



Gerda Iguchi

Wesendonck Synthetic

Friday 17 April 2026

10:00PM

HARBAR

www.leadssong.com



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.

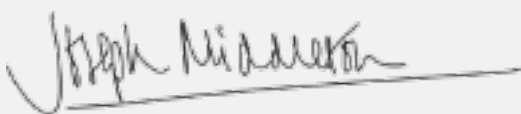
This year's masterclasses feature renowned artists including Bernarda Fink, Joan Rodgers CBE, Mark Padmore and Roger Vignoles, whose guidance offers invaluable insight into the art of interpretation.

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

WESENDONCK SYNTHETIC Wagner in Metamorphosis

Electro pulses meet Romantic passion in this bold reimagining of Wagner. Leeds Song's late night immersive gig uses ambient textures to transform the Wesendonck Songs into a soundscape that feels at once intimate and electrifying.

Born from a forbidden love, Richard Wagner's setting of poems by his muse Mathilde Wesendonck has captivated audiences since 1857. This iconic cycle of five songs for female voice and piano remains a cornerstone of the Romantic art song repertoire — but here, it is reborn.

German-Japanese opera singer Marie Gerhardine Iguchi rediscovered these songs through a dual cultural lens, embracing both tradition and innovation. Seeing herself as a bridge between worlds, she dives deep into the Wesendonck cycle, infusing it with electronic energy and contemporary atmosphere.

The result is a vivid collision of past and future — a luminous, genre-blurring experience that redefines what Wagner can be.

This is Wagner as you've never heard it before.

Marie Gerhardine (Gerda) Iguchi is a Japanese-German mezzo-soprano studying with Professor Christian Elsner at the Institute of Music Theatre at the Hochschule für Musik Karlsruhe. Already during her bachelor's studies she began working in professional opera productions as a guest chorister, including with the State Opera of Stuttgart, and was later engaged to sing the title role in *Rinaldo* — a reduced adaptation of Handel's *Rinaldo* — at the Händel Festival of the Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe.

Her repertoire includes roles from the bel canto tradition such as *Romeo* (*I Capuleti e i Montecchi*) by Bellini and *Rosina* (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) by Rossini. Alongside her operatic work, Gerda has explored a wide range of genres and artistic platforms. She produced her own reimagined version of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, in which she not only performed all four principal roles herself but also transcribed and integrated songs by the avant-garde heavy-metal band IGORRR. This and similar interdisciplinary projects attracted the band's attention, leading to her engagement as their new female lead singer for their 2026 international tour.

Beyond her love of opera and heavy music, Iguchi is an avid interpreter of German art song and an explorer of electronic ambient sound worlds. In combining these interests, she won the inaugural ART SONG CHALLENGE led by LiedBasel with her interpretation of Wagner's "Träume", which resulted in multiple concert engagements and the release of her debut EP, *Wesendonck Synthetisch*.

Texts and Translations

Richard Wagner 1818-1883

Texts by Mathilde Wesendonck (1828-1902)

Wesendonck Lieder

Der Engel

In der Kindheit frühen Tagen
Hört ich oft von Engeln sagen,
Die des Himmels hehre Wonne
Tauschen mit der Erdensonne,

Daß, wo bang ein Herz in Sorgen
Schmachtet vor der Welt verborgen,
Daß, wo still es will verbluten,
Und vergehn in Tränenfluten,

Daß, wo brünstig sein Gebet
Einzig um Erlösung fleht,
Da der Engel niederschwebt,
Und es sanft gen Himmel hebt.

Ja, es stieg auch mir ein Engel nieder,
Und auf leuchtendem Gefieder
Führt er, ferne jedem Schmerz,
Meinen Geist nun himmelwärts!

Stehe still!

Sausendes, brausendes Rad der Zeit,
Messer du der Ewigkeit;
Leuchtende Sphären im weiten All,
Die ihr umringt der Weltenball;
Urewige Schöpfung, halte doch ein,
Genug des Werdens, laß mich sein!

