



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
Saturday 18 April at 11am

Coffee Recital

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.

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Saturday 18 April 2026, 11am
THE VENUE, LEEDS CONSERVATOIRE



Coffee Recital *'Mortal Wounds'*

Theodore Platt baritone
Keval Shah piano

“Daß ich trag’ Todeswunden, das ist der Menschen Tun” (Justinus Kerner)

Inspired by a line from Robert Schumann’s *Kerner-Lieder*, this programme is a meditation on human suffering, with a particular focus on the innocent child victims of conflict. From the bombing of the Basque village of Guernica, to racist attacks in African American churches, to the horrors of Nazi occupation in France, this concert speaks of fascism, racism, and injustice, at the same time following the search for freedom, and putting forward a faith in the endurance of the human spirit.

Rising British-Russian baritone Theodore Platt, celebrated for his ‘warm and powerful English baritone’ is one of opera’s most promising young voices. He is a recent laureate of the Concours international de Montréal and recipient of the prestigious Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship. And to join him, we welcome back to Leeds alumnus of the Leeds Song Young Artist programme, and now Lecturer of Lieder at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, pianist Keval Shah. Shah’s career is marked by his innovative approach to classical music and his ability to bridge cultural and social divides through his performances.

James Macmillan
The Children

Joaquin Turina
El arbol de Guernica (*2 Danzas sobre temas populares españolas*)

Robert Schumann
from *Kerner-Lieder*
Erstes Grün
Sehnsucht nach der Waldgegend
Auf das Trinkglas eines verstobenen Freundes
Wer machte dich so krank

Francis Poulenc
La fraîcheur et le feu
Rayon des yeux
Le matin les branches attisent
Tout disparut
Dans les ténèbres du Jardin
Unis la fraîcheur et le feu
Homme au sourire tendre
La grande rivière qui va

Shawn E. Okpebholo
Two Black Churches
Ballad of Birmingham
The Rain

Ilse Weber
Wiegala

Richard Fariña arr. Will Liverman
Birmingham Sunday

Margaret Bonds
The Negro Speaks of Rivers

Florence Price
My Dream

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

James Macmillan (b. 1959)

The Children

Upon the street they lie
Beside the broken stone:
The blood of children stares from the broken stone.

Death came out of the sky
In the bright afternoon:
Darkness slanted over the bright afternoon.

Again the sky is clear
But upon earth a stain:
The earth is darkened with a darkening stain:

A wound which everywhere
Corrupts the hearts of men:
The blood of children corrupts the hearts of men.

Silence is in the air:
The stars move to their places:
Silent and serene the stars move to their places:

William Soutar (1898-1943)

Joaquin Turina (1882-1949)

from *2 Danzas sobre temas populares españolas*

El arbol de Guernica

Piano solo

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

from *Kerner-Lieder*

Justinus Kerner (1786-1862)

Erstes Grün

Du junges Grün, du frisches Gras!
Wie manches Herz durch dich genas,
Das von des Winters Schnee erkrankt,
O wie mein Herz nach dir verlangt!

Schon wächst du aus der Erde Nacht,
Wie dir mein Aug' entgegen lacht!
Hier in des Waldes stillem Grund
Drück' ich dich, Grün, an Herz und Mund.

...

First Green

You young green, you fresh grass!
How many hearts have you healed,
Which were laid low by the Winter's snow,
Oh, how my heart yearned for you!

Already you are waking from the earth's night,
And my joyful eyes behold you!
Here in the quiet depths of the forest
I press you, green, to my heart and lips.

...

Wie treibt's mich von den Menschen fort!
Mein Leid, das hebt kein Menschenwort,
Nur junges Grün ans Herz gelegt,
Macht, daß mein Herze stiller schlägt.

Sehnsucht nach der Waldgegend

Sehnsucht nach der Waldgegend
Wär' ich nie aus euch gegangen,
Wälder, hehr und wunderbar!
Hieltet liebend mich umfangen
Doch so lange, lange Jahr'.

