Spitalfields music festival

Scenes from Under Milk Wood

Ninfea Crutwell Reade

Wednesday 2nd July | Metronome London

Rebecca Afonwy-Jones	Mezzo-Soprano
Thomas Humphreys	Baritone
Osian Clarke	Actor/Singer
Madeleine Morgan	Actor/Singer
David Prince	Narrator
Nova Music Ensemble	
Sarah Bennington	Flute, piccolo, alto flute
Catriona Scott	Clarinet, bass clarinet
Małgorzata Zwierzchowska	Violin
Gemma Wareham	Cello
Olivia Jageurs	Harp
George English	Percussion
George Vass	Conductor
Harvey Evans	Director

Scenes from Under Milk Wood is an abridged adaptation of Dylan Thomas's much-loved radio play Under Milk Wood (1954) – a work that humorously documents the imperfections and digressions of the inhabitants of a Welsh fishing town named Llareggub. Styled as a 'play for voices', Thomas' words were designed to paint a vivid picture of his fictional town in an audio-only format. This adaptation, however, combines narration, acting and song with instrumental music in 20 short scenes. It preserves the play's evocative temporal structure, which runs from dawn to dusk, opening with a dream sequence in which the inner thoughts and memories of certain characters are introduced: Captain Cat dreams of his seafaring days and dead lover Rosie Probert; Myfanwy Price dreams of her dashing draper hero Mog Edwards; Mr Waldo is dogged by rumours of his numerous infidelities; and guesthouse owner Mrs Ogmore-Pritchard continues to nag her two deceased husbands in her sleep. These dreaming scenes give way to a morning animated by town bustle and gossip, in which further characters are introduced: the murderous husband Mr Pugh, the optimistic verse-maker Reverend Eli Jenkins, the endlessly amorous Polly Garter, and the letter-opening postman Willy Nilly. As the afternoon 'yawns and moons through the dozy town', Mr Pugh firms up plans for poisoning his wife and Rosie Probert reappears in a sung reverie imagined by Captain Cat. With the arrival of dusk, the characters gradually return to their dream-like states.

Scenes from Under Milk Wood is a joint commission from the Presteigne and Spitalfields festivals and the Nova Music Trust. The commission and production are supported by the Hinrichsen Foundation, the Colwinston Charitable Trust and the George Vass Commission Fund.

– Ninfea Cruttwell-Reade

Ninfea Cruttwell-Reade is a British composer based in Edinburgh. Drawing on her training as a cellist, her creative work is often shaped by hands-on engagement with musical instruments, practices, and objects. Ninfea's most frequently programmed composition is Three études for piano and flower pots (2019). Originally written for the Manchester-based Psappha Ensemble, the work has been performed at the Royal Festival Hall, broadcast on BBC Radio 3, and recently recorded by the American pianist George Xiaoyuan Fu as part of his album Colouring Book (2025, Platoon). Other recent compositions include a song

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cycle based on letters by the art nouveau illustrator Aubrey Beardsley, a chamber work for ensemble and narrator presenting satirical texts by the Edwardian writer Saki, and a choral setting of a sonnet by the contemporary Scottish poet Don Paterson.

Supported by a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship at Durham University, Ninfea is currently at work on a series of raag-oriented chamber compositions that combine Western and North Indian instruments. An earlier Psappha commission, Patdeep Studies (2022, NMC Recordings) saw her collaborate with the sitarist Jasdeep Singh Degun and study the sitar herself. Ninfea completed doctoral studies in Music Composition at Princeton University and her music has been programmed regularly in the United States, including at the Tanglewood Music Festival. Performances in the UK this year have included a piano concerto for Clare Hammond and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

Born in Mid Wales, **Rebecca Afonwy-Jones** began her career as an Emerging Artist at Scottish Opera, in the title role of Carmen. She made her company debut with Welsh National Opera as Countess Geschwitz/ Lulu, later returning as an Associate Artist.
Concert engagements have included performances with BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra at BBC Proms, Britten Sinfonia, Norwegian Wind Ensemble, London Mozart Players, the Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the RTÉ Concert Orchestra, Dublin.
Contemporary credentials include Richard Blackford's Pietà and Songs of Nadia Anjuman, Kerstin in Joseph Phibbs' Juliana at the Cheltenham Festival, Judith Weir's The Consolations of Scholarship and Sleeping Mat Ballad, Julian Philips' Looking West, Paul Patterson's The Fifth Continent and Rick Peat's The Sky Engine. Recent performances include Wellgunde Das Rheingold/Götterdämmerung and Waltraute/ Die Walküre for Longborough Opera's Der Ring des Nibelungen and Elgar's The Kingdom at the Three Choirs Festival.

