prize the following year. By then Giddens – 'I say yes to too many things' – had become artistic director of the Silkroad organisation, replacing Yo-Yo Ma.

'I've been focused on the United States and African-American tradition and the banjo for so long,' she told *Believer*, summing up her past, present and future, 'and with Silkroad, I'm in a larger global context. Ultimately, it has to be connected to a larger story of human migration, of global movements and global collaboration.'

What can Wigmore Hall audiences expect from a Rhiannon Giddens residency? Stories that need to be told, definitely, borders that must be crossed … and a healthy serving of banjo.

THURSDAY 05 FEB 2026, 7.30PM
WEDNESDAY 27 MAY 2026, 7.30PM

A countertenor reaching beyond the Baroque

BY HUGH CANNING

Hugh Cutting, the latest British countertenor to break through, is on a quest for new repertoire, from Kurt Weill to Debussy

One of the rising stars of the UK's Early Music world, the countertenor Hugh Cutting is making his presence increasingly felt in concert and recitals, unfazed by the dominance of his senior colleagues Iestyn Davies and Tim Mead, the artists he says inspired him to become a countertenor in his teens and with whom he regularly now sings in opera performances.

During the 2025/26 Season, he features in one of Wigmore Hall's residencies, comprising three concerts – two with orchestra, one a song recital with piano – but in the first week of the autumn season he took part as the alto soloist in a chamber performance of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* with John Butt's Dunedin Consort. His first solo gig of the season came two weeks later, when he joined the English Concert and Harry Bicket in a 'normal, traditional' programme of 17th-century Italian, German and English music: Monteverdi, Barbara Strozzi, Johann Christoph Bach (the cousin of Johann Sebastian's father), Purcell, Pelham Humphrey and John Blow. 'After that, in December, I have a modern programme, really mixed-up repertoire on a theme with a modern ensemble.'

Cutting is a good example of a younger generation of countertenors who refuse to be restricted to the Baroque repertoire usually assigned to male altos. In August, he was at the Edinburgh Festival singing Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, the solo part written for a boy treble. He is certainly aware of the challenges that falsettists face in tackling the Romantic song repertoire.

Which later composers does he think work best for the countertenor voice? 'Well, French song can really suit us: I'm thinking of Poulenc, for example. There's that superb David Daniels disc, *Serenade*, in which he sings Poulenc's *Priez pour paix*. That's amazing and works well for that colour of voice. I think Debussy and Reynaldo Hahn work well, too. Everyone has to decide which songs work for them.'

Yet neither composer features on Cutting's first recital disc, released this October. 'It's entitled *Refound* and is all to do with the relationship we have with the past'

The album draws on the repertoire for his second Wigmore Hall recital on 21 December, built around a modern classic



Hugh Cutting © Olivia da Costa

'I'm a staunch believer that song can be sung by all voice-types. Handel actually rewrote entire parts, lots of arias, for different voice-types'

– a transcription for chamber ensemble of Oberon's famous solo 'Welcome Wanderer! … I know a bank where the wild thyme grows', from Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – and a new commission from the Austrian composer Elena Langer, *Fabulous Beasts*, of which Cutting gives the world première. Otherwise the programme juxtaposes Baroque and 20th-century composers: Cavalli and Geoffrey Burgon, Purcell and Herbert Howells, Schubert's *Erlkönig* alongside music by Richard Rodney Bennett, Kurt Weill and living composers Don Maclean and William Bolcom, a heady cocktail.

'I'm a staunch believer that song can be sung by all voice-types – my brother Guy is a tenor, and there are all sorts of versions, transpositions, available to us. Handel is a composer who actually rewrote entire parts, lots of arias, for different voice-types. At this year's Proms I sang in Handel's *Alexander's Feast*, a piece not usually done with an alto, but in Dublin Handel rewrote the bass part for a woman. He rewrote his operas and oratorios all the time.'

He's excited about his forthcoming ENO debut in November as the love-lorn Arsace, one of Partenope's suitors in Christopher Alden's acclaimed modern-dress (1950s) staging. 'I love *Partenope* as a show. I can't wait to sing this part because it's such a great arc of character development. He's a ladies' man, and he begins so confidently, but then it all changes when his old girlfriend, Rosmira, turns up [dressed as a man and posing as a rival suitor to Partenope]. I find myself in sympathy with the role – he wants to seduce every one – and the changes he undergoes.

'I love singing in English, and I am happy to go with this production choice. We're not working in a museum. I think it's our job to make our art intelligible.'

Opera takes pride of place in the third of Cutting's Wigmore concerts, *The Trials of Tenducci*, in which he will sings famous castrato arias, including Gluck's 'Che faro' from *Orfeo ed Euridice*, two of Farnace's arias from Mozart's *Mitridate, re di Ponto* and one from Thomas Arne's English *opera seria*, *Artaxerxes*, which Tenducci sang in Dublin.

Cutting is disarmingly honest about the challenges that face any countertenor aspiring to the crowns of the legendary British exponents of the voice type, from Alfred Deller via James Bowman and Michael Chance to Davies and Mead today. But he has emerged at a time when male altos are no longer regarded as curiosities, as they were 50 years ago; indeed, the art of the countertenor is more internationally accepted than ever, with outstanding exponents from all over the world.

'The difficulty is getting your voice to sound like a normal human instrument. In the song repertoire I think you need to be aware of an artist "speaking", not in terms of vocal production but of communication. Not every song works for my kind of voice, but there are plenty of songs that do!'

—

SUNDAY 21 DECEMBER 2025, 7.30PM
MONDAY 9 MARCH 2026, 7.30PM

Your impact at a glance

Reflections on the 2024/25 Season and beyond

The 2024/25 Season has proved to be one of the most monumental in the Hall's history. Having exceeded our initial target of £10 million for the Director's Fund a year ahead of schedule, the Trust has already voluntarily withdrawn from the Arts Council National Portfolio. The interest alone on £10 million mitigates the loss of funding, although we must maintain annual fundraising of almost £4 million from gifts, sponsorship, memberships and grants, to underpin the entire artistic and learning programme.

I'm delighted to report a 15% increase in ticket sales last season, bringing in over £4 million. We had an astonishing 608 concerts over 11 months and featured more than 2,600 artists. None of this would be possible without your support at every level. Following the initial success of the Director's Fund, our new target is to build a £30 million endowment for the Hall over the next decade. This fund will allow us to continue our ambitious support of emerging artists and inspiring repertoire and programming.

Gifts in Wills continue to underpin both the Director's Fund and our annual fundraising, so please feel free to contact me directly if you would like to discuss leaving the Hall a gift. I would be very pleased to talk with you.

We continue to work with some of the most marginalised groups in society, and thanks to support from individuals, trusts and foundations, we received over £330,000 in gifts and grants for our Learning and Participation Programme.

Some of the biggest impact from your collective support can be seen in our ongoing commitment to contemporary music and living composers. In the 2024/25 Season alone, we had 48 world premières, 25 UK premières, and 16 commissions. We remain the leading presenter of contemporary chamber music in the UK. The International String Quartet Competition had a very worthy winner in the young, Swedish-Norwegian quartet, Opus13.

We should never forget all those who helped to preserve and enhance Wigmore Hall over the past 125 years. We are all custodians of this very special place, and together we must continue to secure the future of this most beloved and precious of chamber venues.



