

# Spitalfields music festival

THE MISSING PIECE... IS PEACE  
FRIDAY 26<sup>TH</sup> JUNE

ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND

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**ARTS COUNCIL  
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# Spitalfields Music Festival at 50

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Welcome to the start of our 50th birthday celebrations!

Any milestone celebration offers the opportunity both to survey the past and think to the future. In 1976, who could have imagined that a single fundraising concert for Christ Church Spitalfields - curated and conducted by the late Richard Hickox - would have grown into an award-winning charity, offering a year-round programme of music-making, performances and creative leadership training?

Much has changed in the East End since our foundation. 153 languages are now spoken in our local schools, reflecting the welcome given to those who have made their home here. In a volatile world, we have chosen to begin our anniversary year with a meditation on peace, and a warm welcome to all. It feels important; we hope you agree.

Tonight's event has been made possible by Cockayne, an enlightened and courageous supporter of arts projects in London. We thank them for their vision and encouragement, along with our core funder, Arts Council England, and the many other organisations listed below. We simply couldn't continue without them, or you. If you are able, please consider supporting us with a regular donation.

Thank you for joining us for this special occasion.

*Sarah Gee*

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Spitalfields Music Festival is supported by:

Arts Council England  
The Mary Kinross Charitable Trust  
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The Henfrey Charitable Trust

# The Missing Piece... is Peace

Friday 26 June | Shoreditch Town Hall

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**Piet Swerts**

Elegia

**Simon Mundy**

Peace

**Arvo Pärt**

Silhouan's Song

**George Walker**

Lyric for Strings

**Malika Booker**

Summer Evening

**Reena Esmail**

Testament

**Reshma Ruia**

The Missing Piece is Peace

**Philip Herbert**

Lingua Pacis (*World Premiere*)

**Matt Abbott**

Peace in Your Pocket, Your Mouth, Your Lungs

**Jean Sibelius**

Andante Festivo

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**City of London Sinfonia**

**Jonathan Berman** conductor

With poets:

**Matt Abbott**

**Malika Booker**

**Simon Mundy**

**Reshma Ruia**

# About Tonight's Concert

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“Our organisation was founded on the pursuit of peace . . . Yet, as I scan the landscape of today's world, the one thing missing most dramatically is peace.

And by that, I mean peace in all its dimensions. As conflicts rage and geopolitical divisions grow, peace in our world is threatened. As polarization deepens and human rights are trampled, peace within communities is undermined. As inequalities explode, peace with justice is shattered. As we continue our addiction to fossil fuels, we make a mockery of any notion of peace with nature.

Around the globe and across the range of issues, peace is the missing piece.”

**António Guterres, UN Secretary-General – February 2024**

In a world shaped by uncertainty and unrest, the need for space to reflect on peace feels urgent. For the opening concert of the 50th anniversary of Spitalfields Music Festival, we're reflecting on the moment in which we find ourselves, exploring how music and poetry can help us make sense of the world around us.

Philip Herbert, a composer and curator of this evening's concert, was particularly inspired by the words of António Guterres, alongside quotes from two other great thinkers of the mid-20th century. In 1941, the conductor **Robert Shaw** wrote a manifesto for his newly formed choir in New York. It opened with:

“In these days of political, personal and economic disintegration, music is not a luxury, it's a necessity; not simply because it is therapeutic, nor because it is the universal language, but because it is the persistent focus of our intelligence, aspiration and goodwill.”

Later, in 1963, President **John F. Kennedy** delivered a speech upon receiving an honorary degree from Amherst College, Massachusetts, just 27 days before his assassination:

“When power leads man toward arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the area of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses.”

Tonight, four poets bring their own perspectives on what peace means – their words interspersed with music chosen by Philip to provide space for reflection about our roles in promoting peace as individuals, in our communities, as a nation, and as a planet. These commissions, together with Philip Herbert's *Lingua Pacis*, mark the moment of Spitalfields Music's half century.

