



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 at 2pm

Lunchtime Recital

TOURNAMENT GALLERY,
ROYAL ARMOURIES MUSEUM



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, 2pm
TOURNAMENT GALLERY, ROYAL ARMOURIES MUSEUM



Lunchtime Recital

'If I could shut the gate against my thoughts': an exploration of melancholy

Nardus Williams soprano

Elizabeth Kenny lute

Soprano Nardus Williams and lutenist Elizabeth Kenny join Leeds Song in an intimate recital designed to mark the 400th anniversary of the death of John Dowland, performed in the remarkable setting of the Royal Armouries Museum.

Winner of the Rising Talent award at the 2022 International Opera Awards, and praised for her "magnetism", Nardus Williams has been described as "a knockout combination of melting vulnerability and lustrous ardour" (*The Times*). Williams excels in recital, concert and operatic performances in venues in the UK and abroad and it's a real thrill to invite her back to Leeds Song for her first full-length recital with us. Elizabeth Kenny is one of the world's leading lute players and an academic, with a history of performing with many of the major early music ensembles and a back catalogue of celebrated recordings that show her to be a master of versatility and imaginative collaborations.

Please note that this performance takes place during in a room which is part of a public space open to museum visitors.

John Danyel

If I could shut the gate against my thoughts

Nicholas Lanier

Qual musico gentil

John Dowland

Flow, my tears

Giulio Caccini

Alme luci beate

Robert Johnson

Come, heavy Sleep

Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger

Toccata

John Dowland

Now cease my wand'ring eyes

Francesca Caccini

Lasciatemi qui solo

Robert Johnson

Have you seen the bright lily grow?

Claudio Monteverdi

Si dolce è' l tormento

Lucrezia Vizzana

O Magnum Mysterium

Barbara Strozzi

Lagrimie mie

Francesca Caccini

Non sò se quel sorriso

John Dowland

Can she excuse my wrongs

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

John Danyel (1564-1626)

If I could shut the gate against my thoughts

If I could shut the gate against my thoughts,
And keep out sorrow from this room within,
Or memory could cancel all the notes
Of my misdeeds, and I unthink my sin,
How free, how clear, how clean my soul should lie,
Discharged of such a loathsome company.

Or, were there other rooms without my heart,
That did not to my conscience join so near,
Where I might lodge the thoughts of sin apart,
That I might not their clam'rous crying hear,
What peace, what joy, what ease should I possess,
Freed from their horrors that my soul oppress.

But oh, my Saviour, who my refuge art,
Let thy dear mercies stand 'twixt them and me,
And be the wall to separate my heart,
So that I may at length repose me free,
That peace and joy and rest may be within,
And I remain divided from my sin.

Anon

John Dowland (1563-1626)

Flow, my tears

Flow, my tears, fall from your springs!
Exiled for ever, let me mourn;
Where night's black bird her sad infamy sings,
There let me live forlorn.

Down vain lights, shine you no more!
No nights are dark enough for those
That in despair their lost fortunes deplore.
Light doth but shame disclose.

Never may my woes be relieved,
Since pity is fled;
Then tears and sighs and groans my weary days
Of all joys have deprived.

From the highest spire of contentment
My fortune is thrown;
And fear and grief and pain for my deserts
Are my hopes, since hope is gone.

Hark! you shadows that in darkness dwell,
Learn to contemn light.
Happy, happy they that in hell
Feel not the world's despite.

Anon

Robert Johnson (1583-1633)

Come, heavy sleep

Come, heavy Sleep, the image of true Death,
And close up these my weary weeping eyes,
Whose spring of tears doth stop my vital breath,
And tears my heart with Sorrow's sigh-swoll'n cries.
Come and possess my tired through-worn soul,
That living dies till thou on me be stole.

Come, shadow of my end, and shape of rest
Allied to death, child to his blackfac'd night
Come thou and charme these rebels in my breast,
Whose waking fancies doe my mind affright.
O come sweet sleepe, come or I die for ever:
Come ere my last sleepe comes, or come never.