DIRECTOR, WIGMORE HALL

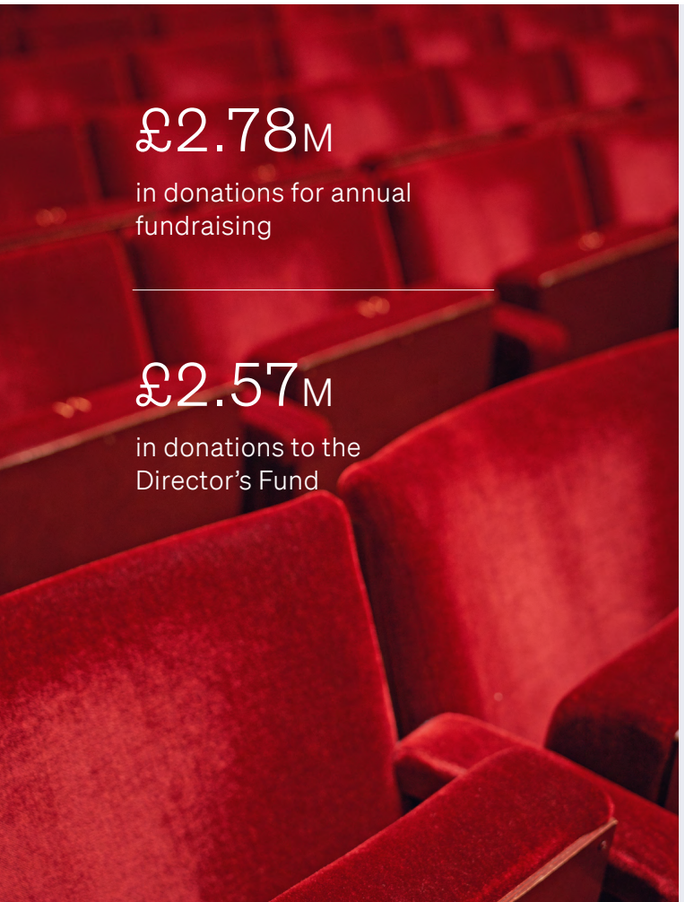
IMPACT REPORT

Thanks to your vital support in the 2024/25 Season

£4.08M
in ticket sales
– an increase of 15%

+2,600 Artists
608 Concerts

199,077
tickets sold

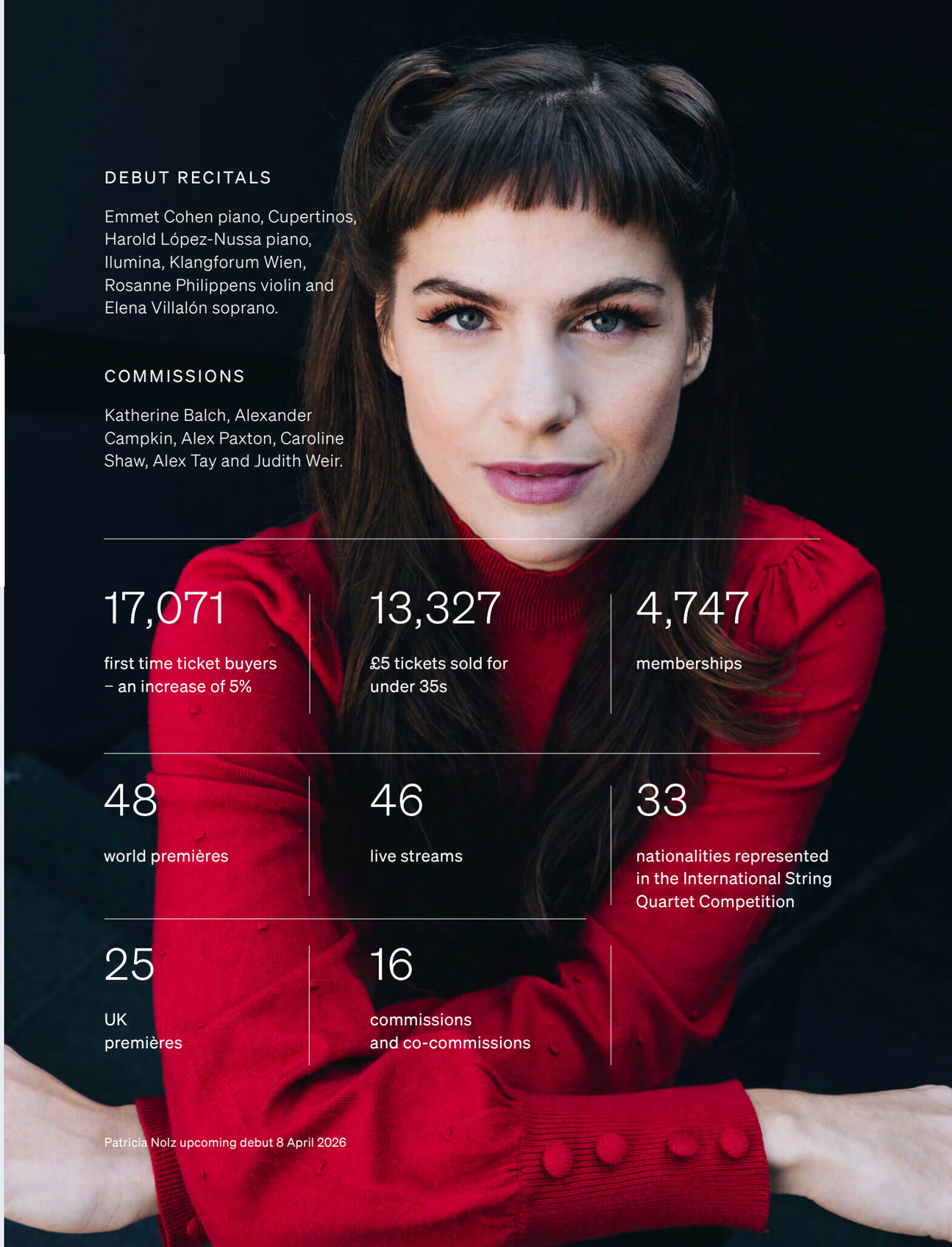


£2.78M
in donations for annual fundraising

£2.57M
in donations to the Director's Fund

'I cannot thank you enough, from the bottom of my heart, for all your generosity in helping us to transform the programme and the public perception of the Hall, particularly over the last quarter century. Rest assured that every contribution makes a huge difference.'

John Gilhooly



DEBUT RECITALS

Emmet Cohen piano, Cupertinos, Harold López-Nussa piano, Ilumina, Klangforum Wien, Rosanne Philippens violin and Elena Villalón soprano.

COMMISSIONS

Katherine Balch, Alexander Campkin, Alex Paxton, Caroline Shaw, Alex Tay and Judith Weir.

17,071
first time ticket buyers
– an increase of 5%

13,327
£5 tickets sold for under 35s

4,747
memberships

48
world premières

46
live streams

33
nationalities represented in the International String Quartet Competition

25
UK premières

16
commissions and co-commissions

Patricia Nolz upcoming debut 8 April 2026



IMPACT REPORT

Learning & Participation

+£336k
in donations to Learning & Participation programme

287
individual participants took part in our Music for Life programme

272
workshops and events with early-career musicians, students and trainees

150
creative music-making sessions for school children

21
Chamber Tots workshops for children aged 1-5

12
For Crying Out Loud! concerts for babies and parents/carers

COLLABORATIVE MUSIC-MAKING

We led music-making workshops with two partner organisations engaging families across London who have experienced marginalisation, poverty, trauma, and face barriers to accessing creative music-making activity. We also led sessions with women and children in refuges. In total, we facilitated 578 interactions with participating families across these workshops.

We continued to offer BSL-interpreted concerts for schools and family audiences, and relaxed low stimulus, multi-stimulus, and co-produced concerts for neurodiverse audiences.

We led a pilot project in an Alternative Provision setting (for pupils who have been excluded from mainstream school, are at risk of exclusion or require alternative education).



‘It’s clear it’s been really well thought out for babies and my baby loves them [...] It’s quite rare to be able to do something baby related that parents get to enjoy’

parent/carer, For Crying Out Loud!

‘They left with a sense of the joy music can bring to all’

audience member, BSL interpreted Family Concert

‘Singing at Wigmore Hall has given us wings to fly into the sky’

person living with dementia

Chamber Tots workshop © James Berry
Music for Life project in care setting © Elizaveta Melkumov

2025/26 Anniversary Season

This season, as we mark 125 years of music, some of the biggest names in classical music today join us to celebrate alongside thrilling new artists from all over the world, with major explorations of repertoire from the Renaissance to the current day. There is so much to discover, and we hope that you will join us often over the season.

We remain grateful to you all for your continued generosity. Did you know that over half of our income comes from your donations? Your support is essential, not just to keep this house running, but to sustain the thousands of artists who call it home. This season, we will present up to three concerts every day, creating space for both emerging and established musicians to connect with audiences like you.

We invite you to experience the joy of giving and become part of our story and our birthday celebration. Everyone can participate at any level, and every donation matters.

WAYS TO SUPPORT OUR 125TH ANNIVERSARY

Make a gift to our Audience Fund – we are over halfway to our goal of £125,000 for 125 years.

Upgrade your membership for our anniversary year or purchase a gift membership for a friend.

Support the Anniversary Festival and **join the 1901 Patrons’ Circle**.

DEBUT RECITALS

Zoltán Daragó countertenor, Ensemble Diderot, Ensemble Près de votre oreille, Barbara Hannigan soprano, Anja Mittermüller mezzo-soprano, Modo Antiquo, Illia Ovcharenko piano, Quartetto Indaco and Jonathan Swensen cello.

COMMISSIONS

Sally Beamish, George Benjamin, Lawrence Dunn, Thomas Gibbs, Thomas Larcher, Rachel Portman, Freya Waley-Cohen and Héloïse Werner.

