



Leeds
Song

"Leeds Song Festival ... from inner city to international, world-class music making."

The Guardian



*Music gives a soul
to the universe*

2026 Festival
Sunday 12 April

Evening Recital at 7.30pm

(Pre-concert Talk at 6.30pm)

THE VENUE, LEEDS CONSERVATOIRE



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



THE LIZ & TERRY BRAMALL
FOUNDATION

Director's Welcome

Music gives a soul to the universe

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.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joseph Middleton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Joseph Middleton
Director, Leeds Song

2026 Festival at a Glance

Saturday 11 April

1 – 2pm	Lunchtime Opening Recital: Patricia Nolz and Joseph Middleton	The Venue, LC
3 – 5.30pm	Bring and Sing! Rehearsal with Gareth Malone OBE	The Venue, LC
6pm	Bring and Sing! Concert with Gareth Malone OBE: Haydn <i>Nelson Mass</i>	The Venue, LC
6.30 – 7pm	Pre-concert Talk with Richard Stokes	HAR
7.30pm	Evening Opening Recital: Louise Alder, Huw Montague Rendall and Joseph Middleton	HAR

Sunday 12 April

10am – 12.30pm	Festival Masterclass I: Bernarda Fink	The Venue, LC
2 – 3pm	Lunchtime Recital: Nardus Williams and Elizabeth Kenny	Royal Armouries Museum
4 – 5.30pm	Young Artists Study Event with Richard Stokes	Recital Room, LC
6 – 7pm	Friends of Leeds Song Private Reception	Rooftop Bar, LC
6.30 – 7pm	Pre-concert Talk with Richard Stokes	The Venue, LC
7.30pm	Evening Recital: Marianne Crebassa and Joseph Middleton	The Venue, LC

Monday 13 April

10am – 1pm	Friends' Festival Masterclass II: Bernarda Fink	Linacre Studio, HOC
2pm – 5pm	Friends' Festival Masterclass III: Mark Padmore CBE	Linacre Studio, HOC

Tuesday 14 April

10am – 1pm	Festival Masterclass IV: Bernarda Fink	Linacre Studio, HOC
6 – 8pm	Evening Recital: Roderick Williams OBE and Iain Burnside	The Venue, LC
9pm	Late Night Recital: <i>Dunwich</i> : An intermedia première by Martin Iddon	The Attic

Wednesday 15 April

5 – 7pm	Composers & Poets Forum Showcase and Exhibition: 'A Leeds Songbook'	Brodrick Hall, Leeds City Museum
8pm	Evening Recital: Helen Charlston and Sholto Kynoch	Left Bank Leeds

Thursday 16 April

12 – 1.30pm	Young Artists Showcase	HAR
3 – 6pm	Festival Masterclass V: Joan Rodgers CBE	Linacre Studio, HOC
6.30 – 7pm	Pre-concert Talk with Dr Katy Hamilton	HAR
7.30pm	Evening Recital: Axelle Fanyo, Fleur Barron and Julius Drake	HAR
9.45 – 11pm	Late Night Lieder Lounge with Leeds Song Young Artists	HAR Bar

Friday 17 April

10am – 12.30pm	Festival Masterclass VI: Roger Vignoles	Linacre Studio, HOC
1 – 2pm	Lunchtime Recital: Felix Gygli and Jong Sun Woo	HAR
3 – 6pm	Festival Masterclass VII: Anna Tilbrook	Linacre Studio, HOC
6.30 – 7pm	Pre-concert Talk with Mark Rogers	HAR
7.30pm	Evening Recital: Katharina Konradi and Joseph Middleton	HAR
9.45 – 11pm	Late Night Recital: Gerda Iguchi: Art Song Challenge 2025	HAR Bar

Saturday 18 April

11am – 12pm	Coffee Recital: Theodore Platt and Keval Shah	The Venue, LC
2 – 3.30pm	Young Artists Finale Concert	The Venue, LC
6 – 6.30pm	Pre-concert Talk with Dr George Kennaway	Rooftop Bar, LC
7pm	Festival Closing Recital: Dame Sarah Connolly and Joseph Middleton (and Northern Aldborough New Voices Singing Competition Prize Winners)	The Venue, LC

HAR = Howard Assembly Room | LC = Leeds Conservatoire | HOC = Howard Opera Centre

All information correct at the time of publication.

Leeds Song reserves the right to change artists, programmes and events if necessary.

Box Office: 0113 223 3600 | boxoffice@operanorth.co.uk | www.leedssong.com/whats-on

Sunday 12 April 2026, 6.30pm
THE VENUE, LEEDS CONSERVATOIRE

Pre-concert Talk

with **Richard Stokes**

Richard Stokes, song pedagogue and expert linguist, takes to the stage in advance of the evening recital to present an introduction to this rich and emotionally powerful selection of French song, and to Mahler's deeply moving Kindertotenlieder cycle.



