Spitalfields music festival

A Celebration of the Voice

The Carice Singers

Tuesday 1st July | Bishopsgate Institute

Arthur Bliss	River Music 1967
Max Gibson	...cold, clear, and blue...
Claire Cope	In its light
Aníbal Vidal	Theatre of Origins (World Premiere)
Daniel Soley	With wonders to hear
Elif Karlıdağ	S̈ingl̈iyi̇ i̇r

George Parris Conductor

The Carice Singers

Sopranos
Hannah Dienes-Williams, Olivia Hugh-Jones, Eve McGrath, Anna Semple

Tenors
Matthew Howard, James Robinson, Ed Woodhouse, Will Wright

Altos
Jessica Gillingwater, Nathan Mercieca, Charlotte Sleet, Joy Sutcliffe

Basses
Eoghan Desmond, Thomas Lowen, Stuart O'Hara, Henry Saywell

As Master of the Queen's Music, it fell to **Sir Arthur Bliss** to compose an anthem for the opening of the Queen Elizabeth Hall in 1967. Bliss asked the poet Cecil Day Lewis to provide a text that would link the idea of music with the River Thames. The vision of River Music 1967 ended up being broader than that: it speaks of how both art and river will outlive us all, and tells us to 'honour the fluent forms, the fountainy strains of calm and force'. Bliss' music responds to this colourfully with pageant-like variety, but it also feels like a powerful commentary on a new age of uncertainty. Many of the rivercraft mentioned in the poem were being phased out during the 1960s in favour of modern launches that could carry a much larger quantity of freight. Yet the piece can still sound fresh and meaningful in 2025, fifty years after its composer's death, especially when performed in close proximity to the great river.

Showcasing new music is one of this evening's agendas, and we next come to two pieces that were brought to life and premiered at the 2024 New Voices Academy, generously hosted by the Three Choirs Festival.

Max Gibson, a British-Irish composer, writer, and educator currently pursuing a PhD in Composition at the University of California, Davis, is musically interested in the idea of expanded time and the act of listening. He has been particularly fond of the work of Emily Brontë since he was a teenager. In fact he attempted to set this very same text for choir in his teens but, in his own words, "failed spectacularly". Yet for years this poem, and his attempt, have remained with him, in the corner of his mind, "growing, brewing, brooding." The poem has only six lines, and yet it offers so much for the imagination -- both visually and musically -- which Max has captured with such bold vision and clarity in his 2024 setting.

Claire Cope is a composer, pianist and bandleader working across both contemporary classical, jazz and improvised music. She has performed at the Manchester Jazz Festival, the London Jazz Festival and as part of the BBC Proms Plus Series, broadcast on BBC Radio 3, and her music has been performed in Europe and the US. In Its Light, a setting of magical words by the 8th-century Chinese poet Du Fu, begins with ghostly harmony that gradually builds in intensity. Claire wanted to explore the interesting relationship humans have with the moon, as captured in Du Fu's poem and, in some ways, unchanged since his time. The piece is harmonically fluid, and culminates in a final bell-like coda that conveys gradually expanding drops of moonlight in a joyful and emphatic setting of the poem's final line, 'All ten thousand miles at once in its light!'.

Anibal Vidal's Theatre of Origins (Part I), for sixteen singers and with a libretto by Thomas Lowen, tells the story of Creation and was inspired by Geoffrey Hill's poem Genesis. While it evokes theological imagery, the work takes a secular approach, aiming to incorporate the myths and symbols of cultures from around the world. What struck Anibal about Hill's work was its portrayal of Creation as something macabre—almost Edgar Allan Poe-esque—as if the making of Earth and paradise came at a cost. This dark and dramatic vision became the starting point for composing an epic about the origins of existence. Part I of Theatre of Origins presents a mythic drama that begins in Chaos and moves through the emergence of matter, elements, and geography, culminating in the rise of titans and giants. As in many world mythologies, these beings battle for the conquest of Paradise. Only the victors—after all the bloodshed—are granted access to Paradise and, ultimately, bring about the creation of humankind. Musically, you will notice that each singer has a set of handheld instruments, such as corrugated tubes, various

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whistles, bowls of water, a foot pump, and a frog buzzer, among others. These instruments extend the choir's sound palette, enriching the vocal textures and timbres to create a more expansive, immersive sound world.

Returning back to our two other New Voices Academy works, **Daniel Soley**'s With Wonders to Hear was written to reflect the composer's Worcestershire origins. Daniel's music has been performed by the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, the Band of the Welsh Guards, and Britten Sinfonia. He has also worked as a composer in theatre and in film, with his soundtrack for 'B□l Boy' receiving an It's My Shout award.