ANNIVERSARY FESTIVAL (25 MAY - 7 JUNE)

Release of *There is Sweet Music Here: The World of Wigmore Hall* by Julia Boyd
Lise Davidsen soprano, Rhiannon Giddens, Asmik Grigorian soprano, Alexandre Kantorow piano, Leonkoro Quartet, Igor Levit piano, Yunchan Lim piano, Elaine Mitchener vocalist, Jordi Savall and Hespèrion XXI, Abel Selaocoe cello, Christian Tetzlaff violin and many more.

Our new battle plan

BY RICHARD BRATBY

John Gilhooly, Director of Wigmore Hall, is quizzed about arts funding, attracting young audiences and his plan for classical song

John Gilhooly is sick of talking about the Arts Council of England. ‘Please tell me you’re not going to ask about that,’ he groans. ‘I walked into an interview last week where it was only about that, and if I’d known I would’ve declined. There have got to be broader things now.’ That’s awkward; because in the (admittedly grey) world of UK arts funding, Gilhooly’s announcement in March that he was taking the concert hall he manages – the Wigmore Hall – out of the Arts Council’s funding portfolio has been the story of the year.

He’s dead right, though. We’re sitting in one of the world’s great music venues: an art-nouveau jewel just off Oxford Street, consecrated to Schubert, Beethoven and Bach. The Wigmore Hall is the London home of the string quartet, the solo piano and the song recital. And infinitely more, too; just upstairs, rehearsals are under way for a weekend of African music. Classical superstars such as Sir András Schiff and the Takács Quartet speak of the Wigmore Hall with unfeigned love, while younger artists take selfies by its door (a Wigmore debut is a landmark in any musical career). The Hall will be 125 years old next year and the celebrations begin this month; Gilhooly, too, is celebrating 20 years in the job. There are better things to discuss than a public spat with a committee of jargon-spouting quangocrats.

But he does have one thing to add. ‘It’s a deep breath from me then,’ he says. ‘We’d been building up towards leaving the Arts Council’s portfolio. And it’s happened. We are out.’ Wigmore Hall's successful campaign to raise £10 million and reclaim its artistic autonomy was a testament to the affection in which ‘the Wiggy’ is held, and to Gilhooly’s own leadership. A triumph of self-reliance, you might imagine: something for the Arts Council (ACE) to commend? Oh no. The Council’s chairman Nicholas Serota promptly released a passive-aggressive open letter, targeting Gilhooly by name. ‘It is our view that this isn’t good enough,’ he thundered, lest any other ACE clients should have the effrontery to try to snip the apron strings.

‘The response from them was sour,’ says Gilhooly. ‘The public beating-up. It was such an overreaction – how could we rattle cages that much? It was like we’d dropped a bomb, but they’d been told a year before that we were leaving. There was a suggestion that we were anti-public funding, which we’re not; and that we thought an Arts Council shouldn’t exist. We’ve never said that. This is not a substitute for national public funding. We know that we’re in a unique position. But it’s almost like they wanted to underplay our achievement, or to slap us for it.

‘For years, we were hand-to-mouth; it’s taken a huge amount of work to get here. And it’s not just because we’re in London: a lot of our money comes from the UK regions. They also suggested that we were anti-diversity, which we’re not. And as a human being, to be on the receiving end of…’ He pauses.

‘They didn’t need to make it so personal towards me. But I took it on the chin. The reality is that people were so angry with the letter that we raised another £200,000 within a week. There were people ringing us from around the country with donations, purely because the Arts Council had said, “John’s in charge of a rich London venue” and mocked our audience. So what? It’s irrelevant.’ Gilhooly has said before now that the Arts Council has ‘lost the confidence of classical music’. It’s hard to see his experience at the hands of the box-tickers mending many bridges. ‘There is a culture of fear,’ he agrees, ‘because look what happened. We were beaten up for speaking out, for moving on.’

Still, as he says, it’s irrelevant. After two decades on Wigmore Street, he’s specially proud of the way the Hall’s audience has grown and evolved. Like all stereotypes, the old reputation of the Wigmore as a clubhouse for Hampstead’s mitteleuropean music-lovers – nirvana for the kind of classical geek who carries miniature scores in a crumpled Tesco bag – had, and still has, a grain of truth. But these days, it’s a microscopic one. ‘It’s an easy cliché,’ says Gilhooly.

‘But it’s almost like people are refusing to acknowledge what’s in front of them. Two hundred thousand young people under the age of 35 have come to concerts here in the past eight years, and 60 per cent are returning, which is incredible. It’s through our own under-35s scheme, which we run with Classic FM, and it’s interesting that most of them are not music students. They’re young people studying or working in London. One couple told us they couldn’t afford both the babysitter and concert seats, until we introduced the subsidy. And then they could.’



Jakub Józef Orliński with il Pomo d'Oro © Hugo Glendinning

Above all, there's the music, and for Gilhooly, the opportunity to plan a pair of 125th anniversary seasons with – effectively – the pick of the world's greatest chamber musicians. The names that have been released already are enough to make any fan salivate. Mitsuko Uchida, Matthias Goerne, Christian Tetzlaff and Martha Argerich; jazz from Fred Hersch, and Bach from Les Arts Florissants. There's a series of anniversary commissions, residencies for composer Thomas Larcher and the Kanneh-Mason family, and a belated Wigmore debut from Canadian soprano-extraordinaire Barbara Hannigan.

'There are pillars which keep this place up: Beethoven, Schubert and so on,' says Gilhooly. 'Anybody who programmes only according to their own ego will fail. But of course, a majority of the music – probably 60 per cent – is what I love myself. And then I look at what's missing, how we can move things on.' One way in which Gilhooly plans to move things on is likely to ruffle some feathers: from early next year he plans to trial surtitles for song recitals. Expect massed handbag-clutching from the purists; even today, there are still opera-goers who disdain this liberating technology. But we can't all be omnilingual, and in no art form is the union between words and music more subtle, or intimate, than in classical song. Surtitles are an imperfect solution, but they're the best we have, and as Gilhooly sees it, the survival of an artform is at stake.

'Some people might complain, but I'm afraid it will fall on deaf ears because we've got to do it. We are the last bastion of the song recital – not just in London, in the world. We're doing 70-plus recitals a year of classical song. If you look at Vienna, it's 12 to 16 across the city. In Paris, ten. In Berlin, it's a bit better, but no more than 20. We've found that our new audiences love solo piano programmes. They love early and baroque music, and counter-tenors. But they're not as keen on song recitals, and that is because of the language barrier.' The surtitle projectors were installed last month.

'We've been planning this for a long time and it's going to be very elegantly done, with no screen – the words will be projected on the wall. We're going to need experts in Czech, Russian, German, Latvian, you name it: sometimes a recital will include 24 songs in four different languages. It's a big challenge. But I think this is an essential investment in the future of lieder. And if we don't do it – if we fall – then the rest of Europe falls. That's not being arrogant, that's just a fact.'

Fighting talk; but when you believe in something, you fight. Gilhooly has already faced down the ACE. Might London's most civilised music venue have the answers that classical music needs if it is to claim the audience that is undoubtedly there, as well as the freedom that – for any serious art – is even more vital than subsidy? 'You need to stretch your audience,' he says.

'But that doesn't mean throwing everything out, and the Wigmore Hall will always be a venue where we respect the traditions of chamber music. Intimate music-making, where the musicians are all equally valid, and which brings us into the conversation as audience members. So, that school of music-making, at the highest possible international level. Doing a job like this, I've had to put my own prejudices to one side, because prejudices just hamper you as an artistic director. But you've still got to set the standards.'

Published by *The Spectator* in September 2025



There's still time to join the 1901 Patrons' Circle...

...for a unique opportunity to become part of Wigmore Hall's enduring legacy, as we celebrate over a century of world-class music making.

In recognition of their support, 1901 Patrons' Circle members will receive:

- **Top level Priority Booking** and personal ticketing assistance for all Wigmore Series concerts throughout the year
- An **invitation to a private event** within the two-week festival
- A signed copy of a **new publication on the Hall's history**
- **Named acknowledgement** in our online donor listing and in printed materials where possible

Suggested minimum donation £5,000

For more information on the Anniversary Festival, or to join the Circle, please contact **Tara Fry, Head of Grants and Donor Care**
tara@wigmore-hall.org.uk | 020 7258 8220
or visit wigmore-hall.org.uk/1901patrons

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Igor Levit © Felix Broede

Taking care of this house

BY MARIE-HÉLÈNE OSTERWEIL

The Hall's Director of Development looks back at a quarter-century of fundraising and the impact of gifts in Wills

After nearly 25 years working with Wigmore Hall, I am filled with gratitude. When I joined in 2001, I could not have anticipated how much I would learn or how deeply the Hall would touch and enrich my life. Those quiet moments of reflection whilst listening to a concert, the shared connection between artists and audiences, and my own uplifting conversations with so many of you – it has been a privilege and a joy.