Sunday 12 April 2026, 7.30pm
THE VENUE, LEEDS CONSERVATOIRE

Evening Recital

Marianne Crebassa mezzo-soprano
Joseph Middleton piano

Mezzo-soprano Marianne Crebassa has enjoyed a spectacular rise on the international music stage with celebrated performances in opera, concert and recital the world over, and we are fortunate to welcome her in what is her first UK recital outside of London. Her recital recordings have won her a plethora of accolades, including a Gramophone Award and together with Middleton she has performed at Wigmore Hall, Berlin Philharmonie and Madrid's Teatro de la Zarzuela. Their programme for Leeds Song is a sumptuous and stirring programme of French song including works by Debussy, Mompou and Ravel, as well as Mahler's intense and poignant cycle *Kindertotenlieder* which sets Rückert's grief-stricken texts.

"[Marianne Crebassa] brought an extraordinary and riveting ability to communicate through her voice...this wasn't just a faultless performance by Crebassa – it was one which drew you in from the very first note." (Opera Today)

Claude Debussy

Trois chansons de Bilitis
La flûte de Pan
La chevelure
Le tombeau des Nāïades

Claude Debussy

La fille aux cheveux de lin (premier livre de *Préludes*)

Gustav Mahler

Kindertotenlieder
Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgeh'n
Nun she' ich wohl, warum so dunkle Flammen
Wenn dein Mütterlein tritt zur Tür herein
Oft denk' ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen
In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus!

INTERVAL

Federico Mompou

Combat del somni de Josep Janés
Fes-me la vida transparent
Ara no sé si et veig, encar
Damunt de tu només les flors
Aquesta nit un mateix vent
Jo et pressentia com la mar

Claude Debussy

Bruyères (deuxième livre de *Préludes*)

Maurice Ravel

Cinq mélodies populaires grecques
Chanson de la mariée
Là-bas vers l'église
Quel galant m'est comparable
Chanson des cueilleuses de lentisques
Tout gai!

Texts and Translations

If you are using a printed copy of this programme, please turn the pages quietly to avoid disturbing the performers and other audience members

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Trois chansons de Bilitis

Pierre Louys (1870-1925)

La flûte de Pan

Pour le jour des Hyacinthies,
Il m'a donné une syrinx faite
De roseaux bien taillés,
Unis avec la blanche cire
Qui est douce à mes lèvres comme le miel.

Il m'apprend à jouer, assise sur ses genoux;
Mais je suis un peu tremblante.
Il en joue après moi, si doucement
Que je l'entends à peine.

Nous n'avons rien à nous dire,
Tant nous sommes près l'un de l'autre;
Mais nos chansons veulent se répondre,
Et tour à tour nos bouches
S'unissent sur la flûte.

Il est tard;
Voici le chant des grenouilles vertes
Qui commence avec la nuit.
Ma mère ne croira jamais
Que je suis restée si longtemps
A chercher ma ceinture perdue.

La chevelure

Il m'a dit: "Cette nuit, j'ai rêvé.
J'avais ta chevelure autour de mon cou.
J'avais tes cheveux comme un collier noir
Autour de ma nuque et sur ma poitrine.

Je les caressais, et c'étaient les miens;
Et nous étions liés pour toujours ainsi,
Par la même chevelure, la bouche sur la bouche,
Ainsi que deux lauriers n'ont souvent qu'une racine.

Et peu à peu, il m'a semblé.
Tant nos membres étaient confondus,
Que je devenais toi-même,
Ou que tu entras en moi comme mon songe."

...

The pan pipes

For the festival of Hyacinthus
He gave me a syrinx, a set of pipes made
From well-cut reeds,
Fixed together with the white wax
That is sweet to my lips like honey.

He is teaching me to play, as I sit on his knees;
But I tremble a little.
He plays it after me, so softly
That I can hardly hear it.

We have nothing to say to each other,
We are so close;
But our songs want to reply to each other,
And our mouths are joined
As they take turns on the pipes.

It is late:
And here is the song of the green frogs
Which begins at dusk.
My mother will never believe
I spent so long
Searching for my lost girdle.

The hair

He told me: "Last night I had a dream.
Your hair was around my neck,
Your hair was like a black necklace
Around my neck and on my chest.

"I was stroking it, and it was my own;
And so we were joined for ever like that,
By the same hair, my mouth on your mouth,
Just as two laurels often have only one root.

"And gradually I felt,
As our limbs were so entwined,
That I was becoming you,
Or that you were entering me like my dream."

...

Quand il eut achevé,
Il mit doucement ses mains sur mes épaules,
Et il me regarda d'un regard si tendre,
Que je baissai les yeux avec un frisson.

Le Tombeau des Naiïades

Le long du bois couvert de givre, je marchais;
Mes cheveux devant ma bouche
Se fleurissaient de petits glaçons,
Et mes sandales étaient lourdes
De neige fangeuse et tassée.

Il me dit: "Que cherches-tu?"
Je suis la trace du satyre.
Ses petits pas fourchus alternent
Comme des trous dans un manteau blanc.
Il me dit: "Les satyres sont morts.

"Les satyres et les nymphes aussi.
Depuis trente ans, il n'a pas fait un hiver aussi
terrible.
La trace que tu vois est celle d'un bouc.
Mais restons ici, où est leur tombeau."

Et avec le fer de sa houe il cassa la glace
De la source où jadis riaient les naiïades.
Il prenait de grands morceaux froids,
Es les soulevant vers le ciel pâle,
Il regardait au travers.