Wo in euren Dämmerungen
Vogelsang und Silberquell,
Ist auch manches Lied entsprungen
Meinem Busen, frisch und hell.

Euer Wogen, euer Hallen
Euer Säuseln nimmer müd',
Eure Melodien alle
Weckten in der Brust das Lied.

Hier in diesen weiten Triften
Ist mir alles öd' und stumm,
Und ich schau' in blauen Lüften
Mich nach Wolkenbildern um.

Wenn ihr's in den Busen zwinget
Regt sich selten nur das Lied;
Wie der Vogel halb nur singet,
Den von Baum und Bach man schied.

Auf das Trinkglas eines verstorbenen Freundes

Du herrlich Glas, nun stehst du leer,
Glas, das er oft mit Lust gehoben;
Die Spinne hat rings um dich her
Indes den düstren Flor gewoben.

Jetzt sollst du mir gefüllet sein
Mondhell mit Gold der deutschen Reben!
In deiner Tiefe heil'gen Schein
Schau' ich hinab mit frommem Beben.

Was ich erschau' in deinem Grund
Ist nicht Gewöhnlichen zu nennen.
Doch wird mir klar zu dieser Stund',
Wie nichts den Freund vom Freund kann trennen.

Auf diesen Glauben, Glas so hold!
Trink' ich dich aus mit hohem Mute.
Klar spiegelt sich der Sterne Gold,
Pokal, in deinem teuren Blute!

...

How I long to escape from other people!
My sorrow cannot be eased by human word,
Only young green pressed to my heart
Can make it beat more calmly.

Yearning for the woodland

Yearning for the woodland
Would that I had never left you,
You sublime, wonderful forest!
You held me in a loving embrace
For oh so many years.

Where in your twilight,
With birdsong and silvery springs,
Many a song sprang from my breast,
Fresh and bright.

Your swaying, your echoing,
Your never-tiring murmur,
All your melodies
Awakened song in my heart.

Here surrounded by these wide pastures
Everything seems barren and silent,
And I look up into the blue skies
Searching for cloud pictures.

If you try to force it in your breast,
Only seldom does a song succeed;
The way a bird sings only half-heartedly
When parted from tree and stream.

To the glass of a departed friend

Glorious glass, now you stand empty,
The glass that he often cheerfully raised;
Since then, a spider has woven
A sombre web around you.

Now I will have you filled
With the moonlight gold of German vines!
Into the sacred lustre of your depths,
Trembling I look down devoutly.

What I see in your depths
Is not to be spoken of to mortal man.
But in this hour it has become clear to me
That nothing can separate friend from friend.

And with that toast, lovely glass,
I will drain you with a cheerful heart.
The gold of the stars is brightly reflected,
Goblet, in your precious blood.

...

Still geht der Mond das Tal entlang,
Ernst tönt die mitternächt'ge Stunde.
Leer steht das Glas! Der heil'ge Klang
Tönt nach in dem kristallinen Grunde.

Wer machte dich so krank?

Daß du so krank geworden,
Wer hat es denn gemacht?
Kein kühler Hauch aus Norden
Und keine Sternennacht.

Kein Schatten unter Bäumen,
Nicht Glut des Sonnenstrahls,
Kein Schlummern und kein Träumen
Im Blütenbett des Tals.

Daß ich trag' Todeswunden,
Das ist der Menschen Tun;
Natur ließ mich gesunden,
Sie lassen mich nicht ruhn.

Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

La fraîcheur et le feu

Paul Éluard (1895-1952)

Rayons des yeux

Rayons des yeux et des soleils
Des ramures et des fontaines
Lumière du sol et du ciel
De l'homme et de l'oubli de l'homme
Un nuage couvre le sol
Un nuage couvre le ciel
Soudain la lumière m'oublie
La mort seule demeure entière
Je suis une ombre je ne vois plus
Le soleil jaune le soleil rouge
Le soleil blanc le ciel changeant
Je ne sais plus
La place du bonheur vivant
Au bord de l'ombre sans ciel ni terre.