# About the Music

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## Piet Swerts *Elegia (1987)*

In 1987, the ferry *Herald of Free Enterprise* sank off the north coast of Belgium, leading to the loss of 193 souls. The footage was broadcast live on Belgian television. Piet Swerts, alone at the time, was so moved to see such harrowing images that he wrote this *Elegia* in silence - without piano. He describes it as being like writing in his personal diary, proceeding to leave the score in a drawer with no intention of releasing it publicly. A year later, however, he was commissioned to compose the *St Mark's Passion* and in that oratorio he placed the *Elegia* as a non verbatim comment on the scene of the Last Supper.

## Arvo Pärt *Silhouan's Song (1991)*

Pärt based this piece on a religious text by St Silouan (1866-1938), a Russian monk from Mount Athos in Greece who taught that the criterion for true faith is love for your enemies. Characteristic of Pärt's 'tintinnabuli' ('bells') style, *Silhouan's Song* is designed so that the music could also be sung, and reveals the sacred quality of both sound and silence. As Pärt describes it: "if you approach silence with love, music may result. A composer often has to wait a long time for this music. It is this reverent sense of expectation that constitutes the brief silence of which I am so fond.

## George Walker *Lyric for Strings (1946 / 1990)*

Originally composed in 1946 as the second movement 'Lament' of his *String Quartet No.1*, in 1990 Walker expanded and reworked the piece to become *Lyric for Strings*. It was dedicated to his grandmother, Melvina King, who was formerly enslaved and died shortly before the original string quartet was completed. Walker continued to call it 'my grandmother's piece' throughout his life. In 1996 he became the first African American to win the Pulitzer Prize for Music.

## Reena Esmail Testament (2014)

*Testament* is the powerful third movement of the larger work *Vishwas*. The word 'vishwas' expresses the concept of fervent belief, or faith, in Hindi. Esmail was inspired by Meera Bai, a celebrated saint-poet from 15th century India who – despite being forced into a traditional marriage to unite two kingdoms – believed she was married to the Hindu deity Lord Krishna. The events of her life were shaped around her devotion to this intangible but omnipresent figure. *Testament* incorporates one of Meera's own bhajans (devotional songs), in Raag Malhar, the raag that beckons rain. Krishna has used the forces of nature to show himself, and to honour Meera's faithfulness to him. Even as the flames surround her, Meera walks calmly into the temple to honour her Lord.

## Philip Herbert Lingua Pacis (2026)

*Lingua Pacis* ('The Language of Peace') is a soundscape through which musical themes explore different aspects of the syntax of peace. At the outset comes a repeated melisma on the violas (A), shadowed by dissonant harmonies and underpinned by an unsettled bass line - symbolic of a cry for peace in a turbulent world. A pastoral theme (B) follows - exuding serenity, then a peaceful theme played high up on the violin (C) that evokes the stillness and calm that is the essential foundation for human healing from the trauma of human conflict.

A poignant, minor key violin theme serves as a reminder that the acquisition of peace comes at a cost, in memory of those who gave their lives to procure it (D). After the return of the theme of stillness (C), an agitated theme emerges along with an intense cello solo - a parallel to our modern lives (E).

The middle section explores the euphoria that comes from societal liberation from the oppression of conflict, and the militancy to protect the right to peace, before themes A - E return.

## Jean Sibelius Andante Festivo (1922 / 1938)

Originally composed for string quartet in 1922, Sibelius rescored *Andante Festivo* for string orchestra in 1938. It was premiered on New Year's Day 1939 as part of a live worldwide broadcast for the New York World Exhibition, with Sibelius conducting the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra. The performance was designed as a greeting to the world from Finland, but this piece held significance to the composer on a personal level too: it was played at Sibelius' own funeral in 1957.

# Poems

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## Simon Mundy Peace

Where the water laps at the end  
Down in the mind's harbour  
There is a new taste on the wind,  
Perhaps fresh mint, currency  
Of freedom in progress,  
Rising clear and unveiled  
And the breeze free from the east.  
I am so calm now.

On the sand latte children circle  
Their multicoloured parents,  
A cattle man from inland  
Views the sea, at its gentlest today,  
With mistrust as he tries to sell  
Bangles and trinkets to an Asian  
Woman, in a bikini with nowhere  
To hide money. There is no energy  
In either proposal or refusal.  
A cat and a monkey flash tails  
At each other but look away,  
Pretending. Neither moves.