Claude Debussy

La fille aux cheveux de lin

(premier livre de *Préludes*)

Piano Solo

When he had finished,
He put his hands gently on my shoulders,
And looked at me so tenderly
That I with a quiver I lowered my eyes.

The tomb of the water nymphs

I was walking through the frost-covered woods;
My hair in front of my mouth
Blossomed into tiny icicles,
And my shoes were heavy
With muddy caked snow.

He asked me: "What are you looking for?"
"I'm following the tracks of the satyr -
His little cloven hoofprints alternate
Like holes in a white cloak."
He said to me: "The satyrs are dead.

"The satyrs are dead, and so are the nymphs.
There hasn't been such a terrible winter for thirty years.
The tracks that you see are those of a he-goat.
But let's pause here, at their tomb."

And with his iron hoe he broke the ice
Of the spring where the water-nymphs used to laugh.
He picked up the large cold pieces
And raised them towards the pale sky,
And gazed through them.

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Kindertotenlieder

Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866)

Nun will die Sonn' so heil aufgehn

Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgehn,
Als sei kein Unglück die Nacht geschehn

Das Unglück geschah nur mir allein!
Die Sonne, sie scheint allgemein!

Du mußt nicht die Nacht in dir verschränken,
Mußt sie ins ew'ge Licht versenken!

Ein Lämplein verlosch in meinem Zelt!
Heil sei dem Freudenlicht der Welt!

Nun seh' ich wohl, warum so dunkle Flammen

Nun seh' ich wohl, warum so dunkle Flammen
Ihr sprühtet mir in manchem Augenblicke.
– O Augen! – Gleichsam, um voll in einem Blicke
Zu drängen eure ganze Macht zusammen.

Doch ahnt' ich nicht, weil Nebel mich umschwamen,
Gewoben vom verblendenden Geschicke,
Daß sich der Strahl bereits zur Heimkehr schicke,
Dorthin, von wannen alle Strahlen stammen.

Ihr wolltet mir mit eurem Leuchten sagen:
Wir möchten nah dir bleiben gerne!
Doch ist uns das vom Schicksal abgeschlagen.
Sieh' uns nur an, denn bald sind wir dir ferne!

Was dir nur Augen sind in diesen Tagen:
In künft'gen Nächten sind es dir nur Sterne.

Wenn dein Mütterlein

Wenn dein Mütterlein
Tritt zur Tür herein,
Und den Kopf ich drehe,
Ihr entgegen sehe,
Fällt auf ihr Gesicht
Erst der Blick mir nicht,
Sondern auf die Stelle,
Näher nach der Schwelle,
Dort, wo würde dein
Lieb Gesichtchen sein,
Wenn du freudenhelle
Trätest mit herein,
Wie sonst, mein Töchterlein.

...

The sun will rise as brightly as usual

The sun will rise as brightly as usual,
As if nothing terrible had happened in the night.

The terrible thing happened just to me!
The sun shines on everyone!

You must not enclose the night within you,
You must immerse it in eternal light!

A little light went out in my world!
Hail to the joyful light of the world!

Now I see clearly

Now I see clearly why sometimes your eyes
Flashed such bright flames at me,
Oh eyes! As if totally in one glance
You could compress your entire power.

But I didn't realise, for mists surrounded me,
Woven by fate to dazzle me,
That your brightness was already heading home,
Towards the place, from where comes all lights.

You wanted to tell me with your shining light
We really want to stay close to you!
But fate denies us that ability,
Just look at us, soon we will be far away.

What to you now are just eyes
In the coming nights will just be stars.

When your mother

When your mother
Comes through the door
And I turn my head,
Look towards her,
My gaze doesn't
Rest on her first,
But in the place
Nearer the threshold,
There where your
Dear face would be,
When you joyfully
Came in with her,
As you used to, little daughter.

...

Wenn dein Mütterlein
Tritt zur Tür herein,
Mit der Kerze Schimmer,
Ist es mir, als immer
Kämst du mit herein,
Huschtest hinterdrein,
Als wie sonst ins Zimmer!
O du, des Vaters Zelle,
Ach, zu schnell, zu schnell,
Erloschner Freudenschein!

Oft denk ich, sis sind nur ausgegangen

Oft denk' ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen!
Bald werden sie wieder nach Hause gelangen!
Der Tag ist schön! O sei nicht bang!
Sie machen nur einen weiten Gang

Jawohl, sie sind nur ausgegangen
Und werden jetzt nach Hause gelangen!
O, sei nicht bang, der Tag is schön!
Sie machen nur einen Gang zu jenen Höh'n!

Sie sind uns nur vorausgegangen
Und werden nicht wieder nach Hause gelangen!
Wir holen sie ein auf jenen Höh'n
Im Sonnenschein! Der Tag ist schön auf jenen Höh'n!

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus,
Nie hätt' ich gesendet die Kinder hinaus;
Man hat sie hinaus getragen,
Ich durfte nichts dazu sagen.

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Saus,
Nie hätt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus,
Ich fürchtete sie erkranken;
Das sind nun eitle Gedanken.

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Graus,
Nie hätt' ich gelassen die Kinder hinaus;
Ich sorgte, sie stürben morgen,
Das ist nun nicht zu besorgen.