Elif Nur Karlıdağ is a Turkish/British composer who integrates music, text, visuals, and electronics in multidisciplinary art, film, and stage productions. Her music was recently performed by the Philharmonia and she is currently composing a new work for English National Opera. She co-founded the East London Sound Ensemble, amplifying underrepresented voices in contemporary classical music. S̈ïngl̈ïÿï ïr is a meditative piece based on the Issyk inscription, a yet undeciphered text from the 4th century BC. It was discovered in 1969 on a silver bowl in Kazakhstan. The combination of Elif's tonal language and her dramatic use of whispering makes for an incredibly evocative thread of music, featuring a hauntingly beautiful soprano solo.

The Carice Singers, praised by The Times for its "poised professionalism and beautiful sound" (2024), is making a strong impact on the UK's choral landscape with performances of exceptional quality in a wide variety of repertoire. For a group named after Sir Edward Elgar's daughter, the choir offers new ways to honour the UK's rich musical heritage, often by working with today's composers while looking further afield as well as back to music of the twentieth century and beyond. Recent projects have included a performance of Kaija Saariaho's masterpiece Reconnaissance at London's Kings Place, a tour of Gustav Holst's choral music across the UK, and the world premiere of Daniel Kidane's N'dehou at the 2025 New Music Biennial. The group is also regularly invited to run summer composer academies at the Cheltenham Music Festival and the Three Choirs Festival, and has commissioned works from Daniel Kidane, Electra Perivolaris, Evelin Seppar, and Aníbal Vidal.
www.thecaricesingers.co.uk

George Parris is a conductor recognised for captivating performances, imaginative concert programmes, and his work with contemporary composers. His commitment to the UK choral scene in particular has resulted in major collaborations with UK festivals and venues such as Kings Place, the Three Choirs Festival and Spitalfields Music. He studied at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, followed by a Master's Degree in Choral Conducting at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. As founding director of The Carice Singers he is exploring the richness and variety of British music and has brought to the UK a plethora of previously unheard works, especially from the Finno-Baltic region, including UK premieres of works by Arvo Pärt, Lotta Wennäkoski, Matthew Whittall, Galina Grigorjeva and Evelin Seppar.
Parris has a key role in the development of emerging composers and choral conductors through his teaching and mentoring, establishing schemes such as the Composer Academy at Cheltenham Music Festival and giving masterclasses at MTU Cork School of Music and the Sibelius Academy. He is also an Associate Conductor of Birmingham-based Ex Cathedra, Principal Conductor of the North Cotswold Chamber Choir, and leads workshops for the UK's network of Early Music Forums. Elsewhere, he regularly works with the Helsinki Chamber Choir (as a singer, conductor, and chorus master) and is Co-Artistic Director of the Aurore Renaissance Music Festival.

Anibal Vidal is a Chilean composer based in London born in 1991. He holds a Master's Degree in Composition with Distinction and an Artist Diploma in Composition from the Royal College of Music. He has received lessons from professors such as Bernhard Lang, Francesco Filidei, Liza Lim, Mark Andre, Lucia Ronchetti, Kenneth Hesketh, among others. His compositional pursuits resonate with both his Latin American heritage and classical training. Through these lenses, he aims to create a sound that speaks universally. His creative process blends the raw nature of traditional and unconventional instruments, objects, and the human voice within a classical music setting, forming a personal sound palette driven by the physicality of sound and direct experimentation with its source. Vidal recently received the third edition of the Pisar Prize, awarded by The Juilliard School, Théâtre des Champs-Elysées and Villa Albertine, to premiere a new orchestral work with Les Siècles orchestra in November 2025 at the Parisian theatre, including a one-month artist residency at Juilliard School in New York with Axiom ensemble. More prizes, commissions and participations include DYCE commission in partnership with European Union, Divertimento ensemble, Cikada ensemble, Ensemble U and Taller Sonoro (Europe), Spitalfields Festival & The Carice Singers commission (UK), City of London Sinfonia commission, Musicians Initiative Commission, 1st Prize of 20th Joan Guinjoan International Prize (Barcelona), 2nd prize Matan Givol Composers Competition 2024 (Israel), RCM Concerto Competition, 17th SunRiver Competition Merit Award (China), Mise-En Call for scores (NYC), Manifeste Academy composer 2023 (Paris), Time of Music Festival composer 2023 (Finland), impuls Academy (Graz), Music Panel Composer (Croatia), Cheltenham Festival composer (UK), The Robert Anderson Trust Special Award (UK). Vidal has been supported by PRS Foundation Music Creators Open Fund, Vaughan Williams Foundation, Hinrichsen Foundation, Anglo-Chilean Society, RCM Accelerate, the Robert Anderson Trust, the Lennox Hannay Charitable Trust Scholarship, Ministerio de las Artes y Culturas de Chile.

SUNG TEXTS
in programme order

Arthur Bliss (1891-1975) River Music 1967
Commissioned by the Greater London Council for the opening of The Queen Elizabeth Hall on March 1st, 1967

Swell the broad stream of art,
Old Father Thames! Men leave their source,
Wander, and die: but on your mazy course
Through London's heart
From age to age the water-music ebbs and flows.

