



SHOWCASE



ROYAL WELSH COLLEGE
OF MUSIC & DRAMA
COLEG BRENHINOL
CERDD A DRAMA CYMRU

2nd October 2026, 1:15pm

Introduction



We are delighted to welcome you to this very special concert, which marks the end of our third Graduate Composers' Showcase. We launched this programme in November 2023, seeking to plug the gap between our pioneering Young Composers' Scheme - which has provided free mentoring in composition to over 300 state-educated students across the UK - and our groundbreaking '100 Commissions' project - our founding aim to commission 100 composers in 10 years, which sees its completion this month.

We recognised the challenges faced by early-career composers, and with this programme we aim to provide a crucial platform to showcase the wealth of extraordinary talent amongst the next generation of composers. Now in its third iteration, the Graduate Composers' scheme has become a staple support platform, receiving a large number of applications from graduates across the country. The five selected composers whose works you're about to hear were handpicked from this competitive pool of submissions. Each displayed an impressive level of skill, musicality and flair in their applications, and we're thrilled to be performing their brand new works today.

I'd like to thank the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama for partnering with us to host the Showcase again, and to the team here for their assistance in making this event possible. We're excited to continue our work with the College through a masterclass with the composition students and our singers, to help develop their skillset and works-in-progress.

Finally, I'd like to thank The Colwinston Charitable Trust, The Headley Trust, The Tedworth Charitable Trust, Scops Arts Trust, and The Adrian Swire Charitable Trust for their support in this crucial project. We'd also like to thank the Cuthbert Family, and our Centurion Circle, ORA100 and ChoralClub members for their critical support in our wider artistic and charitable work. None of this would be possible without them.

Suzi Digby OBE

Artistic Director & Founder, ORA Singers

ORA Singers

The award-winning ORA Singers is recognised for its modern take on the centuries-long choral tradition, and was born out of a belief that we are in a second golden age of choral music, matching that of the Renaissance. It is one of the world's foremost commissioners of contemporary choral music, which it often performs alongside Renaissance masterpieces in its celebrated concerts and recordings. Since its description as "a musical comet", ORA Singers has continued to blaze a trail as one of the UK's leading vocal ensembles. Directed by Suzi Digby OBE, the group was named 'Ensemble of the Year' at the 2018 Opus Klassik awards, and has received critical acclaim both for its "unfailingly elegant" performances and its "superb and exciting" recordings, most recently winning the Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik for its 2023 disc, *Sanctissima*. 2026 marks the group's 10th Anniversary and the completion of their renowned 100 Commissions Catalogue. The 100th commission, *Into thine hand*, by Brett Dean, will be premiered at the group's special Anniversary Concert at Wigmore Hall on 24th October.

"Impeccably tuned and stylishly presented... from homophonic declamation to layered polyphony, and from ravishing sensuality to acerbic dissonance... The competition amongst professional choirs is fierce, but this old/new mix could be a winner."

- Richard Morrison, The Times

Our Singers

Sopranos

Amy Carson
Lucy Cox
Natalie Houlston
Emma Walshe
Daisy Walford
Rosanna Wicks

Altos

Lowri Bufton
Hannah Cooke
Kim Porter
Joy Sutcliffe

Tenors

Edward Beswick
Jeremy Budd
Jack Granby
Benedict Munden

Basses

Christopher Bruerton
Eoghan Desmond
William Gaunt
Jonathan Howard



Suzi Digby OBE

Artistic Director and Founder



Suzi Digby was born in Japan and lived in Hong Kong, Mexico and the Philippines before settling in London, Cambridge and Bath. She is an internationally renowned choral conductor and music educator. She has trail-blazed the revival of singing in UK schools and the community over three decades. Suzi founded the following pioneering National Arts/education organisations: The Voices Foundation (the UK's leading Primary Music Education Charity); Voce Chamber Choir; Vocal Futures (nurturing young audiences for Classical Music); Singing4Success (leadership and Accelerated Learning for Corporates) and London Youth Choirs (a pyramid of 5 choirs [aged 8-22], serving multiple diverse communities in London's 33 boroughs). Her professional vocal consort, ORA Singers (commissioning choral works as reflections of Renaissance masterworks) won the Opus Klassik 'Best Ensemble of the Year', 2018, and the Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik for their 2023 album, *Sanctissima*.