Two trees soar above my balcony,  
A hornbill bends a branch nonchalantly,  
A mongoose relishes berries that no-one  
Else will touch. Butterflies and people,  
White and dark, flit and amble.  
A tiny spider inspects my words  
As it scurries across this page.

We are all incomers on this fragment,  
This beguiling coast, the dhow and the kite surfer,  
The paw-paw seller and the waitress.  
Languages mingle without embarrassment.  
There is no need to translate.  
We all know what we mean.  
Not even the flies can be bothered  
To be bothersome. Am I writing fiction?

Not today.  
For now in this sliver of place  
There is peace.  
Please let nothing change.

Explosions splinter the equatorial night  
For fun; scary bangs for shooting stars  
At New Year, blasting away the dreadful old,  
Letting the light-bursts signal fleeting hope  
Before they singe the sea. The dogs  
And Colobus monkeys cower. They know  
Humans are always deluded, never constant.

North. Look. Take a straight line  
From this mid point of our globe  
Until you meet the ice. A bent pillar  
Exuding fire. Bangs are for every night,  
Punctuate the days, announce the morning,  
Shout curfew. No stars follow, only dust,  
Bodies in random portions,  
Glass and concrete threshed.

Machines protect leaders,  
Demolish the unsuspecting.  
I am so calm – now.

Leaders mutter and demand prizes  
For peddling death and national pomp.  
Only the death is true,  
Prizes sprayed in fools' gold.

For a newshound peace would be hell,  
Without irritation escalating into hate,  
Annoyance into arrogance.  
If arguments over land were settled  
Over a beer or a flask of wine  
Needing no label,  
Just an appreciative palate.

When no-one can remember  
Why there were nations, their flags  
Lose even decorative meaning,  
The newshound will resign, write novels  
Find stories that never upend illusions.  
Each child will grow to be a diplomat,  
Dictators jokes for Christmas crackers.

A gentle swell carries the dhow home,  
Only a zephyr, barely enough  
To fill the sail, pushes us forwards,  
Causes the water to slap in play  
Beneath the bow.

At last the men are silent, waiting to go  
about,  
Tack; for the final time head out to sea,  
Far enough to watch the sun set  
Behind palm trees and baobab.

On this water none of us are slaves now,  
We thank our various gods. For us  
The waves, the winds, bring movement  
But no threat. We can trust them.

Today my gods are kind.

So few are so lucky, in either gods  
Or the transiently powerful.

Why has English evolved to start  
So many words for harbouring evil  
With the innocent letter 'p'?  
Plutocrats and politicians, perverts,  
Presidents,  
Errant priests, Putin, power addicts.

To balance that, all we can muster  
Is one word, too shy, too delicate,  
Too often rendered missing:

Peace

## Malika Booker Summer Evening

Sweet peace, where dost thou dwell? *George Herbert*

In rush hour a woman on the metro sits in full lotus pose,  
while elsewhere  
mockingbirds roost in the orange grove,

a single horse gallops through pasture  
and a girl rests on the bank to watch  
while aunties squat in the shallows, scrubbing clothes  
fishermen perched along canals, pitched poles at half salute

the way that child reels in her kite, poised  
a porcelain saucer balanced on a blade of grass  
shade dappling  
the neighbour's fence with the overflowing apple tree

She stands at the river's edge, a bird flies over  
an orchestrated choir  
their bodies curling and straightening  
the way the rowers, row and row

a child on a verandah, knowing no better  
she could be ten in Guyana again  
in summer evening heat  
the way a hammock swings in the backyard

The way a hammock swings in the backyard  
in summer evening heat  
she could be ten in Guyana again  
a child on a verandah, knowing no better

the way the rowers row and row  
their bodies curling and straightening  
an orchestrated choir  
she stands at the river's edge, a bird flies over

the neighbour's fence with the overflowing apple tree  
shade dappling  
a porcelain saucer balanced on a blade of grass  
the way that child reels in her kite, poised like

fishermen perched along canals, pitched poles at half salute  
while aunties squat in the shallows, scrubbing clothes  
and a girl rests on the bank to watch  
a single horse gallop through pasture,

mockingbirds roost in the orange grove  
while elsewhere  
in rush hour, a woman on the metro sits in full lotus pose.