Sing us, old Thames, along
Your tide! Cranes, dock-gates, launches, ferries,
Lighters and tugs, great steamers, wharves and wherries
Enlarge that song.
From bank to bank, from reach to reach the water-music flows.

Changeful the river's tone –
In sunshine rippling a song without words,
Muted by fog, by rain-storm plucked, long-held chords
Beneath a moon.
From bridge to bridge, from age to age the music flows.

Men must forsake their source,
Wander and die. Only their art remains.
Honour and fluent forms, the fountainy strains
Of calm and force.
From here and now, to all time let our proud music flow!
Cecil Day-Lewis (1904-1972)

Max Gibson - ...cold, clear, and blue... (2024)
Cold, clear, and blue the morning heaven
Expands its arch on high;
Cold, clear, and blue Lake Werna's water
Reflects that winter sky:
The moon has set, but Venus shines,
A silent, silvery star.

Emily Brontë (1818-1848)

Claire Cope - In its Light (2024)
Above the tower – a lone, twice-sized moon.
On the cold river passing night-filled homes.
It scatters restless gold across the waves.
On mats, it shines richer than silken gauze.
Empty peaks, silence: among sparse stars,
Not yet flawed, it drifts. Pine and cinnamon
Spreading in my garden . . . All light,
All ten thousand miles at once in its light!

Du Fu (712-770), English translation by David Hinton

Anibal Vidal - Theatre of Origins
Libretto by Thomas Lowen

Not merely night but darkness and bright
arrested in chains of bronze and quartz;
silence and sound bound tight in links of embered ice
while accidental shapes take form and dissolve,
neither gas nor solid nor ash nor dew.

Unseparated elements at war and peace
jostle and still each other until
a movement draws the uninvented eye:

Weight Weightless
Form Void
Ice Spark

Heavy with noon and midnight,
blue wrests itself from blue
and begins to split again in two.

From sepia gloom, the
slightest spark, a delicate
gleam flickers, flares and
catches on a passing breeze
which sweeps its thin golden line
across the broad horizon.

Rising spheres of orange and
silver uneclipse themselves.
Throwing off night, flaming day!

Let there be night, let there be day
Let there be light!
Let there be...
Sea Sky
Earth Air

A crack appears in deepest green
while tendrils snake from undergrowth
and red streaks the newborn heavens
as dawn claws away dusk.

Argon Carbon
Boron Iron
Malachite Amethyst
Magnesium Mercury
Phosphorus Silicon
Zinc Xenon
Uranium Plutonium

Fire, revelling in its nascent force,
races the land and laps the sea,
igniting destroying inspiring creating

Beneath its burning arms
The creaking earth moves with molten shapes
growing, groaning under the weight of
waking limbs and stirring heads,
fearsome nameless creatures lift
a wing a tail an eyelid a scale,
fins break through the churning water,
as the raging talons pierce the mist.

Logan Hydra
Anzu Chimera
Tiamat Jörmungandr
Manticore Leviathan
Caicai-Vilu

Through clearing smoke,
the first hand clenches into the first fist
and strikes
god or beast or giant or titan

War Pierce Bow Stab
Club Gore Axe Mace
Hack Spear Gouge Flay
Discord Tumult War Attack Destroy
Thunderbolt Terrorise

Agonise Decimate
Arrow Hammer Crossbow Trident
Carnage Ravage Mayhem Slaughter

The victors, forged in fire,
now claim it as their prize,
and from the battlefield's mud,
in vanity
kindness
loneliness
create...
...us.

Veni Creator Spiritus,
Mentes tuorum visita,
Imple superna gratia,
Quae tu creasti pectora.

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Daniel Soley - With Wonders to Hear (2024)
In a summer season, when soft was the sun,
In rough cloth I robed me, as I a sheep were,
In habit like a hermit in his works unholy,
Went wide in this world with wonders to hear.
But on a May morning on Malvern hills,
A marvel befell me, of Faery I'm sure.
I wandered me weary, so weary, I rested
On a broad bank by a bourne;

And as I lay and leaned and looked upon the waters,
I slumbered in a sleeping, it sounded so merry.
Then I encountered a marvellous dream -
That I was in a wilderness, wist I not where.
Thus I went wide where, walking alone
In a wide wilderness, by a wood side,
The bliss of the birdsong made me abide there,
And on a lawn under a linden I leaned for a while
To listen to their lays, their lovely notes.
The mirth of their mouths made me sleep.
William Langland (c. 1370-86)

Elif Karlıdag - S̈ingl̈iyï ïr (2024)
Dört bul Küz S̈ingl̈iyï ïr
Uş yüz ÿïğ anta ïçïr

Translation:
[Of the] Four Corners* [the] tribes Syngly sing
Three hundred mourners oath drink**

* North, East, South, and West
** make an oath

anon. [Issyk inscription from c. 4th century BC], adapted & translated by Zaur Hasanov

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