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus,
Nie hätt' ich gesendet die Kinder hinaus;
Man hat sie hinaus getragen,
Ich durfte nichts dazu sagen.

In diesem Wetter, in diesem Saus, in diesem Braus,
Sie ruh'n als wie in der Mutter Haus,
Von keinem Sturm erschreckt,
Von Gottes Hand bedeckt.
Sie ruh'n wie in der Mutter Haus!

When your mother
Comes through the door
With a flickering candle,
It always seems to me
That you come in too
Slipping in behind her, just as
You always came into the room!
Oh you, the joyful light of your father's
Flesh and blood, Alas, too quickly,
Too quickly extinguished!

I often think they have just gone out

I often think they have just gone out!
That they will be home again soon!
It's a beautiful day, oh don't worry!
They have just on a long walk,

Of course, they have just gone out
And will soon be home again!
Oh don't worry, it's a lovely day!
They've just gone for a walk in the hills!

They have merely gone ahead of us
And won't be coming back home again!
We will catch up with them in the hills
In sunshine! It's a beautiful day in the hills!

In this weather, in this storm

In this weather, in this storm,
I would never have sent the children out.
But they were taken outside,
I wasn't allowed to say a word against it.

In this awful weather, in this gale,
I would never have let the children go out,
I thought they might get ill,
But these were all idle thoughts.

In this awful weather, in this dreadful blast
I would never have let the children go out,
I was afraid they might die tomorrow,
There is no cause for these fears now.

In this awful weather, in this gale,
I would never have sent the children out.
But they were taken outside,
I wasn't allowed to say a word against it.

In this awful weather, in this storm, in this gale
They rest as though they were in their mother's house,
Not frightened by the storm,
Protected by God's hand.
They rest as if they were in their mother's house.

Federico Mompou (1893-1987)

Combat del somni

Josep Janés (1913-1959)

Fes-me la vida transparent
Ara no sé si et veig, encar
Damunt de tu només les flors
Aquesta nit un mateix vent
Jo et presentia com la mar

For copyright reasons, we are unable to reproduce the text of these songs.

Claude Debussy

Bruyères

(deuxième livre de *Préludes*)

Piano Solo

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Cinq mélodies populaires grecques

Michel Dimitri Calvocoressi (1877-1944)

Chanson de la mariée

Réveille-toi, réveille-toi, perdrix mignonne,
Ouvre au matin tes ailes.
Trois grains de beauté, mon coeur en est brûlé!
Vois le ruban d'or que je t'apporte,
Pour le nouer autour de tes cheveux.
Si tu veux, ma belle, viens nous marier!
Dans nos deux familles, tous sont alliés!

Song to the bride

Wake up, wake up, little partridge!
Open your wings to the morning.
Three beauty spots – my heart is on fire!
Look at this golden ribbon I have brought you
To tie around your hair.
If you want, my beauty, let's get married!
Everyone is related in our two families!

Là-bas, vers l'église

Là-bas, vers l'église,
Vers l'église Ayio Sidéro,
L'église, ô Vierge sainte,
L'église Ayio Costannidino,
Se sont réunis,
Rassemblés en nombre infini,
Du monde, ô Vierge sainte,
Du monde tous les plus braves

Down there, by the church

Down there, by the church,
By the church of Ayio Sidéro,
The church, o holy virgin,
The church of Aiyo Costannidino,
There are gathered,
Assembled in infinite numbers
The world's, o holy virgin,
The world's best people.

Quel galant m'est comparable

Quel galant m'est comparable,
D'entre ceux qu'on voit passer?
Dis, dame Vassiliki?

Quel galant m'est comparable

Which gallant can compare to me,
Amongst all those one sees passing by?
Tell me, Lady Vassiliki?

Vois, pendus à ma ceinture,
pistolets et sabre aigu...
Et c'est toi que j'aime!

Look, hanging from my belt
I have pistols and a sharp sword...
And it is you that I love!

Chanson des cueilleuses de lentisques

O joie de mon âme,
Joie de mon coeur,
Trésor qui m'est si cher;
Joie de l'âme et du coeur,
Toi que j'aime ardemment,
Tu es plus beau qu'un ange.
O lorsque tu parais,
Ange si doux
Devant nos yeux,
Comme un bel ange blond,
Sous le clair soleil,
Hélas! tous nos pauvres coeurs soupirent!

Tout gai!

Tout gai! gai, Ha, tout gai!
Belle jambe, tireli, qui danse;
Belle jambe, la vaisselle danse,
Tra la la la...

Song of the mastic collectors

Oh joy of my soul,
Joy of my heart,
Treasure, so precious to me;
Joy of my soul and my heart,
You, whom I love passionately,
You are more beautiful than an angel.
When you appear,
My sweet angel,
Before our eyes,
Like a golden haired angel,
In the bright sunlight,
Alas! All our poor hearts sigh!

Everyone is merry!

Everyone is merry, Everyone is merry!
Beautiful legs, tireli, are dancing;
Beautiful legs; even the china is dancing!
Tra la la la ...