Our Team



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Artistic Director & Founder



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2026 Graduate Composers



Marcello Palazzo

27, London
Durham University,
University of Oxford (MPhil)

Marcello Palazzo is a composer and conductor, whose music has been described as having 'something of the expansiveness of Sibelius' (Seen and Heard International). He has written music for the London Symphony Orchestra, Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra, Sir Thomas Allen, CHROMA Ensemble, Ligeti Quartet, Merton College Choir (Oxford), Britten-Pears Contemporary Ensemble, Lumas Winds, Flux Quartet and the BBC Singers, amongst others. As a versatile composer, Marcello also writes for occasions outside the concert hall including for theatre. His most significant work in theatre is the original score for *Truck* – a new play produced by MoMA in New York.

Marcello's music has been performed at important institutions including the Aldeburgh Festival (2023), Vienna Opera Festival (2023), Tête-à-Tête Opera Festival (2024), and the quinquennial Greater New York showcase (2026). His opera, *Mount Herzog*, was the Tête-à-Tête Opera Festival's best-selling production. His music has been performed at venues including LSO St. Luke's, MoMA PS1 (NYC), the Glasshouse International Centre, Oxford's Town Hall and the Sheldonian Theatre. Marcello has also won important awards, including first prize in the inaugural Pinuccia-Marzocchi Competition, and significant grants from the Countess of Munster Trust and Mazzini-Garibaldi Foundation.

As a conductor, Marcello is equally at home with new music and established repertoire, having worked with the Fidelio Trio for a performance of Beethoven's *Triple Concerto*, and premiered over 50 new pieces by fellow composers. Notably, he has conducted the Budapest Symphony Orchestra MAV, at the Aalborg Opera Festival (Denmark), and at the Vienna Opera Festival. He has been appointed to conduct the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra's side-by-side performances from the 2026/27 season.

Upcoming projects include a new song cycle, a work for string orchestra, and an orchestral piece. He continues to develop his opera, *Mount Herzog*, for the big stage. Marcello is completing a doctorate at the Royal Academy of Music, and prior to this graduated with Distinction from the University of Oxford (MPhil, Composition).



Evie Atkin

23, London

Guildhall School of Music and Drama

Evie Atkin (she/her) is a composer, musical director, and performer based in London.

As a composer, she has written for ensembles such as the BBC Concert Orchestra, National Youth Choir, and Exaudi, as well as soloists including clarinettist Heather Roche and pianist Ben Smith. Her piece *What Were You Wearing?*, which was written in response to the Mary Simmerling poem of the same name, won the 2020 BBC Young Composer award.

Evie's music contains mesmerising minimalist textures, jazz-inflected harmonies, and off-kilter rhythms, which paint rich yet whimsical, landscapes that feel familiar even at their most abstract. Her music is often underpinned by a large-scale transformation of parameters, interested in uncovering every step along a continuous spectrum. She enjoys fragmented material and silence, as well as dense euphoria and weightless, glistening beauty, with each compositional decision informed by a consideration of the tactility of the sound. She studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Julian Phillips, Laurence Crane and Hollie Harding and was generously supported by the Guildhall Scholarship Fund.

As a performer, Evie has sung in many venues across London and the UK, including Wigmore Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, and the Royal Albert Hall. Evie also has an interest in musical theatre and is frequently engaged as a musical director. She has collaborated extensively with British Youth Music Theatre as a composer, performer and musical director. In 2025, she was delighted to be commissioned to write *Choreomania*, a new musical telling the incredible true story of The Dancing Plague of 1518, which premiered at the Birmingham Hippodrome in August 2025.

Evie is thrilled to be writing for ORA Singers for a second time, having participated in their inaugural Young Composers competition in 2019.