Anon

John Dowland

Now cease my wand'ring eyes

Now cease my wand'ring eyes,
Strange beauties to admire,
In change least comfort lies,
Long joys yield long desire.

One faith, one love,
Makes our frail pleasures eternal, and in
 sweetness prove,
New hopes new joys,
Are still with sorrow declining unto deep annoys.

One man hath but one soul,
Which art cannot divide,
If all one soul must love,
Two loves must be denied.

One soul, one love,
By faith and merit united cannot remove,
Distracted sprites
Are everchanging and hapless in their delights.

Nature two eyes hath giv'n,
All beauty to import,
As well in earth as heav'n,
But she hath giv'n one heart.

That though we see
Ten thousand beauties, yet in us, in us one should be,
One steadfast love,
Because our hearts stand fix'd although our eyes do
move.

Anon

Robert Johnson

Have you seen the bright lily grow?

Have you seen but a whyte Lilie grow
before rude hands had touch'd it;
Have you mark'd but the fall of the snow
before the Earth hath smucht it.
Have you felt the wool of Beaver,
Or Swansdown ever;
or have smelt of the Bud of the Bryer,
Or the Nard in the fire;

Or have tasted the Bag of the Bee;
O so whyte, O so soft, O so sweet, so sweet,
so sweet is she!
O so whyte, O so soft, O so sweet,
so sweet, so sweet is she!

Ben Jonson (1572-1637)

Lucrezia Vizzana (1590-1662)

O Magnum Mysterium

O magnum mysterium
et admirabile sacramentum
ut animalia viderent Dominum natum
jacentem in praesepio!
Beata Virgo cujus viscera
meruerunt portare Dominum Christum.
Alleluia!

Anon

O great mystery,
and wonderful sacrament,
that animals should see the newborn Lord,
lying in a manger!
O blessed virgin, whose womb
was worthy to bear the Lord Jesus Christ.
Alleluia!

Francesca Caccini (1587-1640)

Non sò se quel sorriso

Non sò se quel sorriso
mi schernisce o m'affida
se quel mirarmi fiso
m'alletta o mi diffida.
Già schernito e deriso
da bella donna infida
non vorrei più che'l core
fosse strazio d'amore.

Non vo' più per dolcezza
d'immaginato bene.
Nutrimi d'amarezza
vivendo sempre in pene,
né per nuova bellezza
portar i lacci e catene,
né graver l'alma ancella
di inferma novella.

Se tu vuoi ch'io t'adori
d'amor stella gentile,
ti canti, e ch'io t'onori
su la mia cetra docile
a più degni tesori
a guideron non vile
chiama l'avida speme
che spregiata già teme.

Soffrir'io più non voglio
la ferità crudele
d'un cor cinto d'orgoglio,
d'un anima infedele'
Né tra scoglio né tra scoglie
affidar più le vele
della mia libertate
senza certa pietate.

Anon

I do not know if that smile

I do not know if that smile
sneers at me or reassures me;
if that fixed look
attracts me or warn me.
Already mocked and derided
by a beautiful, but unfaithful woman,
I do not want this heart
tormented by love.

I care no more about the sweetness
of imagined goodness.
You feed me with bitterness,
living always in pain,
a new love
no longer laces and chains me,
I will not burden the maiden's soul
with a pitiful story.

If you want me to adore you,
gentle star of love,
I sing of you, and honour you
on my sweet lyre,
toward more worthy treasures
guided not by a coward,
I call the eager hope
which scorns fear.

I no longer want to suffer
the cruel wound
of a heart bound by pride;
an unfaithful soul.
No longer between rocks,
I will not trust the sails
of my liberty
without the certainty of compassion.

John Dowland

Can she excuse my wrongs

Can she excuse my wrongs with Virtue's cloak?
Shall I call her good when she proves unkind?
Are those clear fires which vanish into smoke?
Must I praise the leaves where no fruit I find?
No, no; where shadows do for bodies stand,
That may'st be abus'd if thy sight be dim.
Cold love is like to words written on sand,
Or to bubbles which on the water swim.
Wilt thou be thus abused still,
Seeing that she will right thee never?
If thou canst not o'ercome her will,
Thy love will be thus fruitless ever.