Programme Notes

It was André Gide who inadvertently inspired the creation of the **Chansons de Bilitis**. Having returned from Biskra, he waxed so lyrical to Pierre Louÿs about its fascination that the poet wrote to Debussy: 'Gide revient de là-bas comme un fou!' ('Gide has returned a madman!') Louÿs immediately set out for Biskra, where he began a liaison with Ouled Nail Mériem, the prototype of Bilitis. Gide, in *Si le grain ne meurt*, paints this picture of her:

Mériem was amber-skinned, firm-fleshed, well-developed but almost childlike, for she was barely sixteen. I can only compare her to a bacchante, the one on the Gaeta vase, because of her bracelets which tinkled like rattlesnakes and which she was continually shaking.

Louÿs went to enormous lengths to hoodwink his readers into believing that his poems were translations of verse by a Greek poetess from the 5th century BC, called Bilitis, and wrote a detailed description of her life that precedes the 150 or so prose poems that were inspired by Mériem.

Bilitis clearly appealed to Debussy's pagan side that had already produced the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1894) and he was later to create that apostrophe to paganism, *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien*. He selected three of Louÿs' prose poems and set them to music that conjures up an exotic world of awakening, erotic love. The wonderful recitatives of the **Chansons de Bilitis** recall *Pelléas* of three years earlier. In **La flûte de Pan**, Debussy manages to convey with a few deft touches the main images of Louÿs's poem: the playing of the flute at 'il m'apprendà jouer . . .', the croaking of the frogs and Bilitis's final scurrying off. The conversational nature of the whole cycle is mirrored in the extreme narrowness of the vocal range, which only expands in **La chevelure**, especially in the octave at 'la bouche sur la bouche'. After this outburst of passion, **Le tombeau des Naiades** depicts a frozen landscape in which Bilitis vainly pursues the naiads and is confronted at the close with an infinite expanse of wintry sky and Debussy's transfixing and relentless semiquavers. The cycle was composed in 1897 but Debussy was loath to let the songs ago. He finally overcame his fears and gave the first performance on 17 March 1900 with Blanche Marot.

Debussy's *Préludes* comprise 24 pieces for solo piano, divided into two books of 12 preludes each. Each book was written in a matter of months, at an unusually fast pace for Debussy: Book I between December 1909 and February 1910, Book II in 1911 and 1912. These wonderful miniatures are Debussy's final homage to the

tradition of descriptive music that he had so admired in Schumann, but by placing the title of each piece at the end of the music, he seems to recognize that the suggestive nature of his music is of greater importance than a mere descriptive label. **La fille aux cheveux de lin** from Book I was the title of a song that Debussy had composed in about 1882, inspired by Leconte de Lisle's poem of the same name from his *Chansons écossaises*. The only connection the *Prélude* has with the song is a simplicity that stands in striking contrast to the turmoil of the previous *Prélude* about the West Wind, 'Ce qu'à vu le vent d'Ouest'. **Bruyères**, the fifth prelude of Book II, is best translated as 'heather'; and according to Debussy's good friend, the pianist Marguerite Long, it evokes the smell of sea mist mingled with coastal pines. It shares with 'La fille aux cheveux de lin' the same atmosphere, dynamic and harmonic colour. Both develop from a single melodic idea and drift into our consciousness in a magical and unforgettable way.

Mahler wrote the first two songs of **Kindertotenlieder** in the summer of 1901 while at work on his Fifth Symphony, choosing the poems from a volume of verse by Friedrich Rückert entitled 'Kindertotenlieder', which contained over four hundred poems on the theme of the death of infants. Rückert had started writing these poems in 1834 after losing his two youngest children in a scarlet fever epidemic, three year-old Luise and four year-old Ernst. Mahler was still a bachelor in 1901, but in the following year he married Alma Maria Schindler and soon became a father. His second daughter was born in 1904 and it was during the summer of that year, while at work on the Sixth Symphony, that he composed the last three songs of the cycle. They were published and premiered in 1905. Although it has often been asked how Mahler could have been so morbid as to compose such songs when his own children were happy and healthy, it should be remembered that he was simply completing a work that had been begun in 1901. Tragically, however, as if he had been tempting providence, Mahler lost his eldest daughter two years later.

Death, of course, was no stranger to Mahler's own childhood: only seven of his parents' fourteen children survived infancy, including Mahler's younger brother, also called Ernst, who then died tragically, aged 13, from water on the heart, leaving Gustav more than ever alone. Rückert's *Kindertotenlieder* were only published after his death in 1872 by his son, Heinrich. The children's names occur in some of the poems, and some of the details are almost unbearably poignant. We read about how their death was announced, how their funeral clothes were bought; he reminisces about the

games he played with his children, remembers their birth. One poem begins: 'Heut ist voll das fünfte Jahr,/ Seit die Mutter dich gebar' (It was exactly five years ago/That your mother bore you.)