Sarah Henderson

24, London
University of Cambridge,
Royal Academy of Music (MA)

Sarah Henderson is a freelance composer, cellist and soprano based in London. Her formal training in composition began at the Junior Department of Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, where she studied with Darren Bloom and wrote pieces that were performed in LSO St. Luke's and the Old Royal Naval College Chapel. She later studied with Masahiro Ishijima when she was a student at Toho Gakuen School of Music in Tokyo.

Sarah developed a great love of writing music for choir during her time as a choral scholar in The Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge. She has written pieces for The Hildegard Singers and Coro Spezzato and was commissioned by The Choir of St. John's College, Cambridge, in late 2024 to compose a set of canticles for lower voices. Earlier this year, Sarah was awarded first prize in Tenebrae's 25th anniversary composition competition "Undiscovered Voices". Her winning piece *Wanderers* was premiered at the live final in Wigmore Hall and will be included in Tenebrae's upcoming album and tour programme "*The Journey*". Sarah is very excited to be working with ORA Singers as part of their 2026 Graduate Composers programme.

Outside of choral music, Sarah has developed a long-standing collaborative relationship with the cellist and mezzo-soprano Doraly Gill. So far Sarah has written three pieces for Doraly, all of which involve singing and playing simultaneously and have been performed in several venues across Cambridge as well as in London, Warwick, Welwyn Garden City and Shropshire for the 2025 Whittington Festival. Other works of Sarah's include the chamber opera *Tempō Famine*, written for CUOS Shorts 2023, and *Rera*, a trio for flute, viola and harp inspired by a derelict shopping centre in rural Japan. Sarah is looking forward to beginning a Master's course in composition with a scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music from September 2026.

Sarah also leads a busy life as a soprano and a cellist. She sings with a variety of professional church choirs in London and has given several solo recitals, specialising in contemporary repertoire. As a cellist, she was an Instrumental Award Holder throughout her time at Cambridge as well as co-principal cellist of the Cambridge University Orchestra. In March 2025, she performed Shostakovich's *Cello Concerto no. 1* in Trinity College Chapel, conducted by Sam Gray. She has also appeared as cello soloist with Stephen Layton and the Holst Singers.



Harry Rees

23, Enniskillen, County Fermanagh
Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama

Harry Rees is an emerging Irish composer from Enniskillen. They graduated from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in 2025 with a First Class Bachelor of Music (Hons) in Composition, studying under Ceri Tippetts, Mark Boden, Michael McCartney, Owen Lloyd, and Tic Ashfield.

In 2024, Harry was shortlisted by the BBC National Orchestra of Wales for Composition: Wales 2025, culminating in March 2025 with a recorded performance by the orchestra of Harry's original work, *Nine Times to Die*, conducted by Jac van Steen. Harry was selected for the Britten Sinfonia Opus 1 scheme in the summer of 2024, working closely with their musicians to compose a new work - a prelude and toccata - for Piccolo, Trombone and Harp, which was publicly performed in Cambridge. The Penarth Chamber Music Festival chose Harry's *String Trio No. 2* to workshop alongside the Neary-Adams String Trio as part of their 2024 summer programme. Harry has also worked with Sinfonia Cymru (*String Quartet No. 2, With the Softest Squeeze*) and The Hermes Experiment (*Nachtmusik*). Most recently, Harry was selected by the Philharmonia Orchestra as one of their composer-fellows for the 2025/6 Composers Academy, during which they wrote a brand-new work for chamber orchestra, *I Once Saw the Face of God*, which was performed and recorded in Royal Festival Hall in May 2026.

Harry enjoys collaborating with other musicians, particularly with Elaina Sophie, a composer-clarinettist, creating *It Falls From Out the Woods*, a multichannel work combining modular synthesis and clarinet that explores declining bird populations and habitat destruction as a result of climate change and *Suite Française* - a work for clarinet and piano that explores the musical processes of French composers such as Pierre Boulez and Francis Poulenc. Harry has also collaborated with guitarist-composer, Harry Woodman, to create several works for guitar and electronics, most notably *Improvisation for Electric Guitar and Modular Synthesiser*.