I have seen first-hand the difference that your donations have made over the years. We have refurbished, modernised, invested, supported – all down to you, and this coming celebratory season is a tangible result for all of us. Legacy gifts have been especially transformational in recent years. What I find so amazing is no matter when the gift comes, it has an impact on what we can do, whether it is to fulfil an immediate need or invest in the future. These gifts are what sustain Wigmore Hall and drive it forward and there is no doubting how important they are. The Director's Fund will grow and grow, ensuring that Wigmore Hall will prosper long into the future with legacies as well as regular gifts.



When I revised my own Will recently, I included Wigmore Hall as one of the beneficiaries. To think that my donation will in some way help artists build an audience and connect people with music – I am very happy about that. I know that Wigmore will make the best use of it. I am championing legacy giving this season, my last on staff before I leave the Hall in July 2026, and hope to talk to many more of you. It does help us to know whether you are interested in gifting in this way, or if you have already made your Will and included Wigmore Hall. Please be assured that we know circumstances can change and amendments might be made along the way, and we appreciate that. If you have any questions about how to include a gift in your Will, don't hesitate to ask. Both John Gilhooly and I, and Sam Rigby, the new Head of Development and Marketing, would be delighted to hear from you.

Leaving a legacy isn't just about money. For me, it's about honouring what has truly mattered: this remarkable community – the artists, the staff, the audience – and above all, the opportunity given to me to experience great music making. I have been incredibly fortunate. Thank you, all of you.

To contact **Marie-Hélène**, please email
mhosterweil@wigmore-hall.org.uk
or call 020 7258 8220

To contact **John Gilhooly**, please email
director@wigmore-hall.org.uk
or call 020 7258 8266



For further information on Gifts in Wills please visit
wigmore-hall.org.uk/support-us/leave-a-legacy/gifts-in-wills

HRH the Duke of Kent
at the Director's Fund Gala

Vive la révolution!

BY ALEXANDRA COGHLAN

French soprano Sabine Devieilhe is intent on telling new stories in her recitals, especially if they ruffle feathers and shake up prejudices



Sabine Devieilhe © Anna Dabrowska

How do you go about putting together a recital – is it a creative process?

I start with my personal preferences – composers, periods – and then focus on the dramaturgy. I work a lot with Mathieu [Pordoy, her accompanist] on the transitions between pieces. I don't always feel the need to respect the order of a cycle, unless the composer has designed it that way. Sometimes I prefer to create cycles combining music by different composers, and this is done through a tonal map and emotional effects.

I consider a recital a time for storytelling, rather than a time for theatre. Ultimately, that's what made me want to sing rather than pursue a career as a cellist: the presence of the text. As a singer you have the power to become a narrator. For two hours, Mathieu and I are working together to tell our own story.

You have constructed a 'cycle of lullabies' for this concert: how did you choose from the huge number of options in the classical repertoire? Where do we find variety among them?

The repertoire of lullabies is indeed very extensive, and I am even more aware of the tradition since I had my own children. The term 'lullaby' is associated with gentle music, but that's not always the case; lullabies are not always written to lull children to sleep – they often evoke death. I think that's interesting, because just as a clown is never just funny, I don't think a lullaby is ever just about soothing. It's also there to remind us of the fleeting nature of life, to evoke an immense sense of love that could end from one day to the next. Lullabies are always bittersweet.

'I think that's interesting, because just as a clown is never just funny, I don't think a lullaby is ever just about soothing.'

Also included are some anonymous and folk lullabies: why bring these simple works into the concert hall? Do we – should we – listen to them differently in this context?

With these lullabies, and also with the inclusion of the songs by Darius Milhaud and Germaine Tailleferre, I aim to shed a different light both on popular folk music itself, and on the classical composers who came before. I am thinking of Schubert or Poulenc, who, for me, is the perfect example of someone who mocked the conventions of the classical world and who always managed to bridge the gap between the classical and popular.

Most of Strauss's *Mädchenblumen* songs appear in this programme – songs originally written for a tenor to sing, comparing women to different types of flowers. Can we enjoy this musical 'male gaze' in the 21st Century? Does singing them as a woman shift the perspective at all?

To be perfectly honest, the lyrics of these songs are enough to make me want to give up singing them, since they clearly reflect a very reductive masculine view of small, flower-like female creatures! However, it is

once again a question of perspective. I have deliberately paired the *Mädchenblumen* Lieder with Germaine Tailleferre's very raw and bitter music, to showcase Strauss's sublime music but also to confront his approach with the frank, resolutely folkloric style of Tailleferre.

It's a rare recital by you that doesn't include works by female composers. Is this a deliberate decision?

As a woman, and a performer who is often invited onto international stages, I believe I have a duty always to include music by female composers in every programme. Here, there are four women represented, and perhaps that is still not enough. As well as performing contemporary music we also need to showcase the music of female composers who have too often been overlooked by history, so you can count on Mathieu Pordoy and me to remedy that!

Edith Piaf is an unusual figure in the classical concert hall: how does she fit into the tradition of French *mélodies* and *chansons*?

Edith Piaf is an unmissable figure in the history of French music, and as a proud ambassador for French music here at Wigmore Hall, it seems obvious to me that she should be included in the programme. She is a very important figure in our repertoire, and I think that the barriers between classical and popular repertoires should be broken down.

You and Mathieu Pordoy have worked together extensively. What do you enjoy and admire about his musicianship and playing?

I have known Mathieu for almost 20 years, since we first met at the Paris Conservatoire. We grew up together. I admire his knowledge and expertise in the art of piano and accompaniment, and he's also an absolutely brilliant vocal coach.

But above all, he is a good friend, and I think that one of the great things about this repertoire of Lieder and *mélodies* is that it allows you to share special moments with someone you care about, someone you travel with, someone you spend time with outside of concerts, someone with whom you discover the world. So, I am very fortunate to be accompanied in every sense of the word by the wonderful Mathieu.

What are some of your forthcoming highlights for 2026?

There are three particular projects I am very excited about. First, my return to the role of Cleopatra in *Giulio Cesare*: a great vocal challenge. I will be singing the part on a major tour in February with the period ensemble Il Pomo d'Oro. Then there's my debut in a role that's a bit of an Everest for sopranos: Lucia, though in its French version, 'Lucie' de Lammermoor, which I will perform at the Opéra-Comique. The French version is slightly higher-pitched than the Italian, and perhaps a little lighter, but of course still with the notorious mad scene that I can't wait to sing! Finally I'll be reprising the role of the Queen of the Night in an exciting new production by Clément Cogitore, conducted by Leonardo García Alarcón, at the 2026 Festival d'Aix-en-Provence.

WEDNESDAY 14 JAN 2026, 7.30PM

A sadly underplayed pioneer



Ina Boyle
Illustration by Peter Field

BY ANDREW STEWART

Tutored by Vaughan Williams, the Irish composer Ina Boyle's tender music is finally receiving a much-deserved boost

Ina Boyle

One of Ireland's most prolific composers of the 20th Century rarely heard her works performed. Yet Ina Boyle, shy and reclusive, who spent much of her life in a rural backwater, upturned the prejudices of her age by becoming the first Irish woman to penetrate creative territory traditionally colonised by men. Her large output, much of it unpublished, includes three symphonies, a violin concerto, a chamber opera and a trio of ballet scores. Interest in Ina's music has surged over the last decade, propelled by her homeland's rising pride in its classical composers, the foundation of a society devoted to the promotion of her art, and performers inspired by the high quality of her compositions.