Was I so base, that I might not aspire
Unto those high joys which she holds from me?
As they are high, so high is my desire,
If she this deny, what can granted be?
If she will yield to that which reason is,
It is reason's will that love should be just.
Dear, make me happy still by granting this,
Or cut off delays if that die I must.
Better a thousand times to die
Than for to love thus still tormented
Dear, but remember it was I
Who for thy sake did die contented.

Anon

Nicholas Lanier (1588-1666)

Qual musico gentil

Qual musico gentil, prima che chiara
Altamente la lingua al canto snodi;
All'armonia gli animi altrui prepara
Con dolci ricercate in bassi modi:
Così costei, che nella doglia amara
Già tutte non oblia l'arti e le frodi;
Fa di sospir breve contento in prima,
Per dispor l'alma in cui le voci imprima.

Torquato Tasso (1544-1595)

As a fine musician

As a fine musician, before clear
And high his tongue he loosens in song,
To harmony the souls of others he prepares
With sweet improvisations in low modes:
Thus she, who in bitter pain
Still does not forget all artifices and deceits,
Makes of sighing a brief concord first,
To dispose the soul upon which she would
impress her tones.

Nicholas Lanier (1588-1666)

Alme luci beate

Alme luci beate
Che dolcemente ardeste
E dolce distruggeste
L'incenerito core,
Chi di bei lampi or farà lieto Amore?

Io vi lasso mie scorte,
Io mi parto bei numi,
Io vò lungi miei numi,
E non ho spem' ohimè che mi conforte.

Alme luci beate,
Se per sì lunga etate
Amando e rimirando
Voi foste il mio gioire,
Or per sì lunga etate
Amando e rimembrando
Sarete il mio martire.

Divine Light

Divine light
That sweetly burned
And consumed
My ashen heart,
Whom will love now delight with your
lovely flashes?
I leave you, my beacons,
I depart for distant parts,
My divine ones,
And I have no more hope to comfort me.

Divine lights,
If for so long,
Loving and gazing,
You were my delight,
Now for just as long,
Loving and remembering,
You will be my martyrdom.

Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger (1580-1651)

Toccata

Instrumental solo

Francesca Caccini

Lasciatemi qui solo

Lasciatemi qui solo
Torante augelli al nido
Mentre l'anim'e 'l duolo
Spiro su questo lido
Altri meco non voglio
Ch'un freddo scoglio
E 'l moi fatal martire
Lasciatemi morire
Dolcissime sirene
Che'n si pietoso canto

Raddolcite mie pene
Fate soave il pianto
Movet' il nuoto altronde
Togliete all'onde
I crudi sdegni, e l'ire
Lasciatemi morire
Placidissimi venti
Torante al vostro speco
Sol miei duri lamenti
Chieggo che restin meco

Vostri sospir non chiamo
Solingo bramo
I miei dolori finire
Lasciatemi morire

Felicissimi amanti
Torante al bel diletto
Fere eccels'ò notanti
Fuggite il mesto aspetto
Sol dolcezza di morte
Apra le porte
All'ultimo languire
Lasciatemi morire

Avarissimi lumi
Che su 'l morir versate
Amarissimi fiumi
Tard'e vostra pietate
Gia mi sento mancare
O luci avar'e
Tarde al mio conforto
Gia sono esangu'e smorto

Leave me here alone

Leave me here alone,
Return, birds, to your nests,
while my soul, and my pain
I give up on these shores.
I want no one else with me
Other than a cold rock,
And my fated death.
Leave me to die
Sweetest sirens
Who with such merciful song

Sweeten my sufferings and
Soften my weeping
Go elsewhere to swim
Dampen the waves'
Cruel scorn, and their ire
Leave me to die.
Calmer winds
Return to your cave
I ask that only my harsh laments
Remain with me

I do not call upon your sighs
Alone I wish
To end my sufferings
Leave me alone to die.

