



Claire Lees Jong Sun Woo

Friday 17 April 2026

1:00PM

Howard Assembly Room

www.leadssong.com



Leeds
Song

Music gives a soul to the Universe

Leeds Song Festival 2026

It is with great joy and delight that I welcome you to the Leeds Song Festival 2026, a week-long celebration of one of the most intimate, expressive, and endlessly fascinating forms of music: the art song. Across seven days and a variety of venues throughout Leeds, we have gathered some of the brightest stars, most compelling voices, and most visionary creators in the world of song to present a programme as diverse and vibrant as the city itself.

Buoyed by the extraordinary success of last year's Festival – which broke all previous box office records by 30% – we return in 2026 with renewed energy, ambition and gratitude. This momentum would not be possible without the loyal and generous support of our Friends, audiences, donors, and those trusts and foundations whose belief in our mission underpins everything we do. My heartfelt thanks to each of you.

Faced with an embarrassment of riches, it feels almost invidious to pick out highlights, but as you turn the pages ahead you'll notice programmes from internationally acclaimed singers Marianne Crebassa, Katharina Konradi, Axelle Fanyo, and Fleur Barron, who bring fresh energy to Leeds. British stars Dame Sarah Connolly, Louise Alder, Huw Montague Rendall and Roderick Williams return, delivering performances that showcase the very best of British artistry. The opening and closing evening recitals are especially packed with joyous fare.

Our commitment to supporting the finest rising stars includes recitals by Austrian mezzo-soprano Patricia Nolz, our first lute-accompanied recital with Nardus Williams (partnered by early music royalty Elizabeth Kenny), and a performance from recent Deutsche Grammophon signing Theodore Platt. Leeds Song Young Artist alumni are also represented: Héloïse Werner's *Knight's Dream* will be performed by Helen Charlston and Sholto Kynoch, while Keval Shah, Felix Gygli and Jong Sun Woo all make welcome returns.

Festival favourites Roderick Williams and Iain Burnside explore new compositions inspired by Japanese haiku from leading American composer Libby Larsen, and we are proud to present a Leeds Song commission: *Dunwich*: an intermedia première by Martin Iddon blending spoken word, piano and video in a powerful meditation on history and memory.

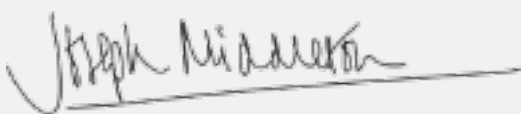
This year's masterclasses feature renowned artists including Bernarda Fink, Joan Rodgers CBE, Mark Padmore and Roger Vignoles, whose guidance offers invaluable insight into the art of interpretation.

Our community offering, *Bring and Sing!*, returns with Gareth Malone, inviting all to take part in a joyous performance of Haydn's *Nelson Mass*. Meanwhile, the Composers & Poets Forum and the Art Song Challenge winner, Gerda Iguchi, broaden the boundaries of the genre with bold, interdisciplinary work.

The festival concludes with a specially curated recital by Dame Sarah Connolly, joined by prize winners from the Northern Aldborough New Voices Singing Competition – a fitting finale, celebrating both excellence and the future of song.

Leeds Song Festival is not just a series of concerts; it is a vibrant gathering of artists, audiences, and ideas, a space where music's power to connect, move, and transform is celebrated in all its richness. Whether you are a lifelong devotee of art song or discovering it anew, we invite you to join us for what promises to be an unforgettable festival.

Thank you for being part of this journey.