Halte an dich, zeugende Kraft,
Urgedanke, der ewig schafft!
Hemmet den Atem, stillt den Drang,
Schweigt nur eine Sekunde lang!
Schwellende Pulse, fesselt den Schlag;
Ende, des Wollens ew'ger Tag!

Daß in selig süßem Vergessen
Ich mög' alle Wonne ermessen!
Wenn Aug' in Auge wonnig trinken,
Seele ganz in Seele versinken;
Wesen in Wesen sich wiederfindet,
Und alles Hoffens Ende sich kündigt,
Die Lippe verstummt in staunendem Schweigen,
Keinen Wunsch mehr will das Innre zeugen:
Erkennt der Mensch des Ew'gen Spur,
Und löst dein Rätsel, heil'ge Natur!

Im Treibhaus

Hochgewölbte Blätterkronen,
Baldachine von Smaragd,
Kinder ihr aus fernen Zonen,
Saget mir, warum ihr klagt?

...

The Angel

In my early childhood
I used to hear tales of angels
who exchanged the bliss of heaven
for the sunshine of earth.

I heard that when a sorrowful heart
hides its grief from the world,
when it bleeds in silence and
dissolves in tears,

and when it can merely pray
fervently for deliverance,
then an angel flies down
and carries it gently up to heaven.

To me too an angel has come down
and on its shining wings
it carries my spirit away from all pain,
towards heaven!

Stand Still!

Rushing, roaring wheel of time,
you measure of eternity,
you shining spheres in the vast firmament,
you that encircle our earthly sphere:
eternal creation, stop!
Enough of becoming: let me be!

Cease, generative force,
primal thought that endlessly creates;
stop every breath, pacify every urge,
be still for just one second!
Swelling pulses, restrain your beating!
End, eternal day of the will!

So that in sweet forgetfulness
I may taste the fullness of joy!
When one eye gazes blissfully into another,
when one soul drowns in another;
when one being discovers itself in another
and the end of all hoping is near;
when lips are mute in silent amazement
and the soul has no further wish:
then man recognises Eternity's footprint
and solves your riddle, sacred Nature!

In the Hothouse

High-arching leafy crowns,
canopies of emerald,
you children of distant lands,
tell me, why do you lament?

...

Schweigend neiget ihr die Zweige,
Malet Zeichen in die Luft,
Und der Leiden stummer Zeuge
Steiget aufwärts, süßer Duft.

Weit in sehndem Verlangen
Breitet ihr die Arme aus
Und umschlinget wahnbefangen
Öder Leere nicht'gen Graus.

Wohl ich weiß es, arme Pflanze:
Ein Geschicke teilen wir,
Ob umstrahlt von Licht und Glanze,
Unsre Heimat is nicht hier!

Und wie froh die Sonne scheidet
Von des Tages leerem Schein,
Hüllet der, der wahrhaft leidet,
Sich in Schweigens Dunkel ein.

Stille wird's; ein säuselnd Weben
Füllet bang den dunklen Raum.
Schwere Tropfen seh' ich schweben
An der Blätter grunem Saum.

Schmerzen

Sonne, weinest jeden Abend
Dir die schönen Augen rot,
Wenn im Meeresspiegel badend
Dich erreicht der frühe Tod;

Doch erstehst in alter Pracht,
Glorie der düstren Welt,
Du am Morgen, neu erwacht,
Wie ein stolzer Siegesheld!

Ach, wie sollte ich da klagen,
Wie, mein Herz, so schwer dich sehn,
Muß die Sonne selbst verzagen,
Muß die Sonne untergehn?

Und gebietet Tod nur Leben,
Geben Schmerzen Wonnen nur:
O wie dank'ich daß gegeben
Solche Schmerzen mir Natur.

Träume

Sag', welch' wunderbare Träume
Halten meinen Sinn umfängen,
Daß sie nicht wie leere Schäume
Sind in ödes Nichts vergangen?

Träume, die in jeder Stunde,
Jedem Tage schöner blühn
Und mit ihrer Himmelskunde
Selig durchs Gemüte ziehn?

Träume, die wie hehre Strahlen
In die Seele sich versenken
Dort ein ewig Bild zu malen;
Allvergessen, Eingedenken!