Wigmore Hall is set to boost the Boyle revival on Tuesday 10 March when Ailish Tynan, Paula Murrihy, Robin Tritschler and Iain Burnside present a lunchtime recital of her songs. These will be placed alongside works by two of her teachers, Charles Wood and Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Elizabeth Maconchy, whose friendship with Ina spanned 50 years. The programme presents Ina's profoundly moving setting of Kipling's *Have you news of my boy Jack?*; 'So Blyssid be the Tyme', the first of *Two Christmas Songs*; *All Souls' Flower*, another Christmas carol; and *Roses*, an early work dressed in the sentimental style of an Edwardian drawing-room ballad. Other highlights include the Irish-inflected folk idioms of *The Joy of Earth*; *A Song of Enchantment* (to words by Walter de la Mare, later set by the schoolboy Benjamin Britten); 'Carrowdore' and 'The Mill-Water' from Ina's late song cycle *Looking Back*, both rooted in the great Celtic storytelling tradition; and the Romantic lyricism of *A Soft Day, Thank God!*

Selina Adelaide Philippa Boyle was born in 1889 at Bushey Park, her maternal family's Georgian mansion on the outskirts of Enniskerry in County Wicklow. Ina's father, the Reverend William Foster Boyle, Anglican curate at St Patrick's Church, Powerscourt, was an enthusiastic amateur musician and violin-maker from whom she received her first music lessons. She was taught violin and cello by governesses, part of a regime of home-schooling that set the template for her private studies in composition. The latter began at the age of 11 with lessons from Samuel Myerscough, a former assistant organist at Manchester Cathedral who converted to Catholicism and relocated to Dublin in 1899 to teach music at Loreto Abbey. Myerscough supplied Ina with a thorough training in the rudiments of music. She also did a correspondence course with her cousin's husband, Charles Wood, lecturer in harmony and counterpoint at Cambridge University, and later received instruction from the Dublin-based Englishmen, Percy Buck and Charles Herbert Kitson.

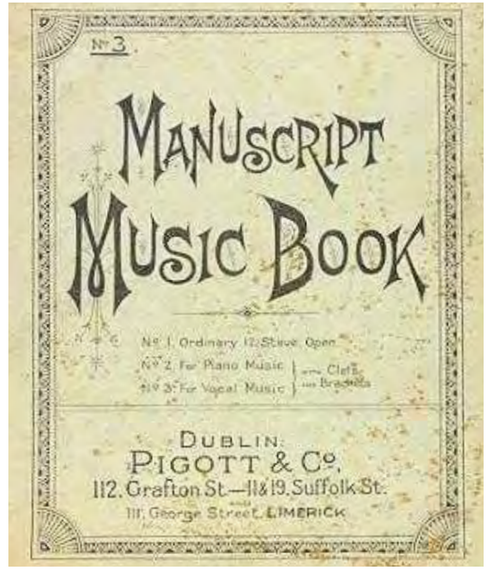
> Under his guidance Ina cultivated her own distinctive voice, conservative in style yet unrestrained in expression, free from the burden of following the latest trend or -ism.

Ina's apprentice years led to the composition of her first orchestral work in 1913. *Elegy* for cello and orchestra was awarded first prize at that year's Sligo Feis Ceoil, while her enchanting setting of Walt Whitman's *The Last Invocation*, the closing song in Wigmore Hall's Boyle programme, received second prize. *Soldiers at Peace* (1916), a setting for chorus and orchestra of verse by Herbert Asquith, son of the British prime minister HH Asquith, generated critical acclaim following its first performance in 1920 at the country estate of the cricketer and philanthropist Sir Stanley Cochrane. It was one of just 10 pieces to be published during Ina's lifetime. Her orchestral rhapsody, *The Magic Harp* (1919), was chosen for publication in the prestigious Carnegie Collection of British Music, which had already issued works by, among others, Gustav Holst, Frank Bridge, Arthur Bliss, Herbert Howells and Vaughan Williams; it was first performed in 1923 at the Queen's Hall in London during Henry Wood's Promenade Concerts. Boyle was the only woman to make the cut of 45 Carnegie Collection composers.

Determined to develop her skills, Ina wrote to one of Charles Wood's former pupils, Ralph Vaughan Williams, then a professor of composition at the Royal College of Music. Between 1923 and 1938 she often travelled from Bushey Park to London for private lessons with him, an arrangement ended by the outbreak of the Second World War. Vaughan Williams applied practical wisdom to the business of bringing out the best in his students, favouring the delivery of honest emotions over displays of technical brilliance. Under his guidance Ina cultivated her own distinctive voice, conservative in style yet unrestrained in expression, free from the burden of following the latest trend or -ism.

Her finest music blends a tender beauty tinged with melancholy, traits evident in her *Phantasy* for violin and orchestra (1926), *Five Sacred Folksongs of Sicily* (1930), the String Quartet in E minor (1934), and the haunting *Three Ancient Irish Poems* for voice, viola and harp (1958). Having achieved some success in postwar Ireland with radio broadcasts and performances of *Wild Geese* (1942), her 'Sketch for small orchestra', Ina's enthusiasm for work returned and, in addition to completing her symphony for contralto and orchestra, *From the Darkness* (1946-52), she produced a series of songs including those that form *Looking Back* (1960-66).

Ina Boyle's final years were spent at work in her increasingly dilapidated, unheated home. She died from cancer the year after completing *Looking Back*, her last composition, but was still planning to write more. 'I have come upon a most striking old ballad, unknown to me hitherto, called *The Demon Lover*,' she wrote to Elizabeth Maconchy from her deathbed. 'If I can, I will have a shot at setting it for mezzo, baritone, small chorus and orchestra. I have not met anything that so attracted me for ages.' Bushey Park, with its walled garden and panoramic views of the Wicklow Hills, was Ina's refuge. Yet her self-imposed isolation there contributed to the neglect of her music. 'She never complained about it…,' wrote Maconchy in a short biography of her friend, 'but went on with her work, regardless of whether she would hear it played or not.' Thanks to the Ina Boyle Society and a growing community of scholars and performers, her musical legacy has begun to receive the recognition it so richly deserves.



Ina Boyle Manuscript Book
Image © The Board of Trinity College Dublin

TUESDAY 10 MARCH 2026, 1.00PM

A testament to female talent

BY RACHEL HALLIBURTON

From Fanny Mendelssohn to Elizabeth Maconchy and Errollyn Wallen, music by female composers gets its own special day

Right at the start of her manifesto *Women & Power*, the classicist Mary Beard writes about the first recorded example in Western literature of a woman being told to shut up. 'I am thinking of a moment immortalised at the start of Homer's *Odyssey*, almost 3,000 years ago,' she says. This moment is when Odysseus's wife, Penelope, discovers a poet singing to her suitors about the difficulties the Greek heroes are having in coming home from the Trojan war. Consumed by grief for her husband's long absence, she asks him to recount a less painful tale.

Her grown-up son Telemachus scolds her, telling her to 'go back up into your quarters, and take up your own work, the loom and the distaff'. Loftily he declares: 'Speech will be the business of men, and of me most of all; for mine is the power in this household.' Humiliated, Penelope turns round and returns to her room. It's an early example, according to Beard, of how in Homer, 'an integral part of growing up, as a man' is to assert your right to speak in public at the same time as 'silenc[ing] the female of the species'.

Beard – who, one assumes, happily has never been told to stick to her knitting (or indeed weaving) – will be asserting her own right to speak in public at Wigmore Hall's evening event on International Women's Day 2026. Like her book, the concert is titled *Women and Power* and will include a new composition about the Eurydice myth from the Master of the King's Music, Errollyn Wallen, sung by the soprano Nardus Williams.



Elena Urioste © Franz Galo

'When I had a lot of time on my hands during the pandemic, it was an opportunity to really seek out lesser-known composers' – Elena Urioste

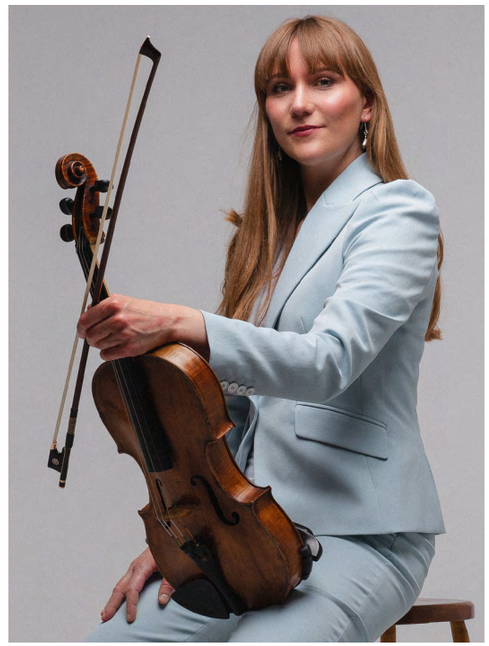
Wallen was praised for her 'bold new take' on Dido's story in her 2021 opera *Dido's Ghost*, so it's fair to predict that Eurydice will be taking full advantage of her new right to speak in a 'rebuttal' or 'anti-lament'. Yet while these represent mythical examples of women seeking to retell their story, strikingly much of the day at the Hall will celebrate real women who – to varying degrees – have been silenced in the public domain.