This season, Rebecca made her debut with the Royal Ballet and Opera as Susie/A Quiet Place. Other highlights include Handel's Messiah for Good Friday at the Royal Albert Hall and Messiah transmitted on the BBC at Easter with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales conducted by Gareth Malone, Verdi Requiem with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Waltraute/Die Walküre in a live podcast recording at the Royal Albert Hall for 'The Rest is History'.
Rebecca is delighted to return to both JAM on The Marsh and the Presteigne Festivals and looks forward to debuts at Lammermuir Festival with the Hebrides Ensemble and with Irish National Opera.

Baritone **Thomas Humphreys** began singing at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford under the direction of Stephen Darlington. He was later awarded a scholarship to study at the Royal Academy of Music.
Thomas is in demand on the concert platform, regularly performing with the premiere choirs and orchestras in the UK, notably the Royal Philharmonic, Bournemouth Symphony and English Symphony orchestras, the London Mozart Players and the City of London Choir. He recently made his Royal Festival Hall debut singing Verdi's Requiem with the London Mozart Players and also with the Oxford Bach Choir at the Sheldonian Theatre. His repertoire includes Handel Messiah, Mendelssohn Elijah, J S Bach St John Passion and Christmas Oratorio, Brahms Ein deutches Requiem, the Requiems of Fauré, Mozart and Verdi, Haydn The Creation and Nelson Mass and Vaughan Williams Five Mystical Songs.

In 2023, Thomas made his debut at the Philharmonie de Paris and the Grand Auditorium of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon, performing concerts of Schubert Lieder with the worldwide renowned pianist Maria João Pires, for which he was universally acclaimed. Thomas also recently made his debut at London's Bechstein Hall, with pianist Ian Tindale. Other recital work has taken him across the UK and to Italy, Russia and Bulgaria. In opera, his roles include the title role in Don Giovanni, Il Conte Almaviva/Le nozze di Figaro, Guglielmo/Così fan tutte), Escamillo/ Carmen, Marcello/La bohème, Tomsky/Pique Dame, Jake Wallace/La fanciulla del West among others for many of the major opera companies across the UK. He was recently acclaimed critically for his role as Conte Almaviva in Dorset Festival Opera's production of Le nozze di Figaro – 'Thomas Humphreys' finely-sung alpha-male Count mixed Marlon Brando-like virility with baffled authority', Opera Magazine.

Madeleine Morgan is a versatile musical theatre performer and a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music, where she earned a Master of Arts in Musical Theatre.

Her professional theatre credits include Mrs Yerkes/ Ensemble/Roadshow for Upstairs at the Gatehouse. While training, she performed a range of roles, including the Baker's Wife/Into the Woods, the Balladeer/Samuel Byck/Assassins and Mary/Merrily We Roll Along. She also featured as a soloist in Cy

Baby and played Wynne/Dinner.
Beyond the stage, Madeleine performed as a soloist with the BBC Concert Orchestra in a special dance-themed edition of Friday Night is Music Night. She was awarded the prestigious 2024 Stephen Sondheim Society Student Performer of the Year and recently appeared as a guest performer in Olivier Award-winner and Tony nominee Jak Malone's cabaret, Gender? I Hardly Know Her.

Osian Clarke is a dynamic performer from Tycroes, South Wales. He began his musical journey at the age of 16, training at the Junior Department of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. He was awarded a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music, where he completed a BMus (Hons) in Vocal Performance and Opera Studies, followed by a Master of Arts in Musical Theatre, graduating with Distinction.
Performance highlights include the Les Misérables 30th Anniversary Concert at the Sondheim Theatre, a solo gala appearance in 's-Hertogenbosch with Loud Applause Rising Stars, I Am Harvey Milk at Cadogan Hall and the Gladiator Live concerts at London's Royal Albert Hall with the Philharmonia Chorus.
With a rich classical foundation and a flair for theatrical storytelling, Osian continues to build a vibrant and versatile career across concert, opera and musical theatre stages.

David Prince trained at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Cardiff. He began his career on Merseyside, devising, performing in and directing theatre-in-education and small-scale touring productions. He later returned to South Wales, where he has worked extensively with companies including Theatr Iolo, Theatr na n'Óg, Fluellen Theatre, Welsh Fargo Stage Company, Sisbro Productions, Pontardawe Arts Centre and Lighthouse Theatre.
David's theatre work also includes performances for Theatr Clwyd and long-standing collaborations with Mercury Theatre Wales, where he has been an actor and assistant director since 2012.
In addition to teaching Performing Arts in further education colleges, David has written and performed two one-man shows: A Gringo's Journey and Nine Suitcases, the latter of which has toured widely, including to the Edinburgh Fringe. While his focus has remained on theatre, David has taken on occasional roles in film, television and online promotional media.

