

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra June 24 programme complementary content

Individual lives – of musicians, travellers and the dispossessed – inform this very special Saturday evening concert.

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir are joined by four fantastic soloists, all under the baton of Martyn Brabbins, for a programme of Eleanor Alberga, Ralph Vaughan Williams and Sir Michael Tippett.

This companion page draws together a range of complementary content that we hope will help shine further light on the pieces, the people who composed them and the performers bringing them to life here in Hope Street.

Martyn Brabbins

Described as an inspirational force in British music, award-winning conductor [Martyn Brabbins](#) was born in Leicester in 1959. He played the euphonium and trombone before studying composition at Goldsmith's College and conducting with [Ilya Musin](#) in what was then still Leningrad.

In 1988 he won first prize in the Leeds Conductors Competition, and between 1994 and 2005 he was Associate Principal Conductor of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. He spent two years as artistic director of the Cheltenham Music Festival, and in 2002 he founded a training course for aspiring conductors at Orkney's St Magnus International Festival.

Brabbins, who is known for his affinity with music of the late 19th and early 20th Century, has conducted many world premieres by leading composers and has made more than 120 recordings (with at least 60 for Hyperion alone) including works by Elgar, Britten and Tippett.

He is currently music director of the [English National Opera](#), artistic advisor to the Huddersfield Choral Society and a visiting professor in conducting at the [Royal College of Music](#) and Royal Scottish Conservatoire.

Nardus Williams

Rising star soprano [Nardus Williams](#) has won praise for her “rich, creamy, elegant voice” and “controlled, sensuous soprano”.

Williams, who won the [Rising Talent](#) category at last year's International Opera Awards, trained at the International Opera School and the Royal College of Music, where she was the sole recipient of the prestigious Kiri Te Kanawa Scholarship.

In 2018 she was a finalist in the Kathleen Ferrier Competition and has won a number of other accolades. This year she was shortlisted for [Young Artist in the Royal Philharmonic Society Awards](#).

She has been a Jerwood Young Artist at Glyndebourne and is an [English National Opera Harewood Artist](#).

Williams is in demand both as an operatic artist and on the concert platform. Last summer she performed in two BBC Proms – singing in Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* and Ethel Smyth’s *Mass in D major*. Recent performances include Bach’s *St Matthew Passion* and Handel’s *Armida abbandonata*, while she is currently also appearing as Adina in Donizetti’s *L’elisir d’amore* at Glyndebourne.

Listen to Nardus Williams sing Giulio Caccini’s [dolcissimo sospiro](#).

Kathryn Rudge

Award-winning mezzo-soprano [Kathryn Rudge](#) needs little introduction to Royal Liverpool Philharmonic audiences.

She first appeared with the Orchestra as a teenager, and since being encouraged by her singing teacher at Liverpool College, she has forged a stellar career both on the concert platform and on the operatic stage.

Rudge studied voice with Susan Roper at the [Royal Northern College of Music](#) and from 2015-17 was a [BBC New Generation Artist](#). She has also been an English National Opera Harewood Artist and was named as *The Times* ‘Rising Star of Classical Music’.

She made her opera debut at the ENO in 2012 playing Cherubino in Fiona Shaw’s *The Marriage of Figaro*, and along with performing with leading opera companies – including Glyndebourne, Garsington Opera and Opera North – she has also sung at the BBC Proms and with many major orchestras.

Since her first appearance aged 18, she has sung many times with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, notably in the Orchestra’s [175th anniversary concert](#) in 2015 and at the Capital of Culture opening ceremony in 2008 when she appeared as [Britannia, draped in a Union Jack](#). Earlier this season, Rudge sang with the Orchestra and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir in the *St Matthew Passion*.

Watch Kathryn Rudge perform Eric Coates’ [Bird Songs at Eventide](#).

Elgan Llŷr Thomas

[Elgan Llŷr Thomas](#) has been hailed as “one of the most exciting British male talents to have emerged in recent years” and praised for his “rich vibrant tone”.

Welsh-born Thomas studied at the Royal Northern College of Music and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He is an English National Opera [Harewood Artist](#) and former Scottish Opera Emerging Artist.

His many operatic engagements include Ralph Rackstraw in the ENO’s *HMS Pinafore* (alongside Liverpool’s Les Dennis), Lysander in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and Rinuccio in Puccini’s *Gianni Schicchi* (both with Scottish Opera), and Dr Richardson in *Breaking The Waves* at Opera Comique.

Thomas is also in demand on the concert platform. Recent appearances include Handel's *Messiah* at the Royal Albert Hall and Mozart's *Requiem* with the Danish National Symphony Orchestra. He previously sang with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in Sir Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man*, conducted by the composer.

Listen to Elgan Llŷr Thomas perform [The Last Rose of Summer](#), arranged by Benjamin Britten.

Roderick Williams

[Roderick Williams](#) is one of the world's foremost and most sought-after baritones.

He was a choral scholar at Magdalen College, Oxford, and later became a music teacher before changing career and studying at the Guildhall School of Music.

His operatic repertoire includes *Billy Budd*, Don Giovanni, Figaro in *The Barber of Seville*, Onegin in *Eugene Onegin* and Albert in Massenet's *Werther*, while he is an accomplished and popular recitalist.

In 2016 he won the Royal Philharmonic Society's Singer of the Year award. Williams, who was made an OBE in 2017 for services to music, is also president of the Three Choirs Festival Society and patron of Birmingham Bach Choir, and on top of that he is a prolific composer.