Happiest lovers
Return to your beautiful pleasures
Wild beasts, whether birds or fish
Flee from this sad countenance
Only the sweetness of death
Should open its doors
To this final languishing
Leave me to die.

Most avaricious eyes
That on point of death spill
The bitterest rivers
Your pity comes too late
Already I feel myself fail
Oh eyes, stingy
And slow to comfort me
I am already bloodless and lifeless.

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

Si dolce è'l tormento

Si dolce è'l tormento
Ch'in seno mi sta,
Ch'io vivo contento
Per cruda beltà.
Nel ciel di bellezza
S'accreschi fierezza
Et manchi pietà:
Che sempre qual scoglio
All'onda d'orgoglio
Mia fede sarà.

La speme fallace
Rivolgam' il piè.
Diletto ne pace
Non scendano a me.
E l'empia ch'adoro
Mi nieghi ristoro
Di buona mercè:
Tra doglia infinita,
Tra speme tradita
Vivrà la mia fè.

Per foco e per gelo
Riposo non hò.
Nel porto del Cielo
Riposo haverò.
Se colpo mortale
Con rigido strale
Il cor m'impiegò,
Cangiando mia sorte
Col dardo di morte
Il cor sanerò.

Se fiamma d'amore
Già mai non sentì
Quel riggido core
Ch'il cor mi rapì,
Se nega pietate
La cruda beltate
Che l'alma invaghì:
Ben fia che dolente,
Pentita e languente
Sospirimi un dì.

Carlo Milanuzzi (c1590-c1647)

So sweet is the torment

So sweet is the torment
That lies in my heart,
That I can live content
With unfeeling, infatuating beauty.
In this earthly paradise
Vanity grows
And piety fades:
Yet like a rock
Against the wave of pride
My faith will always hold fast.

False hope
Turns away from me,
Neither pleasure nor peace
Descend upon me,
And the unholy woman I adore
Does not grant me the relief
Of her favour:
Amidst infinite pain
Amidst forlorn hope
My faith will live on.

From fire and ice
I have no respite
but at heaven's gates
I will find peace...
if the fatal blow
of an unwavering arrow
pierced my heart,
overturning my fate
brought by death's dart
I will heal my heart...

If the flame of love
Has never yet been felt
By the hard heart
That has stolen my own,
If I am shown no pity
By the cruel siren
That has enchanted my soul:
Then let it be that one day,
Languishing in pain and repentance,
She will sigh for me.

Barbara Strozzi (1619-1664)

Lagrimie mie

Lagrimie mie, à che vi trattenete?
Perché non isfogate il fier dolore
Che mi toglie'l respiro e opprime il core?
Lidia, che tant'adoro,
Perch'un guardo pietoso, ahi, mi donò,
Il paterno rigor l'imprigionò.
Tra due mura rinchiusa
Sta la bella innocente,
Dove giunger non può raggio di sole;
E quel che più mi duole
Ed' accresc'al mio mal tormenti e pene,
È che per mia cagione
Provi male il mio bene.
E voi, lumi dolenti, non piangete?
Lagrimie mie, à che vi trattenete?
Lidia, ahimè, veggio mancarmi
L'idol mio che tanto adoro;
Sta colei tra duri marmi,
Per cui spiro e pur non moro.
Se la morte m'è gradita,
Hor che son privo di spene,
Dhe [deh], toglietemi la vita,
Ve ne prego, aspre mie pene.
Ma ben m'accorgo che per tormentarmi
Maggiormente la sorte
Mi niega anco la morte.
Se dunque è vero, o Dio,
Che sol del pianto mio
Il rio destino ha sete,
Lagrimie mie, à che vi trattenete?

