

COMPOSERS & POETS FORUM – ‘A LEEDS SONGBOOK’
LEEDS SONG FESTIVAL, SATURDAY 11 APRIL – SATURDAY 18 APRIL 2026

Leeds Song (formerly Leeds Lieder) is delighted to announce its 2026 Composers & Poets Forum as part of its 2026 Festival (Saturday 11 April - Saturday 18 April 2026). The purpose of the project is to provide an opportunity for composers from the HE sector to collaborate with Yorkshire-based poets and students of the visual arts in the creation of new songs and works of art to be workshopped, publicly performed and presented in a Showcase and Exhibition during the Festival.

Leeds Song has an excellent track record for supporting new music and in recent years has commissioned major cycles from Helen Grime, Errollyn Wallen, Hannah Kendall, Daniel Kidane, Judith Bingham, Mark Simpson, Tansy Davies and Cheryl Frances-Hoad amongst others.

This year, we will build on the work produced as part of the project for the last 3 years and continue with the creation of ‘A Leeds Songbook’; stories about the people of Leeds, told by poets of Leeds, set to music by outstanding composers and performed by award-winning young singers and pianists taking part in our Young Artists Programme. Some further information about the project in previous years can be found in media articles via the following links:

Radio 3 Music Matters – Leeds Songbook interviews: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001ldq>

Classical Music Magazine – Leeds Songbook feature:
<https://www.classical-music.uk/features/article/the-leeds-songbook-how-leeds-lieder-is-creating-a-snapshot-of-the-city>

The Guardian – <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2023/jun/15/leeds-lieder-festival-review-from-inner-city-to-international-world-class-music-making>

The programme from last year’s showcase with information about the composers, poets and new songs composed can be viewed on our website here:

chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.leedssong.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/LLF25_Proof2-CP-9th.pdf

The 2025 performance showcase of the new songs can be viewed on our website here:
<https://youtu.be/k6yWR3uM53k>

For the first time, in 2026 we will also add a visual component to the project and will invite art students to create a piece of visual art to represent/reflect the themes/subject of each of the new songs created which will be presented in an exhibition at Leeds City Museum to accompany the showcase of the new songs at Brodrick Hall during our 2026 Festival. This forms part of *Music Leeds Us: Celebrating 60 Years of Music in Leeds*, a special exhibition at Leeds City Museum (10 October 2025 – 28 June 2026), marking six decades of Leeds Conservatoire, one of our key partners.

This is a collaborative project with poets, composers and artists working in groups of 3 representing the same subject and its themes in poetry, song and visual art. It is our intention that the process will be a communal one, with the poet, composer and artist of each group communicating, liaising and exchanging ideas with one-another with regards their creative representation of the subject.

The project will take place over a number of sessions as follows and participants should be fully available for these dates:

Saturday 22 November 2025 - Preliminary Meeting for Composers and Poets (School of Music, University of Leeds)

The formation of composer/poet partnerships will take place at a preliminary meeting in Leeds where all parties will be asked to introduce their work briefly: poets by reading aloud, composers by playing recordings. Details of the song-writing brief will be given and discussed. After this, everyone is free to mingle over a light lunch after which composer/poet pairings will be decided. **(Visual Artists will not attend this session).**

Visual artists will recruited during October/November and will be allocated to the composer/poet pairings by the **end of November**. An online group introductory meeting will be organised with artist participants during **late November/early December 2025 to be confirmed**. Additionally, the individual groups of 3 allocated composer/poet/artist participants will be encouraged to discuss their ideas/subject for the new song/artwork at a mutually convenient time **during December** (these meetings could take place online).

Tuesday 14 April and Wednesday 15 April 2026

There will be all-day workshop sessions during the Festival week and a showcase performance given by singer/pianist participants of the Young Artists Programme. These are group working sessions led and facilitated by the project Convenors during which each composer/poet/artist would have the opportunity to hear their new song performed by the Young Artists, and for the artist to present their artwork, with some rehearsal of the music and discussion of the subject, text and artwork. We encourage all project participants to attend all sessions where possible to allow for open group discussion about each of the works produced.

Participants are also invited to attend a Festival recital on the evening of 14 April showcasing a première performance of a new work by project leader, Martin Iddon.