Mahler cleverly chose poems which, instead of forming a narrative, portrayed the father's emotions which are alternately grief-stricken, affectionate, consolatory or simply benumbed. **Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgehn** was written by Rückert on the morning after the death of his child, and the glockenspiel that is heard no fewer than three times in Mahler's orchestral accompaniment alludes discreetly to an innocence that is now no more. **Nun seh ich wohl, warum so dunkle Flammen** contains memories of the children's star-like eyes, and throughout the song the cellos repeat a five note theme that resembles the 'gaze' motif from *Tristan und Isolde* ('Er sah mir in die Augen'). The third song, **Wenn dein Mütterlein/Tritt zur Tür herein**, opens with horn and bassoon in counterpoint accompanied by pizzicato cellos, and is a conflation of two Rückert poems which describe how the poet looks for his dead child each time his wife now enters the room; Mahler's setting, marked *grave*, *malinconico*, sounds fittingly like a mixture of a children's round and a danse macabre. **Oft denk ich, sie sind nur ausgegangen!** tells of the father's fond hope that his children will return, that they have merely gone for a walk, that they have wandered into a better world where their parents will one day join them. **In diesem Wetter, in diesem Braus** describes the storm that raged on the day of the funeral, the grief of the heart-broken father, and finally the peace that the children have found in a safe haven.

Frederic Mompou (1893-1987), like Manuel de Falla, lived for a time in Paris; his mother was of French descent, and Paris was for many Catalans not only a cultural Mecca but also a haven from the repressive centralist Spanish state in the early years of the twentieth century. Having heard Marguerite Long play Fauré in Barcelona, Mompou was determined to spend time in the French capital. He returned to his native Barcelona with the fall of France but returned to Paris in 1921 where he spent the next twenty years. From 1941 he lived again in Barcelona and died there in 1987. Many of Mompou's forty or so songs – some of them composed to French texts by Paul Valéry and others – were published in Paris by Editions Salabert, and the first set of his *Comptines* were dedicated to Jane Bathori, the French soprano who created Ravel's *Schéhérazade* and *Histoires naturelles*. Most of his songs, however, are to Catalan texts. The short cycle, **Combat del somni** (*Dream Combat*) sets three sonnets by Josep Janés (1913-1959) that were published in 1937 by Janés's own Edicions de la Rosa dels Vents. Mompou's avowed

aim to achieve in his music maximum expressiveness through a minimum of means is everywhere apparent in these songs where there are few modulations and virtually no development of the musical material. The influence of Érik Satie is clear.

Maurice Ravel, like many of his contemporaries (Vincent d'Indy and Marie Joseph Canteloupe, for example), was fascinated by folksong, and had as early as 1895 harmonized twelve Corsican songs to illustrate a lecture by Austin de Croze. A similar opportunity presented itself in 1904, when Pierre Aubry required at very short notice five Greek songs to be provided with accompaniments for a lecture he was giving at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes. A mutual friend, M. D. Calvocoressi, selected the poems for which Ravel, in a matter of hours, provided the piano accompaniments. Two of these, 'Quel galant' and 'Chanson des cueilleuses de lentisques', were published in 1906, while the remaining three, which have since been lost, were jettisoned by the composer who considered the accompaniments too short. When Calvocoressi a little later needed three more songs to be harmonized for a lecture of his own, Ravel obliged once more, and the resulting amalgam, the **Cinq chansons populaires grecques**, were eventually premiered by Marguerite Babián and published in 1907. **Le réveil de la mariée** describes how a young Greek peasant awakens his bride by serenading her in front of her house; **Là-bas, vers l'église** is a moving song for all those Greek soldiers who perished in the War of Independence against the Turks; **Quel galant m'est comparable** shows us a virile peasant who hints to dame Vassiliki, the Madame of a bordello, that pistols and sabres are not the only things that dangle beneath his belt; **Chanson des cueilleuses de lentisques**, with its beautiful melody, is sung by the lovelorn women as they gather the aromatic resin from the *Pistacia lentiscus*, a shrub that flourishes mainly on the island of Chios; **Tout gai** sets nonsense words to a rumbustious dance which alternates between 2/4 and 3/4 time. The songs are sometimes performed with the original Greek texts, and Ravel also approved a version for harp accompaniment. He himself started to orchestrate the songs but soon lost interest; it was Manuel Rosenthal who finally completed the orchestrated version which was published in 1935.

Richard Stokes © 2026

Richard's new book, *A Carl Loewe Song Companion*, will be published by Bittern Press in the autumn of 2026 and launched at Wigmore Hall on 10 October. Joseph Middleton will accompany Günther GroiBböck, Julian Banse, Lizzie Estrada and Aksel Rykkvin in this lunchtime recital.

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Biographies

Marianne Crebessa

Mezzo-soprano

Blessed with a voice of “warm tone and a remarkable way with both vocal colour and verbal inflection; her lower registers dark and burnished, her top notes warm, clear and effortless” (*Gramophone*), French mezzo-soprano Marianne Crebessa is widely celebrated for her artistry and presence whether on the opera stage, in recital, in the recording studio or in concert. Critics praise her “impassioned, appealingly natural singing” (*Chicago Sun-Times*) and her “extraordinary and riveting ability to communicate through her voice” (*Opera Today*).

Marianne Crebessa’s 2025–26 season includes performances with major orchestras and conductors in signature repertoire: Berlioz’s *Les nuits d’été* with Kent Nagano and the Munich Philharmonic; Mahler’s *Kindertotenlieder* with the Orchestre du Capitole de Toulouse; her début in Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde* with the Orchestre National de France under Juraj Valčuha; Berlioz’s *La damnation de Faust* with the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia under Charles Dutoit; and Mahler’s Symphony No. 3 with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. On the recital platform this season, she appears at the Ciclo de Lied at Madrid’s Teatro de la Zarzuela, the Leeds Song Festival, and Vienna’s celebrated Musikverein.