Pietro Dolfino (1444-1525)

My tears

My tears, why do you hold back?
Why do you not let burst forth the fierce pain
that takes my breath and oppresses my heart?
Because she looked on me with a favourable glance,
Lidia, whom I so much adore,
is imprisoned by her stern father.
Between two walls
the beautiful innocent one is enclosed,
where the sun's rays can't reach her;
and what grieves me most
and adds torment and pain to my suffering,
is that my love
suffers on my account.
And you, grieving eyes, you don't weep?
My tears, why do you hold back?
Alas, I miss Lidia,
the idol that I so much adore;
she's enclosed in hard marble,
the one for whom I sigh and yet do not die.
Because I welcome death,
now that I'm deprived of hope,
Ah, take away my life,
I implore you, my harsh pain.
But I well realize that to torment me
all the more
fate denies me even death.
Thus since it's true, oh God,
that wicked destiny
thirsts only for my weeping,
tears, why do you hold back?

Programme Notes

'If I could shut the gate against my thoughts': an exploration of melancholy

And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.

1 Samuel 16:23

*Beneath the bamboo grove, alone,
I seize my lute and sit and croon;
No ear to hear me, save mine own;
No eye to see me, save the moon.*
Wang Wei (699-759)

...life is short, time asks for its due.

The Seikilos epitaph (the oldest surviving musical notation) c.1-2 Century AD

As the examples above demonstrate, the impulse to marry melancholy with music is universal, and profoundly ancient. This instinct was alive and well in 16th and 17th-century Europe, and indeed it reached such a peak of exquisite refinement in the music of the period, that lute song is now indelibly associated with melancholy. However, even within this timeframe, there was an incredible richness and range to sentiments of grief and melancholy, and we will be exploring these in today's programme.

The specific concept of 'melancholy' has its roots in the four humours, as first codified by the Ancient Greeks. Tantalisingly, they may have their origins in even older traditions, with the cultures of Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia or India suggested as the source. However, through Hippocrates and later Galen, humourism began to emerge as a system of medicine, with four vital bodily fluids identified: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. A significant imbalance of one of these was thought to have negative physical consequences, with each humour having its own specific maladies. Black bile was associated with a melancholic temperament - with the word deriving from the Ancient Greek for black bile μέλαινα χολή (melaina kholé).

Humourism also informed much artistic creation - for example it was commonplace to think about Shakespearean characters through the prism of the humours. But one humour seemed rife for artistic exploration - melancholy. We recall, for instance, Albrecht Dürer's enigmatic, and haunting engraving *Melancholia I*.

But it is in 16th-century England that we begin today's programme.

Of our first composer, John Danyel (c.1564-c.1626), little is known. The historic record does however make mention of him at key points in his life, from which we can trace the contours of his career - born in Somerset in c.1564, he later attended Oxford, before being drawn into the orbit of the royal household. His song **If I could shut the gate against my thought**, is his only known sacred song, yet it is indisputably saturnine, evincing that melancholy is not just the preserve of the lovelorn.

It is exactly this sentiment that we associate with John Dowland (c.1563-1626), however. It should be noted that this is not a posthumous confluence - indeed to give it an anachronistic spin - melancholy was very much part of his 'brand'. This can be seen when he knowingly entitled one work 'Semper Dowland, semper dolens' (always Dowland, always doleful). It is not known for certain where he was born (London and Dublin have been suggested), yet this is not entirely un-apt: he was an inveterate traveller, journeying to France, Germany and Italy. Later, in a case of life imitating art, Dowland followed that famous fictional melancholic, Hamlet, to the court of Denmark. He was not a natural-born courtier however, and following frequent absences, was sacked. Finally, in 1612 he was appointed lutenist to James I, and resided in London until his death in 1626. The first work by Dowland that we will hear today is **Flow my tears**, literally his signature work - such was its popularity that he would at times incorporate its title into his signature. Still of a melancholic disposition, but now taking a more Platonic slant on love, is **Now cease my wand'ring eyes**.

Robert Johnson (c.1583-1633), like so many of the figures in tonight's programme, was a lutenist, singer and composer. He is primarily noted today for writing music for the King's Men, composing for plays by Shakespeare, Johnson and Fletcher. In later years these took place within the candlelit interior of the Blackfriars Theatre, with the very atmosphere inside the theatre echoed in the dark and macabre plots of Stuart drama. Something of this shadowy and sombre mood hangs over **Come, heavy sleep**, on the darkest edges of melancholy.