Le matin les branches attisent

Le matin les branches attisent
Le bouillonnement des oiseaux
Le soir les arbres sont tranquilles
Le jour frémissant se repose.

Quietly the moon drifts along the valley,
The midnight hour strikes gravely.
The glass stands empty! The hallowed tones
Echo in its crystal depths.

Who has made you so ill?

You are so ill,
Who has done this to you?
No cooling breeze from the North
And no starlit nights.

No shade under the trees,
No warmth from the sun's rays,
No sleeping and no dreaming
Amongst the valleys flowers.

That I bear mortal wounds
Is down to the works of man;
Nature healed me,
Mankind gives me no peace.

Beams of eyes

Beams of eyes and of suns
Of branches and of fountains
Light of earth and of sky
Of man and man's oblivion
A cloud covers the earth
A cloud covers the sky
Suddenly the light is unmindful of me
Death alone remains complete
I am a shadow I see no longer
The yellow sun the red sun
The white sun the changing sky
I know no longer
The place of living happiness
At the edge of the shadow with neither sky nor earth.

In the morning the branches stir up

In the morning the branches stir up
The effervescence of the birds
At evening the trees are peaceful
The rustling day is resting..

Tout disparut

Tout disparut même les toits même le ciel
Même l'ombre tombée des branches
Sur les cimes des mousses tendres
Même les mots et les regards bien accordés

Sœurs miroitières de mes larmes
Les étoiles brillaient autour de ma fenêtre
Et mes yeux refermant leurs ailes pour la nuit
Vivaient d'un univers sans bornes.

Dans les ténèbres du jardin

Dans les ténèbres du jardin
Viennent des filles invisibles
Plus fines qu'à midi l'ondée.

Mon sommeil les a pour amies
Elles m'enivrent en secret
De leurs complaisances aveugles.

Unis la fraîcheur et le feu

Unis la fraîcheur et le feu
Unis tes lèvres et tes yeux
De ta folie attends sagesse
Fais image de femme et d'homme.

Homme au sourire tendre

Homme au sourire tendre
Femme aux tendres paupières
Homme aux joues rafraîchies
Femme aux bras doux et frais
Homme aux prunelles calmes
Femme aux lèvres ardentes
Homme aux paroles pleines
Femme aux yeux partagés
Homme aux deux mains utiles
Femme aux mains de raison
Homme aux astres constants
Femme aux seins de durée

Il n'est rien qui vous retient
Mes maîtres de m'éprouver.

La grande rivière qui va

La grande rivière qui va
Grande au soleil et petite à la lune
Par tous chemins à l'aventure
Ne m'aura pas pour la montrer du doigt

Je sais le sort de la lumière
J'en ai assez pour jouer son éclat
Pour me parfaire au dos de mes paupières
Pour que rien ne vive sans moi.

All disappeared

All disappeared even the roofs even the sky
Even the shade fallen from the branches
Upon the tips of the soft mosses
Even the words and the concordant looks

Sisters mirroring my tears
The stars shone around my window
And my eyes closing their wings again for the night
Lived in a boundless universe.

In the darkness of the garden

In the darkness of the garden
come some invisible girls
more delicate than the shower at midday.

My sleep has them for friends
they elate me secretly
with their blind complaisance.

Coolness and fire

Unite the coolness and the fire
unite your lips and your eyes
await wisdom from your folly
make a likeness of woman and of man.

Man of the tender smile

Man of the tender smile
Woman of the tender eyelids
Man of the freshened cheeks
Woman of the sweet fresh arms
Man of the calm eyes
Woman of the ardent lips
Man of the plenitude of speech
Woman of the shared eyes
Man of the useful hands
Woman of the sensible hands
Man of the steadfast stars
Woman of the enduring breasts

There is nothing that prevents you
My masters from testing me.

The great river that flows

The great river that flows
Big under the sun and small under the moon
In all directions at random
Will not have me to point it out

I know the spell of the light
I have enough of it to play with its brilliance
So that I may perfect myself behind my eyelids
So that nothing lives without me.