Highlights of recent seasons include Mahler’s Symphony No. 3 with the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra and Gustavo Dudamel, with whom she maintains a longstanding artistic partnership; her début in Verdi’s *Requiem* with Riccardo Muti and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra; and Mahler’s Symphony No. 2 with the Orchestre du Capitole de Toulouse at the Radio France Montpellier Festival. She has also appeared in recital with her regular pianist Alphonse Cemin at the Théâtre de l’Athénée in Paris, and in concerts and recitals for the Festival de Saint-Denis, Salzburg’s Mozartwoche, the Gulbenkian Foundation, the Orchestre de Paris, the Wiener Symphoniker, Lincoln Center’s Mostly Mozart Festival, the BBC Proms with the Philharmonia Orchestra, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Hamburg’s Elbphilharmonie and at the Waldbühne with the Berlin Philharmonic. Daniel Barenboim invited her to celebrate the Debussy centenary with concerts alongside the Staatskapelle Berlin and a recital at the Pierre Boulez Saal.

A subtle and compelling operatic performer, Marianne’s notable stage work includes originating the role of Woman in George Benjamin’s *Picture a Day Like This*, première at the Festival d’Aix-en-Provence in 2023 before travelling to the Opéra Comique in Paris and the Orchestre de Chambre de Luxembourg. Other recent successes include débuts as Romeo (*I Capuleti e i Montecchi*) at Teatro alla Scala; appearances in a new production of *Resurrection* at the Festival d’Aix-en-Provence staged by Romeo Castellucci; Cherubino (*Le nozze di Figaro*) at the Metropolitan Opera; Dorabella (*Così fan*



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tutte) for the Staatsoper Berlin and Wiener Staatsoper; and the title role in Offenbach’s *Fantasio* at the Opéra Comique. She has also sung Angelina (*La Cenerentola*) at the Opéra National de Paris and La Scala; Mélisande (*Pelléas et Mélisande*) at the Berlin Staatsoper; Cecilio (*Lucio Silla*); the title role in Marc-André Dalbavie’s *Charlotte Salomon*; and Sesto (*La clemenza di Tito*) for the Salzburg Festival. At the Lyric Opera of Chicago she has appeared as Stéphano (*Roméo et Juliette*), Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*) and Rosina (*Le nozze di Figaro*).

An exclusive recording artist with Warner/Erato, Marianne’s most recent release pairs Mozart’s *Requiem* with Fazil Say’s *Mozart ve Mevlana*, recorded with the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra and Michael Sanderling. Her three acclaimed solo recital albums are *Séguedilles* (2021), a Franco-Spanish programme inspired by her Iberian heritage; *Oh, boy!*, devoted to Mozart, Gluck, Gounod and other celebrated trouserrole repertoire; and *Secrets*, a collection of French and Spanish mélodies with Fazil Say. Following *Oh, boy!* she was named ‘Artiste lyrique de l’année’ at the Victoires de la Musique and received the Echo Klassik (now Opus Klassik) award in 2017, while *Secrets* won the Solo Vocal Award at the *Gramophone Awards*. Her discography also includes Ascanio (*Les Troyens*) with John Nelson (Warner Classics); Gluck’s *Orphée et Eurydice* with Ensemble Pygmalion and Raphaël Pichon (Naxos); Mozart’s *Dauid penitente* with Marc Minkowski and Les Musiciens du Louvre; and roles in Lehár’s *Friederike* and Pizzetti’s *Fedra* with the Orchestre National de Montpellier LanguedocRoussillon (Accord).

After studies in Sète and Montpellier, Marianne made her début at the Opéra de Montpellier in Schumann’s *Manfred* in 2008 at the age of 21. In 2010, following her performance as Isabella Linton in Bernard Herrmann’s *Wuthering Heights* at the Radio France Festival de Montpellier, she joined the Young Artist Programme of the Opéra National de Paris, where she went on to perform roles including Gluck’s *Orphée* and Ramiro (*La finta giardiniera*). Her 2012 début at the Salzburg Festival as Irene (*Tamerlano*) alongside Plácido Domingo marked a major step in her career. In 2021, she was named an Officier des Arts et des Lettres in recognition of her contribution to French art and music on the international stage.

Joseph Middleton

Piano

Joseph Middleton is widely regarded as one of the most exceptional and creative pianists of his generation, specialising in song accompaniment and chamber music at the highest international level. Hailed by *Gramophone* as “the absolute king of programming” and by *The New York Times* as “the perfect accompanist”, he collaborates with many of the world’s foremost singers, performing at venues and festivals across Europe, North America and Asia.

A passionate advocate for the power of song, Joseph is the Artistic Director of Leeds Song, praised by *The Guardian* for its “world-class” programming and by *The Times* as a “Northern powerhouse of song”. He also curates series for BBC Radio 3, Wigmore Hall and the University of Cambridge, where he founded and directs their Lieder Scheme. Joseph is Musician in Residence at Pembroke College. He is a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music, where he is Professor of Ensemble Piano, and was made a Bye-Fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge by Lord Chris Smith. Joseph is the first – and to date, only – accompanist to receive the Royal Philharmonic Society’s Young Artist Award, the UK’s most prestigious recognition for a classical musician.