It is no surprise then that there was pushback against the sometimes oppressive gloom that is inherent within melancholy. The next section seeks to explore these subversions of melancholy. But first we will let the light back in with Johnson's hopeful and optimistic **Have you seen the bright lily grow?**

Born in Florence, Francesca Caccini (1587-c.1645) virtuoso singer and lutenist, swiftly progressed to become the highest paid musician in the Medici court, under the beneficence of Christian de Lorraine. This exceptional confluence of both female composer and patron, perhaps explains the liberated and subversive perspective of her *Il Primo Libro delle Musiche* (1618), from which **Non sò se quel sorriso** is taken. In this song, as so often in the songs of Francesca Caccini and Barbara Strozzi, we observe the male narrator being subtly mocked and teased by a knowing woman who is clearly unimpressed by his melancholic professions of love. By way of contrast, later in the programme we will hear her **Lasciatemi qui solo**, a deeply earnest and plaintive lament.

Can she excuse my wrongs, published by Dowland in 1597 continues the theme of subversive melancholy. Whilst the text of the song (often attributed to the Earl of Essex) is that of a conventional bittersweet love song, the music takes the form of a vigorous dance - the galliard, with this juxtaposition imparting a pleasing melancholy to the listener.

We go from the most well-known of lute song composers in Dowland, to undoubtedly the least recognisable name in today's programme - Lucrezia Vizzana (1590-1662). Vizzana entered the convent of *Santa Christina* in her native Bologna at the age of 8, following the death of her mother. It was here that she received a musical education from her aunt, the convent organist. The collection from which **O Magnum Mysterium** derives is the only set of works published by a Bolognese nun of the period (compared to around 80 in Milan). Yet she was certainly not unaware of the musical trends of the day - her writing shows a close familiarity with the latest developments in the works of Monteverdi. Specifically, this idea was *Recitar cantando*, or 'speaking in song', and was one of a wide range of stylistic innovations instituted by Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), the towering musical genius of his era. Hugely influential even within his own lifetime, he was crucial in the development of a number of musical genres, not least of which was opera, with his *L'Orfeo* of 1607 the earliest opera still in the wider repertoire today. Despite his musical novelties, in **Si dolce è'l tormento** we are on very familiar poetic ground. In translation its title 'so sweet is the torment' is pure Dowland.

Also influenced by Monteverdi, was Nicholas Lanier (1588-1666). From a family of court musicians, Lanier was appointed as the first Master of the Kings Music

in 1625. This enabled him to travel to Italy where he became familiar with Monteverdi's work, and subsequently was the earliest English composer to write in the new style. Seemingly at the nexus of all the cultural developments of early 17th Century, Lanier was also responsible for convincing Charles I to bring Anthony van Dyck to England. In **Qual musico gentil**, Lanier sets Torquato Tasso's poem which contemplates the link between music and melancholy.

In the vanguard of the new style was Giulio Caccini (1551-1618). Indeed, the title of the collection from which **Alme luci beate** originates is *Nuove musiche e nuova maniera di scriverle* or 'New music, and a new manner of writing it'. Aside from his work as a singer and lutenist, Giulio Caccini was important in training the next generation of singers in the new techniques now required by vocal music, not least amongst which were his daughters Francesca and Settimia Caccini.

Whilst Monteverdi and G Caccini had a profound effect upon styles of vocal writing, the supreme composer for the lute (theorbo and chitarrone) in this period was the Austrian-Italian Giovanni Girolamo Kapsperger (1580-1651). In particular, his **Toccata's** for solo theorbo, are notable for their harmonic contrasts and rhythmic unpredictability.

Lagrimie mie concludes today's programme, written by the Venetian, Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677). A virtuoso singer and lutenist, Strozzi was the most widely published composer of secular songs in the 17th Century. Already a noted performer by the age of 16, Strozzi was able to fashion her own stage - the *Academia degli Unisoni*, over which she presided - fostering debate, rhetoric and musical performance. However, the recondite meetings of the *Academia* precipitated allegations against her, alluding to the well-worn connection between music-making and sexual licence. Her songs encompass an exceptional range of subject matter and in 'Lagrimie mie' we see Strozzi at her most doleful, harnessing her full vocal armoury to express the bitterest sorrows. And amidst the very armoury we are situated in today, I hope despite all the melancholy, these choleric and bellicose surroundings can help keep your humours well balanced.