An artist in residence with Liverpool Philharmonic in 2020-21 and 2021-22, he has a wide repertoire ranging from baroque to contemporary music, and a particular passion for [English song](#).

Watch Roderick Williams talk about and sing [Songs of Travel](#) by Vaughan Williams at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw.

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir

When the Liverpool Philharmonic Society was founded in 1840, it saw the birth not only of an orchestra but of a chorus too. [The Choir](#) added 'Royal' to its title in 1990.

In recent years, the Choir has performed Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and *Mass in B minor*, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, Mahler's *Symphony No.2*, Rachmaninov's *Vespers*, Verdi's *Requiem*, Karl Jenkins' *Stabat Mater*, James MacMillan's *St John Passion*, the Duruflé *Requiem*, Britten's *War Requiem* and Handel's *Messiah*.

The Choir has also appeared in many of the UK's major concert venues – including the Royal Albert Hall – and has sung on a number of foreign tours.

It's a busy season for the Choir. Along with this concert, their season includes Handel's *Messiah*, Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and Mozart's *Requiem*.

Eleanor Alberga

Award-winning British-Jamaican composer [Eleanor Alberga](#) has been described as a composer of huge originality and consummate skill. Her work is renowned for its brilliant colouring and orchestration.

Alberga was born in the Jamaican capital Kingston in 1949 and at the age of five decided she wanted to be a concert pianist. By 10 she was starting to compose her own piano pieces. She went on to study piano and singing at the Royal Academy of Music (having won the biennial Royal Schools of Music Scholarship for the West Indies), and initially forged a career as a piano soloist.

She joined the London Contemporary Dance Theatre in 1978, later becoming its musical director, and after leaving the organisation began to concentrate wholly on composition.

Her work – which encompasses solo instrumental pieces to symphonic works, opera to compositions for the screen - is performed all over the world. In 2015, she was commissioned to compose [*ARISE, ATHENA!*](#) for the opening of the Last Night of the Proms

[*Tower*](#) dates from 2017 and was commissioned in memory of violinist [David Angel](#), co-founder of the Maggini Quartet.

In 2010 Alberga and her husband, the violinist [Thomas Bowes](#), founded the [Arcadia Music Festival](#) in Herefordshire. She is a Fellow of the [Royal Academy of Music](#) and in 2021, was made an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours.

Listen to the Minnesota Orchestra perform Eleanor Alberga's [*Tower*](#).

Ralph Vaughan Williams

In 1904, [Ralph Vaughan Williams](#) joined the English Folk Song Society. The 32-year-old composer had collected his first folk song, *Bush and Briars*, from an elderly Essex labourer the previous year, and it was to be the start of a lifelong passion which saw him gather together more than 800 songs. For a decade, he devoted up to a month each year to collecting examples from almost two dozen English counties.

[Folk songs](#) helped Vaughan Williams find his 'voice'. And it was against this backdrop that he embarked on his [Songs of Travel](#) cycle.

Their verses come from Robert Louis Stephenson's 1896 book *Songs of Travel and Other Verses*, and while most were composed in around 1904, one - *Wither Must I Wander?* - had been published and performed.

The full work was premiered at London's Bechstein Hall in December 1904 by Walter Creighton, accompanied on piano by Hamilton Harty. A second Vaughan Williams song cycle, *The House of Life*, was on the same bill.

One reviewer wrote: "Some of the songs which were sung last night deserve to be ranked among the most beautiful that have been written by native composers in recent years."

Songs of Travel was dedicated to leading Irish bass-baritone (and son-in-law of Hubert Parry) [Harry Plunket Greene](#), after he chose to sing it in early 1905.

Listen to Roderick Williams singing [*The Roadside Fire*](#) from Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Songs of Travel*.

Sir Michael Tippett

On Sunday September 3, 1939, two things happened. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain took to the radio to explain that Britain was now at war with Germany. And 34-year-old [Michael Tippett](#) began work on a new composition.

Tippett had been looking for subject matter for an oratorio for some time – one discarded idea was around the 1916 Easter Uprising.

Instead, it was the story of a Jewish teenage refugee [Herschel Grynszpan](#), whose shooting of the German diplomat Ernst vom Rath in Paris was used as a pretext by the Nazis for the November 1938 [Kristallnacht](#), which seized the composer's attention.

Tippett completed [A Child of Our Time](#) in 1941, having written both the libretto and the music – which included five African-American spirituals.

The work, with its pacifist message, was then set aside, and it wasn't until 1944 that it would finally receive its premiere.

That came on Sunday March 19, when despite London having once again come under attack from the air in what was described as the '[Baby Blitz](#)', the 'modern oratorio' was unveiled in a matinee concert at the Adelphi Theatre.

It was performed by the London Philharmonic and 200 voices from the combined choirs of the London Civil Defence and Morley College (where Tippett was director of music). Joan Cross and [Peter Pears](#) were two of the soloists.

Did you know? Like Benjamin Britten, Tippett was a pacifist and in June 1943 he was jailed for three months for refusing to carry out farm work. Vaughan Williams had appeared in his defence, describing his compositions as a 'distinct national asset' and saying: "I think Tippett's pacifist views are wrong, but I respect him very much for holding them so firmly."

Listen to [four spirituals](#) from *A Child of Our Time*.