A provisional draft outline schedule of the workshop sessions is as follows (please note this may be subject to amendment):

Tuesday 14 April 2026

10.30am - 5.30pm: Workshop sessions (including a break for lunch)
(Venue: Mantle Studio, Howard Opera Centre, Leeds)

9pm: Late Night Recital: *Dunwich*: An intermedia première by Martin Iddon
(Venue: The Attic, Sheaf Street, Leeds)

As part of the project, we invite all participants of the Composers & Poets Forum to attend the world première performance of Martin Iddon's new work *Dunwich*. Tickets for participants are complimentary. This is an opportunity for participants to see a performance of a brand new extended composition for voice, piano, video and fixed media by one of our project leaders, Martin Iddon. Below is some further information about the piece.

Commissioned for the 2026 Festival, *Dunwich* is a new work by British composer and Leeds Professor Martin Iddon, created in collaboration with pianist Rei Nakamura, speaker Gillian Jane Lees, and videographer Adam York Gregory. Described as a "song cycle without a singer," it is written for speaker, piano, video, and fixed media, and takes its name from Dunwich — the once-thriving port now lost to the sea and often called "Britain's Atlantis." Steeped in ghost stories and legend, the piece draws on this rich history of disappearance and

memory. We're proud to present this innovative commission as part of our commitment to expanding the living tradition of song.

Wednesday 15 April 2026

10am - 1.30pm Workshop sessions

(Venue: Mantle Studio, Howard Opera Centre, Leeds)

1.30pm - 3.30pm Lunch and move to Leeds City Museum and set-up art exhibition

(Venue: Brodrick Hall, Leeds City Museum)

3.30pm - 4pm Round-up/discussion of concert logistics/performance walk-through

(Venue: Brodrick Hall, Leeds City Museum)

Showcase performance and exhibition 5pm - 7pm

(Venue: Brodrick Hall, Leeds City Museum)

Project Brief

The basic brief is as follows:

- Each composer/poet duo is to create an original song for solo voice and piano with a duration of 3-4 minutes maximum.
- Amplification is not permitted.
- Piano preparation is not permitted, though string muting by hand is acceptable.
- Composers can be under- or postgraduate students.
- Each Artist is to create a piece of visual art to accompany/represent the themes/subject of the new song. Artworks can be produced in any standard chosen visual media (to include, but not exclusively: painting, drawing, sculpture, textile, collage, printing, photography, videography, digital, mixed media etc) which can be easily transported by the artist and displayed simply in a standard exhibition set-up (any specific technical requirements (e.g projectors, screens etc for digital media to be provided by the artist). Maximum size to be confirmed but c. 1m x 1m.
- The subject brief is detailed below.
- Leeds Song's Poets Convenor, Hannah Stone, will recruit poets and Martin Iddon, Professor of Music and Aesthetics (University of Leeds) will act as Composers Convenor.
- For reasons of programming, we must impose a limit of 10 composer/poet/visual artist trios. Voice-types/vocal range of performers may be designated for compositions, depending on the Young Artist performers selected.
- Poets to write a poem on the subject of their choice to (a Leeds person), to be completed and shared with composer and artist by **Friday 19 December 2025**.
- Visual artist to plan and draft a proposal of what their artwork will be (in the form of basic sketches, plans and/or written proposal) reflecting the subject/themes of the poem and planned song, to be completed and shared with composer and poet by **Friday 16 January 2026**.
- A working draft of all songs must be completed and submitted to Leeds Lieder by **Friday 20 February 2026** at the latest in order that scores may be distributed to the Young Artists and music prepared by them in advance of the workshop days on 14 and 15 April.
- Visual artists to complete artwork and submit photograph of their work (and share this with composer and poet) by **Friday 13 March 2026**. This photo to be included in the exhibition/showcase performance digital programme.

Subject Brief

The subject of the brief for creating a song for 'A Leeds Songbook', and an accompanying artwork, is as follows:

We would like poets to write about real-life living Leeds people and their stories. The premise of this idea, and one which is at the centre of our work to make the art form more widely accessible, is that by representing Leeds people in song and visual art, and engaging with them through their stories, we would attempt to broaden the usual reach of our output and that of the art-song genre.

The poems do not need to be about a well-known figure, quite the reverse in fact - the stories may be ordinary or extraordinary of any Leeds person.

Ideally poets would engage directly with the individuals whose stories they are telling. It would be wonderful to be able to invite these people along to the April workshops, and to the showcase performance and exhibition so that they hear and see their stories come to life. This is an exciting opportunity for you to champion the art-form that you love and for us to introduce it to new audiences and communities.