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Biographies

Nardus Williams

Soprano

Nardus Williams, winner of the Rising Star award at the 2022 International Opera Awards, has quickly become one of the most exciting and versatile British singers of her generation. Praised for her “magnetism” and “unobtrusive intimacy” (*The Arts Desk*), she has “confirmed her place as an outstanding artist” (*Early Music Review*).

In the 2025–26 season, she returns to the operatic stage to make her role début in the title role of *Partenope* for English National Opera (ENO) under Christian Curnyn. Following her acclaimed performance as the Contessa (*Le nozze di Figaro*) last season for ENO, she reprises the role in a new production for Norwegian National Opera under Ottavio Dantone. She also appears as Asteria (*Tamerlano*) for the London Handel Festival under Laurence Cummings.

In concert, Nardus tours Handel’s *Solomon* with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, singing the role of Solomon’s Queen. She performs *Messiah* with the Aalborg Symphony Orchestra, the Academy of Ancient Music and the Dunedin Consort, and joins the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland for Schumann’s *Das Paradies und die Peri* in the title role. Nardus also returns to ENO for *Mozart’s Women*, a concert celebrating the women in Mozart’s life, which will be filmed for Sky Arts.

Building on the success of her recital appearances at the BBC Proms and Snape Maltings, Nardus returns to Wigmore Hall on International Women’s Day with a new programme exploring the theme of “Women and Power”, in collaboration with Elizabeth Kenny and Dame Mary Beard. She also gives further recitals with Elizabeth Kenny at Leeds Song, Brighton Early Music Festival, Banbury Early Music Festival and again at Wigmore Hall.

Recent operatic highlights include the world première of George Lewis’ *The Comet/Poppea* as Poppea at MOCA in Los Angeles; Adina (*L’elisir d’amore*) for Glyndebourne; Helena (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*) and Donna Anna (*Don Giovanni*) for Opéra de Rouen Normandie; Anne Trulove (*The Rake’s Progress*) for the Glyndebourne Tour; Fiordiligi (*Così fan tutte*) for English National Opera and Opera Australia; the Countess (*Le nozze di Figaro*) for Opera Holland Park, Glyndebourne and English National Opera; and Belinda in the world première of *Dido’s Ghost* — a co-commission with the Dunedin Consort, Mahogany Opera and the Barbican.

A prolific concert artist, Williams has sung Tippett’s *A Child of Our Time* with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and the Glyndebourne Sinfonia; Angelo (*La Resurrezione*) on tour with Le Banquet Céleste; Handel’s *Gloria* with the Tonkünstler Orchestra at the Grafenegg Festival and with Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century at the Concertgebouw; Handel’s *Brockes Passion* with the English Concert; *Messiah*



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with the Philharmonia Orchestra and at the BBC Proms with the Academy of Ancient Music; the title role in Handel’s *Esther* at the London Handel Festival; Fauré’s *Requiem* with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra; Mozart’s Mass in C minor at the BBC Proms, with the NFM Wrocław Philharmonic Orchestra and with the London Philharmonic Orchestra; Haydn’s *Nelson Mass* and Ethel Smyth’s *Mass in D* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra; Beethoven’s *Missa solemnis* with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Hanover Band; Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 with The Hallé; Vivaldi’s *Gloria* with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; Bach’s *St John Passion* and Handel’s *Clori, Tirsi e Fileno* with the Dunedin Consort at the Edinburgh International Festival; and Bach’s *St Matthew Passion* with The Bach Choir.

Other highlights include her appearance as soloist for *The Rest is History* podcast live on stage with orchestra at the Royal Albert Hall; a concert featuring arias from Handel’s heroines in her Berlin Philharmonie début with the Academy of Ancient Music; and tours with the Dunedin Consort, Europa Galante and Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century. Nardus’ debut album *Handel in Rome*, featuring Handel’s Italian cantatas and recorded with the Dunedin Consort under John Butt, was released on Linn Records in 2024 to great critical acclaim.