Shawn E. Okpebholo (b. 1981)

Two Black Churches

Ballad of Birmingham

Dudley Randall (1914-2000)

The Rain

Marcus Amaker (b. 1976)

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

Ilse Weber (1903-1944)

Wiegala

Wiegala, wiegala, weier,
der Wind spielt auf der Leier.
Er spielt so süß im grünen Ried,
die Nachtigall, die singt ihr Lied.
Wiegala, wiegala, weier,
der Wind spielt auf der Leier.

Wiegala, wiegala, werne,
der Mond ist die Laterne,
er steht am dunklen Himmelszelt
und schaut hernieder auf die Welt.
Wiegala, wiegala, werne,
der Mond ist die Lanterne.

Wiegala, wiegala, wille,
wie ist die Welt so stille!
Es stört kein Laut die süße Ruh,
schlaf, mein Kindchen, schlaf auch du.
Wiegala, wiegala, wille,
wie ist die Welt so stille!

Ilse Weber

Richard Fariña (1937-1966)

arr. Will Liverman

Birmingham Sunday

Richard Fariña

For copyright reasons, we are unable to reproduce the text of this song.

Hushabye

Hushabye baby,
The wind plays on the lyre.
He's playing so sweetly in the reeds,
The nightingale sings her song.
Beddy-bye, beddy-bye, bire,
The wind plays on the lyre.

Hushabye baby
The moon is a lantern,
It sits in heaven's tent up high
And looks down on the world.
Beddy-byes, beddybyes, plantern,
The moon is a lantern.

Hushabye baby
How still the world is!
Not a sound disturbs its sweet rest,
Sleep my child, you sleep too rest,
Hushabye, hushabye baby,
How still the world is!

Margaret Bonds (1923-1972)

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

Langston Hughes (1901-1967)

For copyright reasons, we are unable to reproduce the text of this song.

Florence Price (1887-1953)

My Dream

Langston Hughes (1901-1967)

For copyright reasons, we are unable to reproduce the text of this song.

Programme Notes

Mortal Wounds

“Dass ich trag Todeswunden, das ist der Menschen Tun.”

(“That I bear mortal wounds — that is the doing of humankind.”)

This concert takes its title from a lyric of Justinus Kerner, set by Robert Schumann in his 1840 *Kerner Lieder*. The line is disarmingly direct: Kerner tells us that the mortal wounds we carry are not the work of fate, but rather the work of other humans. Across this programme, that recognition — of humankind’s capacity to inflict the deepest suffering — echoes through music shaped by the losses of war, racial violence, and genocide. The songs span almost two hundred years, each confronting the consequences of harm inflicted by human hands and the challenge of finding hope amid the wreckage.

James MacMillan’s **The Children** is a setting of a poem by the Scottish writer William Soutar. Soutar wrote the poem in response to the bombing of Guernica in 1937, when aerial bombardment by Fascist forces devastated the Basque town in an attack which deliberately targeted civilians. Soutar does not describe the event itself, but rather the devastation of its aftermath, turning his gaze to children — their vulnerability, their innocence, and their inability to withstand forces beyond their control. The juxtaposition of Soutar’s grotesque poetry with the stark and hauntingly innocent music, with its eerie toy-box stylization and exposed unaccompanied lines, creates a disturbing and poignant memorial to the innocent victims of Guernica.

Amid the destruction of this Basque town, Guernica’s famous oak tree — long a symbol of Basque identity and independence — remained standing. Shortly after the bombing, when Francoist troops entered the town, an armed guard of local volunteers surrounded the tree, such was the importance of protecting this symbol of freedom. Joaquín Turina’s **El árbol de Guernica** recasts the tree not merely as a symbol of a people, but as a witness to history: its folk-inspired melody and rhythmic character situate the tree within a broader Spanish

cultural memory, rooted not only in violence, but also in dance and song.