Programme

Claire Lees, Soprano
Jong Sun Woo, Piano

Gabriel Fauré 1845-1924

Clair de lune
Mandoline
En sourdine

Richard Strauss 1864-1949

Kornblumen
Epheu
Ich wollt' ein Sträusslein binden
Die Nacht

Benjamin Britten 1913-1976

On This Island

Let the florid music praise
Now the leaves are falling fast
Seascape
Nocturne
As it is, plenty

William Walton 1902-1983

Three Sitwell Songs

Daphne
Through gilded trellises
Old Sir Faulk

Texts and Translations

Gabriel Fauré 1845-1924

Texts by Paul Verlaine 1844-1896

Clair de lune

Votre âme est un paysage choisi
Que vont charmant masques et bergamasques
Jouant du luth et dansant et quasi
Tristes sous leurs déguisements fantasques.
Tout en chantant sur le mode mineur
L'amour vainqueur et la vie opportune,
Ils n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur
Et leur chanson se mêle au clair de lune,
Au calme clair de lune triste et beau,
Qui fait rêver les oiseaux dans les arbres
Et sangloter d'extase les jets d'eau,
Les grands jets d'eau sveltes parmi les marbres.

Mandoline

Les donneurs de sérénades
Et les belles écouteuses
Échangent des propos fades
Sous les ramures chanteuses.
C'est Tircis et c'est Aminte,
Et c'est l'éternel Clitandre,
Et c'est Damis qui pour mainte
Cruelle fit maint vers tendre.
Leurs courtes vestes de soie,
Leurs longues robes à queues,
Leur élégance, leur joie
Et leurs molles ombres bleues,
Tourbillonnent dans l'extase
D'une lune rose et grise,
Et la mandoline jase
Parmi les frissons de brise.

En sourdine

Calmes dans le demi-jour
Que les branches hautes font,
Pénétrons bien notre amour
De ce silence profond.
Mêlons nos âmes, nos coeurs
Et nos sens extasiés,
Parmi les vagues langoureux
Des pins et des arbusiers.
Ferme tes yeux à demi,
Croise tes bras sur ton sein,
Et de ton coeur endormi
Chasse à jamais tout dessein.
Laissons-nous persuader
Au souffle berceur et doux
Qui vient, à tes pieds, rider
Les ondes des gazons roux.
Et quand, solennel, le soir
Des chênes noirs tombera
Voix de notre désespoir,
Le rossignol chantera.

The light of the moon

Your soul is a chosen landscape
Full of masquers and bergamasquers
Playing lutes and dancing and almost
Sad beneath their fantastic disguises.
Singing in a minor key
Of victorious love and life's opportunities,
They do not seem to believe in their fortune,
And their song mingles with the light of the moon,
With the calm light of the moon, sad and beautiful,
Which makes the birds dream in the trees,
And the fountains sob in ecstasy,
Throw tall, svelte jets amid marble statues.

Mandoline

The serenaders
And the lovely women who listen to them
Exchange sweet nothings
Under the singing branches.
There are Thyrsis and Amyntas
And there's eternal Clytander,
And there's Damis who, for many a
Cruel woman, wrote many a tender verse.
Their short silk doublets,
Their long gowns with trains,
Their elegance, their joy
And their soft blue shadows,
Whirl around in the ecstasy
Of a pink and grey moon,
And the mandolin prattles
In the trembling breeze.

Muted

Quietly in this twilight
Which the lofty branches create,
Let us fill our love
With this profound silence.
Let our souls entwine, and our hearts
And our ecstasies,
Midst the lazy languor
Of the pines and the arbutus.
Half-close your eyes,
Cross your arms on your breast,
And from your slumbering heart
Chase away all intent for ever.
Let us succumb to
The soothing, gentle breeze
Which wafts by, rippling at your feet
The waves of russet grass.
And when, solemnly, evening falls
From the black oaks,
The voice of our despair
The nightingale will sing.

Richard Strauss 1864-1949

Texts by Felix Ludwig Julius Dahn 1834-1912

Kornblumen

Kornblumen nenn' ich die Gestalten,
Die milden, mit den blauen Augen,
Die, anspruchslos, in stillem Walten,
Den Thau des Friedens, den sie saugen
Aus ihren eignen klaren Seelen,
Mitteilen allem, dem sie nah'n,
Bewußtlos der Gefühlsjuwelen,
Die sie von Himmelshand empfahn:
Dir wird so wohl in ihrer Nähe,
Als gingst Du durch ein Saatgefilde,
Durch das der Hauch des Abends wehe
Voll frommen Friedens und voll Milde.