Harvey Evans is a director from Newport, South Wales, and a graduate of the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. He is a Welsh bilingual artist passionate about collaborative storytelling, with a focus on work that explores place, language, and identity. Recent directing credits include Don Giovanni for Bath Opera, The Egg for the Atmosphere Festival – a fusion of contemporary dance and opera – and The Game, a short film inspired by opera and the rugby communities of Newport. He has adapted Humperdinck's Hansel and Gretel for schools and worked as an Assistant Director with Bampton Classical Opera and Welsh National Youth Opera.

In 2024, he directed Gwlad! Gwlad!, commissioned by Awen for the National Eisteddfod – a surreal journey into the heart of Welsh nationalism, described as 'an epic collision of land, song, people and time'.

Harvey is especially drawn to experimental and interdisciplinary projects, and his practice spans both professional productions and grassroots collaborations. He creates rehearsal environments that encourage creative risk-taking and meaningful collaboration across all levels of experience.
Upcoming work includes La Traviata for Wedmore Opera and new R&D projects that continue his exploration of Welsh identity and contemporary storytelling.

George Vass studied at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and the Royal Academy of Music. He made his London conducting debut in 1979 and has since appeared at major UK venues and festivals, notably as Artistic Director of Orchestra Nova. He has been Artistic Director of the Presteigne Festival in mid-Wales since 1992 and held a similar post with the Hampstead and Highgate Festival (2004–09).
Vass has conducted leading ensembles including the BBC Symphony, BBC NOW, BBC Philharmonic, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Royal Scottish National, Bournemouth Symphony and Ulster orchestras, as well as international groups such as the Malmö Opera Orchestra. He has also worked with notable UK choirs and broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and Channel 4.
As Founder Artistic Director of Nova Music Opera, he has premiered works by Sally Beamish, Charlotte Bray, Thomas Hyde, Joseph Phibbs and others, also having conducted NMO's productions of Curlew River and Sāvitri. A dedicated champion of new music, he received a BASCA Gold Badge in 2017 for his support of living composers.

Committed to community music-making, Vass is Music Director of the Bushey Symphony Orchestra and often collaborates with the Blaze Ensemble and

Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra.
His extensive discography spans British chamber opera, orchestral and choral music on labels including BIS, Lyrita, Naxos, SOMM and Resonus Classics. Releases in 2025 include Cecilia McDowall Cantatas with the Choir of Royal Holloway and Orchestra Nova, British piano concertos with Clare Hammond and the BBC SO and works by Henriëtte Bosmans with Gemma Rosefield and Benjamin Nabarro with the BBC Philharmonic.

Vass is an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music, was recipient of the 2018 BAFA Exceptional Service Award and the Welsh Music Guild's 2023 John Edwards Memorial Award and is a governor of the Royal Society of Musicians of Great Britain.
The brainchild of George Vass, **Nova Music Opera** presented its first fully-staged production at the 2010 English Music Festival – Gustav Holst's Savitri.
In 2013, Nova Music Opera celebrated the Britten centenary with a production of Curlew River and a specially commissioned companion piece from Sally Beamish – Hagar in the Wilderness.
The company has since achieved great critical and audience acclaim, having regularly commissioned and premiered important chamber operas from Charlotte Bray Entanglement (2015), Cecilia McDowall Airborne (2014) and Stephen McNeff Prometheus Drown'd (2014); the company also revived Thomas Hyde's That Man Stephen Ward in 2015, recording it for Resonus Classics the following year.

2017, Nova Music Opera commissioned Joseph Phibbs for a reworking of Strindberg's dark stage drama Miss Julie. Juliana premiered at the 2018 Cheltenham Festival and NMO's recording soon appeared on Resonus Classics.
2021 saw Nova Music Opera's premiere of Awakening Shadow, a mixture of original scenes by Luke Styles and Benjamin Britten's Canticles, brought together in one unified work. A co-commission with Sydney Chamber Opera, Awakening Shadow was seen in London, Sydney and at the Cheltenham and Presteigne festivals.

In 2022, the company celebrated RVW150 by commissioning composer Julian Philips and librettist Rebecca Hurst for a semi-staged concert work for singers, actor and chamber ensemble, with special funding from the RVW Trust. Looking West premiered at the 2022 Ryedale Festival.

Nova Music Opera has performed at St John's Smith Square, LSO St Luke's, Milton Court, the Cheltenham, Canterbury, Presteigne, Ryedale and St Andrew's Voices festivals, at the Barber Institute, University of Birmingham and for Music at Oxford.

Scenes from Under Milk Wood is supported by Arts Council England, the Stanley Thomas Johnson Foundation, Nottingham Trent University London, and the Hinrichsen Foundation.

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