From very public tragedy, we turn inward with Schumann’s *Kerner Lieder*. For Kerner, a physician and medical writer, the cure for humankind’s suffering was to be found in nature. In **Erstes Grün** (which Kerner originally titled ‘Frühlingskur’ — ‘Spring’s Cure’), the first buds of spring are a welcome remedy for the suffering speaker, a theme which is carried through in **Sehnsucht nach der Waldgegend**, in which the forest is cast as humankind’s true home and solace, its trees — not unlike Guernica’s oak — providing the inspiration for song. **Auf das Trinkglas eines verstorbenen Freundes** is another kind of memorial, this time honouring the dead through the raising of glasses. Finally, **Wer machte dich so krank?** poses a stark question, the speaker interrogating his own suffering before revealing its human source.

Francis Poulenc’s **La fraîcheur et le feu**, written in 1950, sets poetry by Paul Éluard, written a decade earlier in the first year of the Nazi occupation of France. The cycle opens with the sounds of war — the falling of bombs and a world in chaos — before moving through a series of miniature vignettes, each of which plays with the juxtaposition of light and dark. At the centre is the song from which the cycle takes its name, a miniature which espouses, in the simplest terms, Éluard’s philosophy of eternal opposites — light and dark, freshness and fire — as a symbol of the endurance of humanity. This idea is at the heart of the cycle’s penultimate song, in which the constantly-balanced personalities of man and woman suggest the possibility of a future beyond war.

At the heart of this programme is a pair of songs by Shawn E. Okpebholo, addressing racial violence perpetrated by white supremacists in the United States. Composed in 2020, **Two Black Churches** commemorates the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in which four young girls were killed, and the 2015 shooting at Mother Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, which claimed the lives of nine parishioners. The first song, the **Ballad of Birmingham**, is a narrative account of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing from the

perspectives of one victim and her mother, and the music blends the sounds of Black gospel with a more angular, contemporary aesthetic. Fragments of the civil rights anthem 'We Shall Overcome' and the well-known hymn 'Amazing Grace' recur through the song, placing the song in the broader context of Black American spirituality and resistance. The second song, **The Rain**, sets words by Marcus Amaker, poet laureate of Charleston, South Carolina. Here, the rain and floods of Charleston become a metaphor for the overwhelming devastation of racism and injustice, washing through the city and destroying entire communities. Nine parishioners were murdered in the Mother Emanuel AME Church shooting, and the song transfigures each of these victims into a chord, with the entire song built over a nine-chord harmonic progression. The song also quotes the hymn, 'Tis so Sweet to Trust in Jesus', which was sung at the AME Church in the aftermath of the shooting – a musical witness to a community who found faith, hope and song in a moment of deep crisis.

Ilse Weber also responded to crisis with song. Sent to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1942, she wrote over sixty poems during her imprisonment, setting many to music and teaching the melodies to the children of the camp. In 1944, she voluntarily moved to Auschwitz, in order to stay with her husband and son. It is believed that **Wiegala** was sung by Weber to children in the gas chambers as they awaited their death, a lullaby from one mother to all the young people in her care.

Richard Fariña's **Birmingham Sunday** returns us to the 1963 church bombing memorialised in Okpebholo's 'Ballad of Birmingham'. Originally sung by Fariña, and later by his sister-in-law, the great social activist and musician Joan Baez, this protest song takes its melody from a traditional Scottish folksong and its lyrics name the four young victims in turn, with a refrain that reminds the listener of the ongoing struggle for freedom, framing the atrocities of Birmingham within a broader civil rights movement.

The final two songs in the programme set poetry by the great American poet and social activist, Langston Hughes. In **The Negro Speaks of Rivers**, Hughes situates Black identity and experience within a vast historical continuum, stretching back to the ancient civilisations of Mesopotamia and Egypt, to assert the continual existence and autonomy of African Americans in the face of oppression. Margaret Bonds, a friend and frequent artistic collaborator of Hughes, sets the words with weight and grandeur, drawing on the musical languages of the spiritual, African American dance music, and the art song to create a rich and layered tapestry of sound to match the poem's depth. Finally, Florence Price's **My Dream** closes the programme with a vision of a future in which freedom, autonomy and independence are realised, quietly joyful and optimistic, and articulated through a musical language grounded entirely in African American traditions – a musical and cultural voice allowed to speak on its own terms.