Efeu

Aber Efeu nenn' ich jene
Mädchen, mit den sanften Worten,
Mit dem Haar, dem schlichten, hellen,
Um den leis gewölbten Brauen,
Mit den braunen, seelenvollen
Rehenaugen, die in Thränen
Steh'n so oft, in ihren Thränen
Grade sind unwiderstehlich;
Ohne Kraft und Selbstgefühl,
Schmucklos, mit verborgner Blüthe,
Doch mit unerschöpflich tiefer,
Treuer, inniger Empfindung
Können sie mit eigner Triebkraft
Nie sich heben aus den Wurzeln,
Sind geboren, sich zu ranken
Liebend um ein ander Leben:—
An der ersten Liebumrankung
Hängt ihr ganzes Lebensschicksal,
Denn sie zählen zu den seltnen
Blumen, die nur einmal blühen.

Ich wollt ein Sträußlein binden

Ich wollt ein Sträußlein binden,
Da kam die dunkle Nacht,
Kein Blümlein war zu finden,
Sonst hätt' ich dir's gebracht.

Da flossen von den Wangen
Mir Tränen in den Klee,
Ein Blümlein aufgegangen
Ich nun im Garten seh.

Das wollte ich dir brechen
Wohl in dem dunklen Klee,
Da fing es an zu sprechen:
"Ach, tue mir nicht weh!

...

Cornflowers

Cornflowers are what I call those girls,
Those gentle ones, with eyes of blue,
Who waiting patiently, undemanding,
Share with everyone who comes near them
The dew of peace, which they draw
From their own pure souls,
Unaware of the jewels of feeling
Which they receive as a gift from heaven;
You feel so at ease in their presence
As if you were walking through a cornfield
Which wafts in the evening breeze
Full of devout peace and bliss.

Ivy

But Ivy is what I call
Those girls with gentle words,
With silky, pale coloured hair
Around their softly arched eyebrows,
With brown, soulful
Doe eyes, which so often shed tears,
But precisely because of their tears
Are irresistible;
Without strength or self-esteem.
Without adornment, with hidden flowers.
But with unfathomably deep,
Faithful, ardent feelings,
They can never through their own strength
Raise themselves from their roots,
But are born to entwine themselves
Lovingly around another life —
Their whole life depends upon
Their first loving entwinement,
Because they belong to the rare
Flowers which blossom only once.

I meant to make you a posy

I meant to make you a posy,
But dark night then came,
There were no flowers to be found,
Or I'd have brought you some.

Tears then flowed down my cheeks
Into the clover,
And now I saw a flower
That had sprung up in the garden.

I meant to pick it for you
There in the dark clover,
When it started to speak:
'Ah, do no hurt me!

...

...

"Sei freundlich im Herzen,
Betracht dein eigen Leid,
Und lasse mich in Schmerzen
Nicht sterben vor der Zeit!"

Und hätt's nicht so gesprochen,
Im Garten ganz allein,
So hätt' ich dir's gebrochen,
Nun aber darf's nicht sein.

Mein Schatz ist ausgeblieben,
Ich bin so ganz allein.
Im Lieben wohnt Betrübten,
Und kann nicht anders sein.

Die Nacht

Aus dem Walde tritt die Nacht,
Aus den Bäumen schleicht sie leise,
Schaut sich um in weitem Kreise,
Nun gib Acht!

Alle Lichter dieser Welt,
Alle Blumen, alle Farben
Löscht sie aus und stiehlt die Garben
Weg vom Feld.

Alles nimmt sie, was nur hold,
Nimmt das Silber weg des Stroms
Nimmt vom Kupferdach des Doms
Weg das Gold.

Ausgeplündert steht der Strauch:
Rücke näher, Seel' an Seele,
O die Nacht, mir bangt, sie stehle
Dich mir auch.

Benjamin Britten 1913-1976

Texts by W. H. Auden 1907-1973

Let the florid music praise
Now the leaves are falling fast
Seascape
Nocturne
As it is, plenty

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William Walton 1902-1983

Texts by Dame Edith Sitwell 1887-1964

Daphne
Through gilded trellises
Old Sir Faulk

Due to copyright, we are unable to reproduce these texts in a published programme.