Interestingly, it seems lockdown may have played no small part in the current broadening awareness of female composers. 'I was of course aware of figures like Fanny Mendelssohn, but during my time at conservatory I can't think of a single woman whose music I was taught,' says the violinist Elena Urioste, co-director of the Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective, which will be performing the first concert. 'When I had a lot of time on my hands during the pandemic, it was an opportunity to really seek out lesser-known composers.'

Violist Rosalind Ventris – who will be performing the second concert of the day, in a programme based on her critically lauded CD *Sola* – concurs that lockdown proved unexpectedly fruitful. 'We all suddenly had a chance to expand our repertoire,' she declares. 'I didn't plan to create a programme that was all women composers, but I was discovering so much great music that it all came together naturally.'

The gloriously wide-ranging programme for the entire day – which features three concerts – is indeed a testament to female musical talent that has been downplayed over the centuries. Its composers include Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre, a French harpsichordist championed by Louis XIV; Madeleine Dring, a British pianist who studied with Herbert Howells; and Elizabeth

'I didn't plan to create a programme that was all women composers, but I was discovering so much great music that it all came together naturally' – Rosalind Ventris



Rosalind Ventris © Oxford Atelier

Maconchy, a British avant-garde innovator who was performed at the Proms in 1930.

One challenge that has all too frequently been issued to the work of historic female composers is that maybe it didn't survive simply because it wasn't as good as the pieces being written by their male counterparts. Yet it doesn't take much digging to expose this myth as threadbare. Ventris talks about discovering ecstatic reviews of Maconchy, who in the early 20th Century was hailed as 'one of the most substantial composers these islands have yet produced'. Urioste's husband, the pianist Tom Poster – who is also co-founder and artistic director of Kaleidoscope – describes the first movement of Fanny Mendelssohn's Piano Trio in D minor (Op. 11), which they will be performing, as 'fiendishly difficult. It's raw and impassioned – really substantial – and absolutely at the level of works Felix was writing'.

For both Urioste and Poster, Fanny Mendelssohn's story is a classic example of how talented women were restricted from exploring their full potential. Her composition

In a year when Britten would be broadcast over 100 times by the BBC, Maconchy would struggle to get broadcasts into double figures.

teacher, Carl Friedrich Zelter, wrote a letter to Goethe in 1816 to introduce him to her father Abraham. In it he said: 'He has adorable children, and his oldest daughter could really give you something of Sebastian Bach. This child is really something special.' Yet Fanny's father was not convinced. He wrote to her in 1820, 'Music will perhaps become his [Felix's] profession, while for you it can and must only be an ornament.'

By contrast, Ventris – who recently became Director of Music at the Yehudi Menuhin School after being Director of Musical Performance and Performance Studies at Oxford University – has discovered that whereas Maconchy was professionally acknowledged, her work was comparatively neglected. Though she was proclaimed by more than one critic to be Britten's equal, in a year where he would be broadcast well over 100 times by the BBC, she would struggle to get her broadcasts into double figures. 'I think her writing is wonderful, and I was lucky enough to be at St Hilda's College at Oxford where her music is held in the library archive,' says Ventris. 'There's so much there that people don't play. Yet so often when I've performed it in public, I get messages from students asking where they can track it down.'

All the performers I speak to are emphatic that people attending International Women's Day at Wigmore Hall should not simply be interested in the fact that the composers are female. 'There's such a variety of voices, you need to go beyond the idea of women as a theme,' says Urioste. This should, of course, be stating the obvious, with compositions as diverse as Jacquet de la Guerre's Trio Sonata in B flat in the first concert and contemporary composer Sally Beamish's leaping, haunting *Penillion* in the second. Yet even for young

THE SCORE, 2025 AUTUMN ISSUE



Elizabeth Maconchy, in the early 20th Century, was hailed as 'one of the most substantial composers these islands have yet produced'

Dame Elizabeth Maconchy

performers, programming such a breadth of female composers is a novelty, and it's clear there is still a campaign to be waged for it to become the norm.

'I certainly grew up not thinking about this issue at all,' says Ventris. 'So although, for instance, I was a viola geek, when I heard a piece by [the viola virtuoso and composer] Rebecca Clark, I didn't consider how unusual it was to hear a piece by a woman composer.' She explains that one reason for her move to the Yehudi Menuhin School is her belief that if attitudes to music are to shift, they need to do so well before people reach university.

'At Oxford a lot of the students were very enthusiastic about what I was doing,' she says. 'But it was mainly women. What I'd like is for everyone to be invested in expanding this repertoire. Now I'm teaching younger people about the different music they can hear. Right now there's a lot more still to be done.'

SUNDAY 8 MARCH 2026
11.30AM, 3.00PM, 7.30PM

My closest musical companion

BY JESSICA DUCHEN

Imogen Cooper on the affecting impact of Schubert



Imogen Cooper © Sim Canetty-Clarke

Dame Imogen, thank you for talking to us for *The Score*. The programme for your Wigmore Hall recital on 18 January consists entirely of Schubert's two sets of Impromptus. First of all, please tell us what Schubert means to you.

Schubert's piano music, both solo and Lieder, is central to my repertoire. His music has a humanity to it as affecting as any of the great composers', and sometimes more. There is a dark side as well as a luminous one, and he goes from one to the other with no warning, to moving effect. He composed melodies like no-one else; they are haunting, yet often so simple. He is my closest musical companion.

How do the Impromptus fit into his piano output? Do you see them as individual pieces, or as unified sets that perhaps are a step away from being a sonata – especially in the second set, where the keys are related?

The Impromptus were composed in 1827 near the end of his life, and as such must be considered among his most important piano compositions, despite their lightweight title. They are more profound than we mostly give them credit for. They are often treated as salon pieces, but they have the hallmarks of his late music, and we must, each time we play them, regard them with a fresh outlook. For me personally, they are separate pieces that belong well together. This may be a generational issue, as they were never considered as a sort of sonata when I first worked on them.

Do you have any special favourites among them? And what are the chief pianistic challenges in playing them?

For me, the first (and longest) of each set is the greatest. If I had to choose between them both, I would choose the F minor D935/1. As for the greatest challenge, it would be finding the full range of sound and emotion that does them justice.

Some people regard Schubert's piano writing as slightly awkward and unpianistic, or suggest that his works are easier to play on an instrument of his time with its lighter action. What do you think?

I have actually never thought his piano writing unpianistic and awkward – Schumann is considerably worse! It is indeed interesting, however, to play certain passages on pianos of Schubert's time, for example a Brodmann. The instruments with the moderator pedal (whereby when depressed, a layer of felt goes over all the keys) produce a very particular veiled colour, which it is harder – but still possible – to reproduce on a modern grand.

What do you enjoy most about playing at Wigmore Hall?

I have had some of my most memorable musical experiences there, both in solo and in Lieder performances – and as an audience member. There is a great sense of history, an extremely knowledgeable audience and a wonderful acoustic. The piano, if treated without violence, sounds beautiful.

You often sit on piano competition juries. What is your perspective on the challenges facing young pianists today?

I shudder for young pianists. Even the very good ones are not getting sufficient work unless they have the first prize of a big competition behind them. How can they develop, learn, earn a living? Competitions

‘There is a lot of talent around and I admire this generation enormously, for their courage and, by and large, seriousness of intention.’

are their main platform now, for better, for worse. And it is often for worse, as there is an element of Russian roulette to them – good playing does not necessarily unify a jury, unless it is outstanding; we all have different perspectives, after all. The contestants get their biggest audience ever through these competitions’ live-streaming, which reaches tens of thousands and more. They will have prepared an insane amount of repertoire and have to have nerves of steel – which, impressively, very many do, and that is important for this profession. But if the results are mediocre because of the lack of one outstanding player and/or the jury being divided, it is devastating for the really good ones (the perception of which, I fully accept, is entirely personal).

An observation I have made to myself is that contestants are clearly divided into those who know how to make the concert grand piano sound in its full glory, with judicious pedalling, weight without force, imagination and a sense of the orchestral – and those who play the piano, end of… The latter still have a little bit to learn. I worry that this shortcoming comes from the lack of decent instruments on which to practise (some have digital pianos only – not sufficient, despite being very good nowadays). Or also from working with their teachers in small rooms, and maybe not realising how much they must up their game in a big concert hall. There is a lot of talent around and I admire this generation enormously, for their courage and, by and large, seriousness of intention.

And finally, you nurture young pianists through masterclasses at your Imogen Cooper Trust. What are your aims there?