Malika Booker ©

## Reshma Ruia The Missing Piece is Peace

Everything is different now  
Jagged and incomplete.  
One eyed Jackdaws perch on washing lines  
Empty wheelbarrows  
Round and round in circles go  
A mother in a half-blown house  
Knitting needles in her hands  
the wool a red puddle at her feet  
knitting sweaters for children she will never meet  
Stray dogs and abandoned cats spit their despair  
on the mud brown belly of the earth  
There is a talk of change in the air  
Grey clouds looming  
But we did not care  
Our bellies were full Doves cooed on our window sills  
And when we shut our eyes we could touch the Sun  
  
It only took a season or two  
Until the boats came sailing to our shores  
A cargo of untold stories in their hold  
They sank beneath the weight  
Of unmade beds and half-filled kettles  
and school shoes waiting by the door

How do we remember peace  
How do we taste it smell it bring it back home again  
Peace- that timid grey mouse hiding from the glare  
of newspaper headlines

Begin gently say the poets Be kind.  
Look for it in the April shower  
of children singing in the playground  
Find it in a train station cafe where lovers sit  
And smile Their fingers entwined  
Be brave say the poets  
Bury the bones of anger and ache  
Dig them deep with your bare hands  
beneath a field of flowers  
Lay the dead to sleep  
Sing them a lullaby  
So they will forget  
their orchestra of sorrow

Turn the world into a jigsaw again say the poets  
Shake loose the borders and the maps  
Tear down the barbed wires and fences  
And in their place  
Raise a forest of white prayer flags  
And do not rest until you  
find the missing piece  
Until you find Peace

## Matt Abbott Peace in Your Pocket, Your Mouth, Your Lungs

If inner peace was an object,  
it would be a balloon.

And some days,  
with a sack of wet sand in your chest,  
and a tumble dryer in your skull,  
and hailstones battering the windowpanes,  
and bulletins that scream in agony,  
the last thing you want to do  
is inflate a balloon.

Your lungs have quite enough to do  
walking up and down the stairs,  
and you've still not answered that email,  
and you've still not done those dishes,  
and even before you've left the house,  
your mind is a raging furnace –

and how does anybody  
ever have the time  
to sit and inflate  
a balloon?

But it's a long and lonely day  
when that balloon  
lays limp in your pocket.

And you must carry it, lifeless,  
as you go about your duties.

And when other folk go strolling by  
with shiny, crimson spheres,  
your furnace spits out embers  
of envious regret.

The world keeps blundering on:  
it feels dizzying and dismal.

And nobody else can inflate your ballon:  
they're busy inflating theirs.

And so, one day,  
you find the courage.  
And you stop what you're doing,  
and you hold your balloon.

And as it slowly inflates before you,  
you watch it become weightless and bright.

Look at it, bobbing around on its string.  
Catching sunlight through the window.  
See the joy it brings to a child's eyes.  
See the wonder it possesses.

You tie it around your wrist  
and feel much lighter in the street.  
You parade it as an offering:  
a soothing, gentle gesture.

And sure, it's awkward and fumbly –  
in the crowded carriage,  
the café queue –  
but do you see how people smile at it?  
How it softly brightens their day?

And every morning,  
you find the time  
to inflate it fully again.

When you're running late,  
or you've under-slept,  
or the radio's wailing.

Because you recognise that *this* balloon  
is as much as you can offer.

This balloon is a decision  
on how you'll live your life.

And the inner peace that bobs along,  
that floats about your person:  
that inner peace is infectious.

An open invitation.

You inflate your balloon,  
and I'll inflate mine.  
And it doesn't mean we're not troubled:  
it just means that we're choosing to love.

On the days when the furnace flickers,  
that balloon becomes heavier to handle.  
And sure, when it's overwhelming,  
we've felt the colossal burst.

Shards of angry latex.  
The absence of calm.  
The chaos of destruction.  
The fury that comes from release.