...

Be kind in your heart,
Consider you own suffering,
And do not make me die
In torment before my time!

And had it not spoken these words,
All alone in the garden,
I'd have picked it for you,
But now that cannot be.

My sweetheart stayed away,
I am utterly alone.
Sadness dwells in loving,
And cannot be otherwise.

Night

Night steps from the woods,
Slips softly from the trees,
Gazes about her in a wide arc,
Now beware!

All the lights of this world,
All the flowers, all the colours
She extinguishes and steals the sheaves
From the field.

She takes all that is fair,
Takes the silver from the stream,
Takes from the cathedral's copper roof
The gold.

The bush stands plundered:
Draw closer, soul to soul,
Ah the night, I fear, will steal
You too from me.

Claire Lees

Soprano

In 2025/2026 British Soprano Claire Lees returns to Garsington Opera for Minerva/Amore in *Il ritorno d'Ulisse*, conducted by Laurence Cummings. She will also reprise the role of Susanna in *Le Nozze di Figaro* for Opera North.

Highlights of the 2024/2025 included Pamina in *The Magic Flute* for Opera North, Mozart's C Minor Mass with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and Despina in *Così fan tutte* for the Nevill Holt Festival- for which she received widespread critical acclaim- 'She is the star of the evening.... She sparkles on the stage' (Seen & Heard International).

Her roles for Garsington Opera include Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro*, La Musica in *Orfeo* and Naiad in *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Elsewhere highlights include Lisette in *La rondine* (Opera North), Barbarina in *Le nozze di Figaro* and Oscar in *Un ballo in maschera* (Opera Holland Park), Adina in *L'elisir d'amore* (Iford Opera) and Venus in *Venus and Adonis* (Blackheath Opera). In 2023 she returned to Glyndebourne Festival Opera to cover the title role in *Semele*.

Claire is a graduate of both the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. She is a Samling Artist, winner of the 2019 Wil Keune Mozart Prize at the Veronica Dunne International Singing Competition and a recipient of an Opera Awards Foundation bursary. In 2023 she won the Leonard Ingram award at Garsington Opera for her performance as Naiad in *Ariadne auf Naxos*.



Jong Sun Woo

Piano

Described as “poetic and characterful” (*The Guardian*), Jong Sun Woo recently won the Pianist Prize at the Wigmore Hall/Bollinger International Song Competition 2024 and, together with her duo partner Giacomo Schmidt, First Prize at the Wolf International Art Song Competition 2024 in Stuttgart, as well as Second Prize and the Audience Prize at the Schubert Lied Duo Competition 2023 in Dortmund.

Jong Sun also received the Gerald Moore Award from the Royal Philharmonic Society in 2022 and the Pianist Prize at the Maureen Lehane Vocal Awards in 2021.

She has participated in many young artist programmes, including the Heidelberger Frühling Lied Akademie (2021–22), Wigmore French Song (2023–24) and Carnegie Hall SongStudio (2025). She is also a Leeds Song Young Artist, Samling, Britten-Pears and CMF Artist.

Jong Sun began studying with Patsy Toh at the Junior Royal Academy of Music and the Purcell School. After completing her undergraduate studies with First Class Honours at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, she won a full scholarship to Bard College, New York, where she studied with the late Peter Serkin. She later returned to London to complete her Masters and Artist Diploma in Piano Accompaniment at the Guildhall School, studying with Eugene Asti, Pamela Lidiard, Carole Presland and Dr Bretton Brown. She graduated with distinction and was awarded the Concert Recital Diploma for her outstanding final recital. She is currently mentored by Sebastian Wybrew.



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The Friends of Leeds Song are the heartbeat of our community

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Leeds Song,
Yorkshire Dance Offices,
3 St. Peter's Buildings, St. Peter's Square,
Leeds, LS9 8AH

0113 243 4438 | info@leedssong.com | www.leedssong.com
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