Joseph appears regularly at leading international venues including Wigmore Hall, where he has been a featured artist with series on Ravel, Mahler and Strauss; the Royal Opera House, the Barbican and Southbank Centre; Alice Tully Hall and the Park Avenue Armory in New York; the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam; Vienna Konzerthaus and Musikverein; Hamburg Elbphilharmonie; Berlin Pierre Boulez Saal and Philharmonie; Cologne Philharmonie; Madrid’s Teatro de la Zarzuela; Baden-Baden Festspielhaus; Zurich Tonhalle; Paris’s Musée d’Orsay; and Oji Hall, Tokyo. Festival highlights include Aix-en-Provence, Aldeburgh, Edinburgh, Heidelberger Frühling, Munich, San Francisco, Ravinia, the Schubertiade in Hohenems and Schwarzenberg, Seoul, Toronto and Vancouver.

He has enjoyed fruitful partnerships with Sir Thomas Allen, Louise Alder, Mary Bevan, Ian Bostridge, Allan Clayton, Dame Sarah Connolly, Marianne Crebassa, Véronique Gens, Iestyn Davies, Fatma Said, Huw Montague Rendall, Christiane Karg, Sir Simon Keenlyside, Elsa Dreisig, Angelika Kirchschrager, Katharina Konradi, Dame Felicity Lott, Christopher Maltman, John Mark Ainsley, Ann Murray DBE, James Newby, Mark



Padmore, Konstantin Krimmel, Mauro Peter, Miah Persson, Sophie Rennert, Dorothea Röschmann, Carolyn Sampson, Nicky Spence and Roderick Williams.

His award-winning discography on Warner, Harmonia Mundi, BIS, Chandos and Signum, amongst others, includes multiple honours: the Diapason d’Or, Edison Award and Prix Caecilia, alongside nominations for *Gramophone*, *Opus Klassik*, *BBC Music Magazine* and the International Classical Music Awards. Committed to expanding the song repertoire, he has commissioned and premiered works by composers including Thomas Adès, Helen Grime, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Hannah Kendall, Errollyn Wallen, Mark Simpson and Nico Muhly. At the 2018 BBC Proms he premiered recently discovered songs by Benjamin Britten alongside Dame Sarah Connolly. He is frequently called upon to give masterclasses, with recent seasons taking him to Toronto Summer Music, Ravinia in Chicago, Britten-Pears in Aldeburgh, deSingel Antwerp, Samling and the Royal Opera House, London.

Highlights of the 2025–26 season include recitals alongside Dorothea Röschmann, Fatma Said, Louise Alder, Elsa Dreisig, Dame Sarah Connolly, Huw Montague Rendall, Hera Hyesang Park, Katharina Konradi, Carolyn Sampson and Hugh Cutting at venues including Wigmore Hall, the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía, Valencia, the Grand Théâtre de Genève, the Muziekgebouw, Amsterdam, and the Prinzregententheater, Munich. With Vera-Lotte Boecker he will also perform Schumann’s *Frauenliebe und -leben* in staged performances at the Staatsoper Hamburg. His recording projects include an ongoing five-album set of Mahler Lieder for Signum Records.

Richard Stokes

Speaker

Richard Stokes, Professor of Lieder at the Royal Academy of Music, is a regular juror at international song competitions. For the operatic stage, he has translated *Wozzeck* and *La voix humaine* for Opera North, and *Parsifal*, *Lulu*, *L'Amour de loin* and *Jakob Lenz* for English National Opera.

His books include *The Spanish Song Companion* (with Jacqueline Cockburn), *J. S. Bach – The Complete Cantatas* (Scarecrow Press), *A French Song Companion* (with Graham Johnson) (OUP), *The Book of Lieder* (Faber), a translation of Jules Renard's complete *Histoires naturelles* in a dual-language edition (Alma Classics), and *The Penguin Book of English Song – Seven Centuries of Poetry from Chaucer to Auden*, now available in paperback. He collaborated with Alfred Brendel on the latter's *Collected Poems: Playing the Human Game* (Phaidon)

His translations of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and *The Trial* have been published by Hesperus Press, and Alma Books published his translation (with Hannah Stokes) of Kafka's *Letter to his Father*. His translation of Helmut Deutsch's *Memoirs of an Accompanist* appeared in autumn 2020 (Kahn & Averill), and Faber recently published *The Complete Songs of Hugo Wolf. Life, Letters, Lieder*.

Bittern Press will publish Richard's new book in the Autumn: *A Carl Loewe Song Companion*. It will be launched at noon at Wigmore Hall on Saturday 10 October, when Joseph Middleton will accompany Juliane Banse, Lizzie Estrada, Aksel Rykkvin and Günther Groißböck.

Richard Stokes was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2012 and the Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art in 2022.



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QR codes will be available around the venue should you wish to access the programme upon arrival. You are welcome to use your mobile device to view song texts during the recital, but please ensure that your device is switched to silent mode and that your screen brightness is turned down so as not to disturb the performers or fellow audience members.

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