Träume, wie wenn Frühlingssonne
Aus dem Schnee die Blüten küßt,
Daß zu nie geahnter Wonne
Sie der neue Tage begrüßt,

Daß sie wachsen, daß sie blühen,
Träumend spenden ihren Duft,
Sanft an deiner Brust verglühen
Und dann sinken in die Gruft.

Silently you incline your branches,
tracing signs in the air,
and a perfume rises,
mute witness to your sorrows.

You spread your arms out wide
with longing and desire,
but in your delusion you embrace
only barren emptiness, a fearful void.

How well I know it, you poor plant!
We share the same fate.
Although around us the light shines brightly,
here is not our homeland!

And just as the sun gladly departs
from the empty brightness of the day,
so he who truly suffers
will wrap himself in darkness and silence.

It grows quiet; an anxious rustling
fills the dark room.
I see heavy drops hanging
from the green edges of the leaves.

Sorrows

Sun, you weep every evening
until your lovely eyes are red,
when, immersed in the sea,
you meet an early death:

but you rise again in your former splendour,
the glory of the dark world,
freshly awakened in the morning
like a proud and conquering hero!

Ah why should I complain then,
and why should my heart be so heavy,
if the sun itself despairs,
and the sun itself must go down?

If only death gives birth to life,
and if only sorrow brings bliss,
then how thankful I am that Nature
has given me such sorrow.

Dreams

Say, what are these wondrous dreams
that hold my soul captive,
and have not, like bubbles,
disappeared into oblivion?

Dreams which in every hour
of every day bloom more beautifully
and float blissfully through my mind
like messengers from heaven?

Dreams which like glorious rays
penetrate the soul,
leaving there an eternal image:
oblivion, remembrance!

Dreams which, like the the spring sun
kissing blossoms out of the snow
and leading them to
undreamed-of bliss,

letting them grow, blossom
and dreamily cast their scent,
glow softly on your breast,
and then sink into their grave.

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The Friends of Leeds Song are the heartbeat of our community, offering generous support and valued ambassadorship throughout the year. Our Patrons and members of the Jane Anthony Circle are central to the success of Leeds Song. Your leadership and generosity make possible the extraordinary artistic quality and educational reach of our work.

The Friends of Leeds Song

The Friends of Leeds Song are the heartbeat of our community

Friends membership starts annually from £50 or monthly from £5. As acknowledgement of your support, as a Friend you will receive:

- Priority Festival booking for you and a guest
- Invitation for you and a guest to exclusive Festival events
- Quarterly Friends newsletter

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- Priority Festival booking for you and a guest
- Invitation for you and a guest to exclusive Festival events
- Quarterly Friends newsletter
- Invitation for you and a guest to an exclusive recital

Leeds Song Patrons

Patrons and members of the Jane Anthony Circle are welcomed into a closer relationship with Leeds Song

Patron membership starts annually from £500 or monthly from £50. Your generous support will be acknowledged by:

- Meet the artist at an exclusive Patrons' reception
- Post Festival party invitation
- Plus all Friends benefits

With Patron membership from £1000 or monthly from £100 (via direct debit), your support will be acknowledged by:

- Meet the artist at an exclusive Patrons' reception
- Post Festival party invitation
- Support a rising-star artist (with acknowledgement if desired)
- Plus all Friends benefits

The Jane Anthony Circle

The Jane Anthony circle offers a bespoke acknowledgement to its members.

Membership starts annually, from £2500, or monthly from £250, offering its members

- Meet the artist at an exclusive Patrons' reception
- Post Festival party invitation
- Support a headline artist/commission a new work (with acknowledgement (if desired))
- Plus all Friends benefits

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- Meet the artist at an exclusive Patrons' reception
- Post Festival party invitation
- Supporting a recital, Festival event or Leeds Song project, such as the Young Artists Programme, Composers & Poets Forum, school education project, etc.
- Post concert dinner with Leeds Song Director and headline artist
- Plus all Friends benefits

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The generous donations from the Friends contribute towards our Education programmes, Young Artist training, and mounting an annual world-class festival of song.

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