Throughout this programme, Kerner's line resonates in different ways. The wounds in these songs are human in origin, but so too is the impulse to sing. Song, in all these contexts, becomes a vehicle for remembrance, protest, healing – and a means of imagining something beyond the violence that produces our mortal wounds.

Keval Shah, February 2026

Biographies

Theodore Platt

Baritone

The British-Russian baritone Theodore Platt, praised by critics for his “warm and powerful” voice (*Music OMH*), is one of the great talents of his generation. In the 2025–26 season, he makes his role début as Papageno (*Die Zauberflöte*) in a highly anticipated new production at Mozart Week in Salzburg, directed by Rolando Villazón. He also makes his début as Papageno at the Santander Festival. At the Royal Danish Opera in Copenhagen, Platt continues his artistic development with role debuts as Silvio (*Pagliacci*) and Dr Malatesta (*Don Pasquale*). Additionally, on the recital platform he gives performances of his critically acclaimed *Mortal Wounds* programme with pianist Keval Shah at Leeds Song, along with Schumann’s *Dichterliebe* in Schwerin.

In recent years, Platt has established himself with important role débuts, including Count Almaviva (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Lord Cecil (*Maria Stuarda*) and Figaro (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) as an ensemble member of the Royal Danish Opera Copenhagen (2024–25). Previously, he achieved success as Belcore (*L’elisir d’amore*) at the Glyndebourne Festival and in the title role of *Guillaume Tell* in St Gallen (2023–24). Another milestone was his debut with the Berlin Philharmonic under Kirill Petrenko as the Night Watchman (*Die Frau ohne Schatten*) at the Baden-Baden Easter Festival.

In addition to his operatic roles, Theodore Platt is regularly featured in concert performances. He has appeared at renowned festivals and concert halls, including song recitals at Wigmore Hall, the Oxford International Song Festival and Seriös at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. Platt’s recent début at the Hindsgavl Festival in Denmark consolidated his ongoing collaboration with Malcolm Martineau. He was a soloist in Bent Sørensen’s *St Matthew Passion* in Copenhagen, performed at the BBC Proms, and appeared multiple times during Mozart Week in Salzburg, including the concert with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra featuring Mozart’s *Der Schauspieldirektor*. Furthermore, upon invitation from Brigitte Fassbaender, he presented a song recital at the Eppaner Liedsommer festival and sang Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 under the direction of Roberto González-Monjas in the Großes Festspielhaus Salzburg. In 2025, Platt appeared at the Verbier Festival as Marco (*Gianni Schicchi*), sharing the stage with the bass-baritone Bryn Terfel in the title role.

Theodore Platt can be heard on Deutsche Grammophon STAGE+ as a Rising Star, presenting works by Britten, Duparc, Wolf, Sibelius and Rachmaninoff, and features as Marcello in excerpts from *La bohème* on Jonathan Tetelman’s acclaimed Deutsche Grammophon album *The Great Puccini*.



He has received numerous awards, including the Kathleen Ferrier Awards, the Prix Thierry Mermod at the Verbier Festival, and third prize at the 2025 Concours musical international de Montréal. Together with pianist Keval Shah, he won first prize at the 2022 International Art Song Competition Stuttgart.

Born in London, Theodore Platt studied music at St John’s College, Cambridge. He is an alumnus of the Verbier Festival Academy and the Royal College of Music Opera Studio. He attended the Internationale Meistersinger Akademie (IMA) and was a member of the Bavarian State Opera’s Opera Studio in the 2020–21 and 2021–22 seasons. In 2022, he was awarded the prestigious Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship.