An explosion of peace  
that almost feels alluring in the moment.  
Until we realise, that without it,  
all we are, is curling flames.

Each day blesses us  
with a fresh start.  
Each day demands  
that we make those same decisions.

Each day will challenge us,  
and threaten to whisk us away.  
Each day will remind us  
why our duty is more than survival.

Courtesy and kindness.  
Empathy and compassion.  
Patience and forgiveness.  
Collaboration of the soul.

Inner peace is a lesson  
we can only teach ourselves.

Picture a street, pigeon grey,  
where traffic groans, and drizzle persists,  
but every single pedestrian  
is strutting along  
in a shimmering parade.

One hand in their pockets,  
and the other, attached  
to this glossy offering.

A silent broadcast,  
as we just do our best:  
a commitment to broadcast  
tranquillity.

A balloon, so delicate.  
So potent. So precious.  
A balloon, as an offering  
in a world fixed on conflict.

A balloon that's infectious:  
sees the harmony increase.  
A beacon in a quandary  
where the missing piece  
is peace.

Matt Abbott ©

# Biographies

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## City of London Sinfonia

City of London Sinfonia (CLS), founded in 1971 by Richard Hickox – who also founded Spitalfields Music Festival – has always been driven by curiosity and experimentation, commissioning bold new works and championing choral storytelling. Today, that spirit continues through our five-year strategy 'Music and...', which sees orchestral music as a way to reach more people, tell bigger stories, and create deeper impact through world-class performance, cross-art form collaborations, and community partnerships.

Winners of the Royal Philharmonic Society's Impact Award, CLS brings music to life in concert halls, hospitals, care homes, and refugee centres, creating connection, joy, and wonder both on and off the stage.

## Jonathan Berman

Jonathan Berman is an internationally acclaimed British conductor whose work spans the great symphonic tradition, contemporary music, and opera. His performances with the Cleveland Orchestra, London Philharmonic, Philharmonia, BBC Symphony, and BBC National Orchestra of Wales have earned him recognition as one of the most compelling conductors of his generation – praised for his depth of understanding, natural authority on the podium, and extraordinary ability to communicate with audiences. A fearless advocate of new music with over 70 world premières to his name, Jonathan was shaped from the outset of his career by two towering figures: Oliver Knussen, who became a lifelong friend and recommended Jonathan as his replacement at Tanglewood, and Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, one of the great conductor-composers of the twentieth century. Jonathan served as Assistant Conductor to Vladimir Jurowski at the London Philharmonic Orchestra in the 2014–15 season. Alongside the podium, Jonathan is active as a film maker, writer, and broadcaster – exploring the boundaries of classical music through documentary, essay, and radio. His deep engagement with literature, visual art, theatre, film, and Japanese culture feeds into the unique and creative ways in which he connects with audiences and brings music to life beyond the concert hall.

## Philip Herbert

Philip Herbert is a London-born, award-winning British Composer, with eclectic creative interests, who has studied music in the UK and the USA. Philip has developed a portfolio career, combining teaching, performance, curation, writing for publication, developing and devising workshops and projects, assessing music projects for the Arts Council of England, broadcasting and composing. His music has been performed by ensembles such as the BBC Singers, BBC Concert Orchestra, the Philharmonia, Orchestra of the Swan, Sinfonia ViVA, the Sphinx Virtuosi, Chineke!, Manchester Camerata, Northern Chamber Orchestra, Cleveland, Detroit, Houston, Nashville, Minnesota, Charlotte Symphony Orchestras, Royal Ballet Sinfonia, American Youth Philharmonic Orchestra, New England Conservatory Chamber Orchestra, Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Trinity Laban String Ensemble, the Purcell School of Music, Wells Cathedral School and Chethams School of Music, along with the Villiers String Quartet to name a few. Recently he received an honorary Doctor of Music Degree from the University of Winchester.