Nardus has made recital appearances at Wigmore Hall, St John’s Smith Square, Leeds Song and the Oxford International Song Festival. Alongside Elizabeth Kenny, she has recently performed at Wigmore Hall, LIFE Victoria Barcelona, the Tower of London for Spitalfields Music and the Cambridge Music Festival. She continues to tour her recital programme *I Never Laid Eyes on Aeneas...: Women’s Stories from the Ancient World* alongside Dame Mary Beard and Elizabeth Kenny.

Nardus was a member of the Houston Grand Opera Studio for the 2018–19 season and is a former Jerwood Young Artist at Glyndebourne and a former Harewood Artist at English National Opera. She trained at the International Opera School at the Royal College of Music, where she was the sole recipient of the prestigious Kiri Te Kanawa Scholarship.

Elizabeth Kenny

Lute

Elizabeth Kenny is one of Europe's leading lute players. Her playing has been described as "incandescent" (*Music and Vision*), "radical" (*The Independent*) and "indecently beautiful" (*Toronto Post*). She has performed with many of the world's foremost period instrument ensembles, gaining wide experience of different approaches to musicmaking. Her extensive discography includes collaborations across Europe and the USA, as well as critically acclaimed solo recordings featuring repertoire from the ML Lute Book and songs by Lawes, Purcell and Dowland.

This season she performs at Temple Music, Oxford Song, Wigmore Hall, Leeds Song and Early Music in Yorkshire, and presents her programme *Cubaroque* with Nicholas Mulroy and Toby Carr at the Festival van Vlaanderen Antwerpen and the Cambridge Early Music Festival. The programme features music from both 17th-century Europe and 20th-century Latin America.

In recent seasons, Elizabeth has performed a series of concerts with the Benedetti Baroque Orchestra, coinciding with their Decca Classics album release, and has appeared at numerous festivals including the BBC Proms in Scotland, Oxford International Song Festival, Bath BachFest, Shakespeare in Music, Petworth, Beverley Early Music, Cambridge Summer Music, LIFE Victoria Barcelona, Chiltern Arts, Winchester Chamber Music, Salisbury International Arts, Tetbury Music, Spitalfields Music, the London International Festival of Early Music, the Trigonale Festival der Alten Musik in Austria, Britten Pears Arts, Ludlow English Song Weekend and Newbury Spring Festival. She has also continued her collaboration with Isabelle Faust, Kristian Bezuidenhout and Kristin von der Goltz in programmes featuring Bach, Biber and Westhoff across Europe.

In 2007, Elizabeth founded her ensemble Theatre of the Ayre, dedicated to 17th-century vocal music with an improvisational character. She devised and directed *Le malade imaginaire* and *A Restoration Tempest* for the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment at the Sam



Wanamaker Playhouse. The group's debut recording, *The Masque of Moments* (Linn), was named "Disc of the Week" on BBC Radio 3's *Record Review*.

She has premiered works by James MacMillan, Benjamin Oliver, Heiner Goebbels and Rachel Stott. In June 2019, she premiered Nico Muhly's *Berceuse* for solo theorbo, written for her in 2018, which appears on her album *Ars longa: Old and new music for theorbo* for Linn Records, nominated in the 2020 *BBC Music Magazine Awards* (Instrumental category). Elizabeth also appears alongside Ian Bostridge on Warner Classics' *Shakespeare Songs*, which won the 2017 Grammy Award for Best Classical Solo Vocal Album.

She is currently Professor of Lute and Theorbo at the Royal Academy of Music.

A vibrant, surreal stage production scene. A woman in a colorful, patterned dress sits atop a zebra with black and white stripes. The zebra is decorated with a garland of flowers. In the foreground, a person in a red hooded robe is seen from behind, looking towards the stage. The background is filled with colorful balloons and confetti, creating a festive atmosphere. The Opera North logo is in the top left corner.

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