Keval Shah

Piano

Born into a Gujarati family from East Africa, Keval Shah grew up on the outskirts of London in a home filled with music. The soundtrack of his childhood was a mix of Bollywood film scores, ghazals, Hindustani classical music and the bhajans he sang with his grandmother. Aged seven, Keval began piano lessons, following in his sister's footsteps, but it was singing Mozart in a school choir at the age of twelve that ignited his love of Western classical music.

This passion led him to study Music at the University of Cambridge as both pianist and choral singer, where he first encountered the world of artsong and Lieder — a genre in which he discovered a synthesis of all his interests: the piano, singing, language and poetry. This discovery became all-consuming, first taking him to the Royal Academy of Music as a collaborative pianist, where his teachers included Michael Dussek, Audrey Hyland and Malcolm Martineau, and then propelling him towards a career as both performer and teacher. After a short period as a freelancer in London, Keval's path shifted profoundly when, at the age of twentyfive, he was appointed to the faculty of the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki — becoming the youngest professor in the institution's history.

From his new base in Finland, Keval's career expanded rapidly: performances in major European concert halls and festivals; collaborations with renowned singers including Karita Mattila and Roderick Williams; invitations to teach at leading conservatoires across Europe; and, with his regular duo partner Theodore Platt, success in one of the world's most prestigious Lied competitions, the Hugo Wolf Akademie Competition in Stuttgart. These achievements marked the continuation of a path defined by his deep commitment to the artsong tradition.

Yet Keval's early years in Finland came to symbolise more than professional momentum: they represented distance — not only the distance travelled in his musical career, but also the cultural distance from the music of his heritage. This realisation prompted him to reconnect with his Indian roots, initiating a profound and irreversible shift in his artistic perspective. From this emerged a renewed creative vision rooted in crosscultural dialogue, expressed through innovative programming and the exploration and creation of music that transcends cultural boundaries, defies easy categorisation and honours the multiple musical lineages that have shaped him.

Today, Keval is an artist who moves freely across the musical landscape, collaborating with performers who share his curiosity, experimental spirit and resistance to genre boundaries. Working regularly with singers such as Fleur Barron, Anna ElKhashem, Aphrodite Patoulidou and Theodore Platt, he creates concerts that forge connections between classical song and musical traditions from around the world, presenting these programmes at leading festivals and concert



halls across Europe. In 2024 he gave the European première of a song cycle by Shawn Okpebholo blending gospel and jazz within a contemporary classical idiom, pairing it with cycles by Schumann and Poulenc in a programme exploring the vulnerability of children in conflict zones. That same year, working with Jess Dandy, he created *Eternity in an Hour*, a project uniting a newly commissioned cycle of Sanskrit songs by Reena Esmail — setting portions of the *Bhagavad Gita* — with songs from the Western canon. Praised by *The Times* as “profound in its spiritual depth and intellectual curiosity,” the project typifies Keval's curatorial approach.

In 2025 he again collaborated with Reena Esmail on his first solo-piano show, devising an hourlong set of music blending elements of Hindustani classical, Gujarati folk and Hindu devotional traditions with forms and textures from Western classical music. The project premièred at Flow Festival, presented alongside an eclectic lineup including Charli XCX, Hermeto Pascoal and Ganavya — a testament to Keval's ability to reach audiences across genres.

This creative freedom continues to shape his work within the classical sphere. His expertise as a pianist is reflected in recent recordings with Theodore Platt for Deutsche Grammophon, and an international schedule of recitals and collaborations. He maintains an active teaching career, with engagements at institutions such as the Juilliard School in New York and the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo, and has served on the juries of major competitions, including the International Mirjam Helin Singing Competition alongside artists such as Dawn Upshaw and Soile Isokoski.

Keval is part of the artistic team of Helsinki Seriös, Finland's leading international chambermusic series. He is also a public speaker and broadcaster, hosting the interview series *Siba Talks*, presenting for BBC Radio, and appearing frequently in national and international media. His life and career are the subject of a documentary film by Antti Vuori, scheduled for release in 2026.

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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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