## Matt Abbott

Matt Abbott is a poet, award-winning lyricist, and novelist from Wakefield. His spoken word show 'Two Little Ducks' gained critical acclaim at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2017 and on a 2018 UK theatre tour. The show's poems, which explored the working-class Leave vote against the backdrop of the refugee crisis, were published by VERVE in 2018. Matt's debut kids' collection, 'A Hurricane in My Head', was published by Bloomsbury in 2019 and has helped to establish him as one of the UK's leading facilitators of poetry in schools. His debut collection for adults, 'Peacocks Can't Swim', is out with Broken Sleep Books in January, and his debut novel, 'Bouncing Bricks', is due for publication in the Spring. In the early stage of Matt's career, he was best known for fronting indie-pop act Skint & Demoralised – gaining critical acclaim and worldwide listenership during a stint with Universal Records.

## Malika Booker

Dr Malika Booker, a senior lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University, co-founded Malika's Poetry Kitchen (A writer's collective). Pepper Seed was shortlisted for the OCM Bocas and the Seamus Heaney Centre 2014 prize. She is published with Sharon Olds and Warsan Shire in The Penguin Modern Poet Series 3: Your Family: Your Body (2017). A Cave Canem Fellow, Complete Works Fellow and inaugural Poet in Residence at The Royal Shakespeare Company, Malika was awarded the Cholmondeley Award (2019), elected a Royal Society of Literature Fellow (2022) and is the first woman to win the Forward Prize for Best Single poem twice: The Little Miracles (2020) and Libation (2023).

## Simon Mundy

Simon Mundy has published six books of poems so far, the latest being *Waiting For Music* (2022) and *Blue Med – Selected Poems* (2024). His cycle *Radnor Songs* was commissioned by the Presteigne Festival and set by Cecilia McDowall and is published by Oxford University Press Music in 2026. Seven novels have been published by Hay Press, including *Silent Movements* (2008), *The Fragile Land* (2023), *Flagey In Autumn* (2015), *Flagey In Winter* (2024), *Flagey In Spring* (2026). Among his other books are *Making It Home: Europe And The Politics of Culture* (European Culture Foundation, 1998) and the Council of Europe's *Short Guide To Cultural Policy* (2000). He has directed festivals in Scotland & the Netherlands and written several books on musicians. He was the Director of the UK's National Campaign for the Arts from 1989-93 and a co-founder of the European Forum for the Arts and Heritage (now Culture Action Europe). He has served on the Executive Committee of Wales PEN Cymru and was Vice-President of the Writers for Peace Committee of PEN International for several years. He writes on classical music for many journals, including The Independent, Continuo Connect and Early Music America. He is an adviser to the European Festivals Association and the Council of Europe.

## Reshma Ruia

Reshma Ruia has written two novels, *Something Black in the Lentil Soup*, and *Still Lives*, winner of the 2023 Diverse Book Readers' Choice Award. She has published a poetry collection, *A Dinner Party in the Home Counties*, and a short story collection, *Mrs Pinto Drives to Happiness*, shortlisted for the 2022 Eastern Eye ACTA Award. Her work has been commissioned by the BBC and Manchester Literature Festival, University of Cumbria and Geneva among others, and has appeared in national and international journals and anthologies. She is the co-founder of The Whole Kahani, a writers' collective of British South Asian writers.

# CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF SPITALFIELDS MUSIC

We need your help!

This year marks Spitalfields Music's 50th birthday. For half a century, we've been bringing artists, audiences and communities together for world-class music in East London. But we would never have made it this far without the generosity of our donors.

In this special anniversary year, we're asking people to consider becoming part of our story by setting up a monthly donation as a **Supporter** (£1-£19 a month), **Friend** (£20-£99 a month) or **Champion** (£100+ a month).



**By signing up for a regular monthly gift, you will be joining a committed community of supporters investing in the cultural landscape of East London. Regular donations give us financial certainty to help us plan for the future.**

Donate now and help us:

- ◇ Ignite the joy of music in young people through our schools workshops and open access choirs
- ◇ Nurture talent by training the next generation of music leaders
- ◇ Champion new work and support emerging artists to compose and perform

If you can't commit to a regular donation at the moment, we would be so grateful if you would consider a one-off donation! Every pound supports the unique musical ecosystem we've built and ensures we can have an impact for many years to come.

**Thank you - we can't do it without you!**

[spitalfieldsmusic.org.uk/support-us](https://spitalfieldsmusic.org.uk/support-us)