At my Trust sessions we try only to talk about… music. Not the profession: not management, finance, recording, competitions. All those factors have one thing behind them: the need for top music making, a nurtured talent and focus. I very much hope that my Trust can, however briefly, help in this regard.

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SUNDAY 18 JANUARY 2026, 7.30PM

The master of melancholy

BY RACHEL HALLIBURTON

Iestyn Davies on John Dowland, subject of an epic weekend of concerts



Iestyn Davies © Pablo Strong

The enthusiasms of Christian IV, illustrious monarch of Denmark and Norway for 60 years, included ship designing, heavy drinking and 'invisible' music. As he prepares to curate a weekend dedicated to composer John Dowland, Iestyn Davies explains how – to help create this invisible music – Dowland spent part of his time at Christian IV's court confined to a cellar in Copenhagen's Rosenborg castle.

'If you go to the castle,' he explains, 'there's a room that has a panel in the floor with a pipe that goes down to the cellar, so that the music played down there could be transmitted up to the king. The musicians would be sitting there amid the beer barrels and sacks of grain, which on certain levels was probably quite depressing.'

Today it seems Christian IV was several centuries ahead of his time, as we inhabit a world dominated by 'invisible' music, from radio broadcasts to Spotify. Yet while these latter forms pose hazards to musicians ranging from copyright infringement to AI rip offs, none of the disadvantages seem quite as visceral as being confined to a dank basement in northern Europe. 'I always think Dowland's song *In darkness let me dwell* feels like the kind of thing you'd write in a cellar – it's simultaneously metaphorical and very literal,' Davies says when we talk on Zoom. 'Just look at the words: "The roof despair to bar all cheerful light from me/The walls of marble black that moistened still shall weep." It's utterly different from anything written at the time. I think it's one of the greatest songs in the English language.'

Davies is well aware that to read Dowland's songs as autobiographical flies in the face of scholars who argue that his melancholy was essentially an intellectual pose. England in the 16th and 17th centuries was obsessed with gloomy introversion – the most obvious example being Hamlet, written in 1601 at the same time that Dowland was publishing his songs from Denmark. (Shakespeare would certainly have been aware of him. Was it a complete coincidence that the play also had a Danish connection?)

Yet for Davies, to view a song scholastically is to see it through only one dimension. 'When you put something down on paper, people start to be very sacrosanct about it,' he protests. George Guest, his choirmaster when he was a chorister at St John's College Cambridge, taught him to be just as interested in 'the silence between the notes, the gaps. Nine times out of ten you can get something that the composer's been unable to write on the page'.

Davies, arguably today's leading vocal interpreter of Dowland, leapt at the chance to organise a weekend to mark the quatercentenary of the songwriter's death. 'In some ways it was easy. I said, "Let's just do everything!"' he says with a smile. Everything includes works inspired by Dowland, such as Britten's *Lachrymae* and Nico Muhly's arrangement of *Time Stands Still*. The Saturday will comprise all three of the songbooks, 'which will be a bit of a marathon', he declares. Collaborators across the weekend will range from the Phantasm viol consort to Davies's long-term collaborator, the lutenist Thomas Dunford. 'When I sit down with Tom, it's a different experience from when I sit down with anybody else,' he says. 'I do these songs best with him.'

Dowland – a possible spy who went to Denmark because he couldn't be a musician at Elizabeth I's court – eventually returned to England to work for James I. By this point he had established a reputation for fashionable angst that has led some – including Davies – to compare him to the New Romantics of the late 1970s, and others to Leonard Cohen or Tom Waits. Whatever your reference point, Davies continues to be fascinated by how directly his work still speaks to people today.

'I was teaching in Bennington College [for liberal arts] in Vermont,' he says. 'There was a 19-year-old black student who was taking hormones for gender reassignment, and they sang *Flow, my tears* from memory, accompanied by a teacher on a guitar. It was amazing. It was a little rough around the edges, but they had really thought about it and got something from it that I couldn't. That for me shows the degree to which these songs can resonate for different people.'



John Dowland
Illustration by Peter Field

Within his own life, it seems that Dowland was a perpetual outsider. He himself argued that he wasn't accepted at Elizabeth I's court because he was a Catholic, something of which Davies is sceptical: 'Byrd managed to strike the balance.' His own theory is that Dowland's issues were more temperamental, 'I know people like him who are brilliant at what they do, but just on the periphery of being social. Melancholy for him was both the focus and source of his creativity.'

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FRIDAY 27 MARCH 2026, 1.00PM
SATURDAY 28 MARCH 2026,
11.30AM, 3.00PM & 7.30PM
SUNDAY 29 MARCH 2026,
11.30AM & 2.30PM

Playing hertz to hertz

BY CORY OLDWEILER

The JACK Quartet on their speciality: new music that goes between the notes.

More than 30 different string quartets are scheduled to perform at Wigmore Hall during the 2025/26 Season, but none is quite like the JACK Quartet. Since its formation two decades ago, JACK has been dedicated almost exclusively to performing and recording contemporary music composed since the end of the Second World War. The quartet's cellist, Jay Campbell, says that while everyone in JACK 'loves old music' and recognises the importance – particularly as string players – of staying 'connected to the approach to sound and expression' found with Romantic and Classical music, that's not what drives them. 'I would say it's really just that we love working on art that's new, music that's of the current moment, and being engaged in a music scene that is of the right now. That is very different than working on music from the past.'

Part of what makes new music different is the culture surrounding it, at least with respect to the JACK Quartet's approach, which starts with creating an atmosphere that welcomes exploration and experimentation, and is even open to failure. 'We try to give [new composers] that opportunity of [knowing] all new music is inherently an experiment, and there are hits and there are misses, and that's okay. There's no expectation of masterpieces. I think expectation is really a hindrance to composers being able to explore freely the things that are interesting to them without there being this burden of the past.'

This open-minded ethos has been part of JACK since its formation in 2005, when the group's original members – violinists Christopher Otto and Ari Streisfeld, violist John Pickford Richards and cellist Kevin McFarland – were brought together for a music festival performance while they were studying at the Eastman School of Music, in Rochester, New York. (In 2016, Campbell and violinist Austin Wulliman replaced McFarland and Streisfeld.) The first piece of music JACK performed together was Helmut Lachenmann's String Quartet No. 3 'Grido', a work and a composer that remain essential to the group. JACK will perform all three Lachenmann string quartets for the last of a trio of Wigmore Hall concerts on 7 February 2026.

'There's so much depth to his music. Every time we play it, there's something new I discover in it,' Campbell says. Part of that depth comes from the fact that Lachenmann's music doesn't dismiss the standard repertoire but, rather, extends it. 'He composes in a way that is, from my perspective, very Germanic, mixed in with some radical post-war thinking, but it's still very traditional in a lot of ways. And his sound world is not an attempt to throw out the old world, but to extend it.' Which is exactly what composers like Beethoven, Schoenberg, and Webern did before Lachenmann.

'I think Lachenmann is a good representation of what the outer limits are for a logical, cohesive, really capital-C composed piece of music for his time.'

Another composer pushing at the boundaries of contemporary music is Catherine Lamb, whose work was premièred at Wigmore Hall in 2023 when JACK played her 'divisio spiralis'. In February, JACK will première another of Lamb's pieces, 'two blooms', a work that illustrates many of the complexities contemporary music can present.



JACK Quartet © Shervin Lainez

‘We take for granted that a C is a C,’ Campbell says, but the reality is that there’s ‘an infinite number of pitches’ and an ‘infinite number of interval relationships’. Lamb’s scores specify precise frequencies for each note, which requires the musicians to rethink things that are usually taken for granted, such as, in Campbell’s terms, ‘What it means to play a note, or how to play a note, and specifically how to play a note in relationship to other quartet members.’

Her *string quartet (two blooms)* is all about exploring the relationship between tones, starting off with ‘very high, very tight ratios’ where one person is playing at, say, 225 hertz and another at 224 hertz. For most listeners, this difference would be imperceptible in isolation, but in relation to each other the ‘wave cancellations and reinforcements’ cause the tone ‘to oscillate or sort of beat at the frequency of the difference between the two’. After a couple of minutes, when the interval finally expands ever so slightly, the effect is dramatic.

Collaborating with Lamb has led the group to develop a wholly different way of speaking and thinking about music. ‘We collectively have a language for talking about intonation that is quite objective, I would say, even though the physical reality of the sensation of these tones is highly, highly subjective.’ Audiences experience the music differently, as well. ‘I get interesting comments after these concerts where half of the people that talk to us will say it was really relaxing, and others will say it was incredibly tense.’ Sandwiched between the Lamb concert in the morning and Lachenmann concert in the evening will be an afternoon performance featuring quartets by Hans Abrahamsen (No. 4) and Wolfgang Rihm (No. 3), works that are already ‘modernist classics’, Campbell says. These arduous, three-concert marathons, which have characterised JACK’s annual Wigmore appearances since 2023, make for a long day, but the group loves a challenge. ‘There’s a real, almost sick satisfaction we get out of [...] just doing things that maybe at the surface level are so intensely brutal on us that it becomes a little weird, like, “Can we get through it?”’

> ‘We take for granted that a C is a C, but there's an infinite number of pitches’

It’s another way the group is unique. ‘I don’t think JACK has the singular solution for how to play complex music together. We just have our way of doing it, which we’ve arrived at it from years and years of rehearsing and putting the time in. But I really think anyone could do this. [...] It’s a choice of which skills or modes of expression you’re curious about and want to cultivate.’

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SATURDAY 07 FEBRUARY 2026,
11.30AM, 3.00PM & 7.30PM

Time to look up

BY HELEN HAWKINS

They are a fixture in opera houses worldwide, and also at some of the bigger song festivals, but surtitles are a novelty in most chamber music venues. Asked by sizeable Baroque orchestras who perform oratorios and operas whether Wigmore Hall could host the surtitles they were already using, the Hall’s Director, John Gilhooly, began to think seriously about setting up a system to make this happen, especially as songs are not quite as popular with audiences as pianos and string quartets. Ideally the surtitles will be up and running for the Hall’s 125th Anniversary in May.

In charge of this initiative is Anthony Chater, who is pleased to report that a grant has already allowed the purchase of the ‘projectors’ such a system requires. These are not the noisy whirring gadgets of old used for cinema films and home movies. The audience will be unaware of them as they will be out of sight in boxes, controlled by an operator sitting with a large tablet in the Box Office area. And the texts of the songs will be projected directly onto the curved wall at the back of the stage.

Now Chater has to build a team of operators. There could be, he estimates, some 200 concerts a year that require surtitles, in a wide range of languages. The translations of sung texts in all recitals are currently printed on handout sheets (these will probably stay as an item given to the audience), so transferring the texts into a new system will be relatively straightforward. What won’t be so simple are the ways these texts are displayed.

‘I don’t want audiences to get seasick reading fast-moving text,’ Chater says. That means gauging the delivery of each item to suit the pace of the performer’s delivery. The text of a slow song could be projected whole verses at a time, though there might be an advantage in handling very fast-moving songs the same way, so what the audience sees isn’t a flurry of words whizzing past. In all that Chater is preparing he is looking for the surtitles to be ‘helpful but not obtrusive’.

The road testing of the system is due to take place in the new year, over a period of three months. The operators of the projections will have to be conversant both with the software they are using and the song repertoire it is projecting. They will also have to attend rehearsals, to gauge the performer’s approach to tempi, not just the actual recital. Click once too often and the text will leap ahead. (*Da capos* will be ignored, as they are in most opera house systems.) It’s the digital era’s equivalent of being a pianist’s page-turner, ‘with the same degree of terror’, Chater admits. In addition, he wants the Hall’s system to be frontloaded with the texts of all the key works in the chamber repertoire.

He says in all he decides he will be guided by the audience and won’t be imposing anything on them if they prove resistant, but he sincerely hopes they will give the system their blessing. ‘It’s a new way of looking at things,’ he notes. ‘Not spending a concert looking down at the sheets of lyrics in your lap and being free to look up at the performers.’

An inspiring space for all-comers

BY HELEN HAWKINS

The David Wolf Kaye Room is a tribute to the philanthropy of a remarkable man

There is a bench in the grounds of Chiswick House in west London that bears a tribute to David Wolf Kaye written by his widow, Louise, one of Wigmore Hall's major donors. 'Philanthropist, mentor, travel photographer, cricket fan, music lover. He was modest, wise, kind and witty.'

This quiet, astute man has now had his name given to the downstairs social area, that hub in the Hall's basement that is home to all manner of activities designed to foster a love of music in people with no easy access to it. The Room hosts events and workshops that cater to everybody from the toddlers at its Chamber Tots sessions to those living with dementia, for whom Music for Life runs regular workshops, with inspiring results. Anything that will get visitors involved with music making at all levels, and a chance to make new friends along the way.

David's charitable giving was in the process of evolving when he was taken ill on holiday in Vermont in 2019; he died six weeks later, of complications stemming from his Parkinson's, which he suffered from for 15 years. But fortuitously he had recently talked to Louise about his desire to rewrite his will to include donations to specific charities. His work had been running a metal distribution company in Canada, later a private equity firm in the UK. All his sponsorships were related to education work, whether training and mentoring budding entrepreneurs, photographers or cricketers. But at the top of his list, the only specific charity he named, was Wigmore Hall.

Neither David nor Louise had any extensive musical training though both had grown up in households where they were exposed to music and taken to concerts and operas. They discovered both of them had learned classical guitar in their youth but had given it up by the time they were 16. 'We both knew we would never be good enough to satisfy ourselves, let alone anyone else.' Their interest in classical music had led them to attend concerts regularly, at one of which they met.

They went on to attend many more, 'literally hundreds' of them at Wigmore Hall. Louise is a passionate champion of chamber music, whereas David had favoured big orchestral



Chamber Tots © James Berry

pieces; she duly introduced to him the works she loved, starting on their first date, when she played him a recording of the Brahms cello sonatas. Both became friends of many musicians and audience members during their 38-year marriage. Louise's continuing sponsorships include the Kaye Music Trust, a charity which has purchased top-of-the-range instruments now on long-term loan to world-class string players.

Creating the David Wolf Kaye Room is the most fitting of memorials to her much missed husband, Louise believes, a permanent marker of his generosity and philanthropy. She was thrilled when Wigmore Hall's Director, John Gilhooly, suggested naming the room in David's honour. She had taken their grandchildren to Chamber Tots events there; now she looks forward to seeing many more people benefit from the Room's inspiring activities.

Membership Events

WED 11 MAR 2026

Backstage Tour of Wigmore Hall: 10.30am, 11.15am, 12 noon, 12.45pm

See Wigmore Hall from a new perspective and delve into its rich history on this exclusive backstage tour. You will have the opportunity to take to the stage in the footsteps of artists past and present, as well as discover what it takes to live-stream a concert and gain insight into the day-to-day operations of this busy building.

Tours will be given in small groups and are expected to last approximately 45 minutes.

£15



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Further spring events will be announced soon. Please keep an eye on your emails for updates.

How to book
By phone:
Call 020 7258 8230
(Monday-Friday 10.00am-5.30pm)

Online:
Visit wigmore-hall.org.uk/membership-events
(You will need to sign in to your online account or set up an account to book).

Join & Support Membership

Wigmore Hall News

Sam Rigby: New Head of Development

We are very pleased to welcome a new Head of Development, who will manage our Fundraising and Marketing Departments from October 2025. Many of you may know that Marie-Hélène Osterweil is retiring in July 2026 after an astonishing 25 years of service. Sam Rigby joins Wigmore Hall from the National Theatre, where he has been a Major Gifts Fundraiser since 2022. In this role, he has worked with many of the organisation's leading supporters as part of its £125 million fundraising campaign Stories Start Here. Prior to that, he was Managing Director of Schott Music, London, with responsibility for promoting the publisher's catalogue of 20th-century and contemporary composers. From 2003 until 2013, Sam worked for the Artist Management Agency Intermusica, becoming Associate Director. Sam has a degree in History from University College London and an MBA from Lancaster University Management School. He lives in London with his wife and daughter.



Sam Rigby

Wigmore Medal

HRH the Duke of Kent was presented with the Wigmore Medal by mezzo-soprano Dame Janet Baker CH in Anja Mittermüller's recital (with Richard Fu) on 17 October. This was in recognition of the Duke's huge contribution to the musical life of the nation, and particularly his work as a Royal Patron. He has been a steadfast member at the Hall over many decades. This royal presentation marked his 90th birthday celebration.

Marylebone Christmas Lights

Marylebone Village's annual Christmas Light switch-on will take place on 12 November. At the Hall, our Christmas programme features performances from Vox Luminis, Christiane Karg and Siglo de Oro.

Full details via the QR code.

DIRECTOR

JOHN GILHOOLY, CBE, OSI, HONFRAM, HONRCM, HON FGS, HONFRIAM

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FUNDRAISING REGULATOR