Often inspired by extramusical influences, such as birdsong, cubist art, and poetry, Harry's electroacoustic music is centred around the concept of sudden change, creating vast and ever-shifting sonic spaces. Their notated music focuses on combining tonal and non-tonal elements, blending timbral techniques and fluid rhythms to create a kaleidoscopic range of shifting instrumental colours.



Eluned Davies

25, Swansea
Royal College of Music,
The Guildhall School of Music and Drama (MMus, MA)

Eluned Davies is a Welsh composer currently based in London. Having a background in singing as well as a passion for poetry and words, Eluned has a particular affinity with vocal music. Notable works have been her chamber opera *Growing Wings* in collaboration with Tête-à-tête, with libretto by Alfie Coates and her most recent work *A Bone to Pick*, a chamber opera created with librettist Bess Still. Both personal and universal themes are drawn upon in Davies's music for example her particular interest in feminism was explored in her quasi-interactive installation piece *Never Look Always Notice II*. She has written for some of the UK and Europe's most exciting ensembles for new music such as the United Instruments of Lucilin, Exaudi, UPROAR and Plus Minus, and has worked across disciplines such as dance, opera, electro-acoustic and video game music. She is currently completing her MA in Opera Making at The Guildhall School of Music and Drama as Jane Ades scholar, under the tutelage of Julian Philips. Davies also studied with Laurence Crane and Paul Newland in her MMus in Guildhall and with Jonathan Cole and Catherine Kontz in her undergraduate studies at the Royal College of Music.





SHOWCASE PROGRAMME

Thomas Tomkins - *Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom*

Harry Rees - *The Fountain of all Wisdom**

A reflection on Tomkins - Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom

Peter Philips - *Ecce Vicit Leo*

Eluned Davies - *the quiet one**

A reflection on Philips - Ecce Vicit Leo

Evie Atkin - *Everywhere. Beautiful, Alive**

A reflection on Philips - Ecce Vicit Leo

John Sheppard - *Libera nos, salva nos I*

Marcello Palazzo - *Libera nos**

A reflection on Sheppard - Libera nos, salva nos

Sarah Henderson - *Libera nos**

A reflection on Sheppard - Libera nos, salva nos

**Graduate Composer Commission*



Our Graduate Composers were given the choice of three renaissance works on which to reflect; John Sheppard's *Libera Nos I*, Peter Philips' *Ecce Vicit Leo* and Thomas Tomkins' *Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom*.

In line with several other ORA Singers commissions, their brief was to respond to this original work in their own interpretation, taking qualities from the renaissance work as their inspiration. With ORA Singers' full cohort of 18 singers to write for, our Graduate Composers have been composing their new works with support via a series of consultation sessions with Suzi Digby throughout the year.

Thomas Tomkins (1572–1656) - *Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom*

Thomas Tomkins was one of the leading English composers of the late Tudor and early Stuart periods. Born in Pembrokeshire and educated within the English cathedral tradition, he held important posts at Worcester Cathedral and, from 1621, as a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal. His music reflects both the contrapuntal mastery of the Renaissance and the expressive, text-conscious style of the early seventeenth century.

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom is a setting of an English prayer addressed to God as the source of wisdom and understanding. Its devotional text places the work within the Anglican tradition of sacred music, in which clarity of words and the shaping of musical phrases to the meaning of the text are central. The prayer's language of divine illumination and guidance gives the piece a mood of humility, reverence and quiet supplication.

Tomkins responds with music of considerable warmth and refinement. The setting is characterised by carefully woven vocal lines, expressive imitation and a supple interplay between contrapuntal passages and more homophonic writing. Rather than relying on dramatic contrasts, the music unfolds through subtle changes of texture and emphasis, allowing the words to remain at the forefront. The result is a work of poised beauty: contemplative in character, yet enriched by the rhythmic vitality and harmonic sensitivity that distinguish Tomkins' mature style.

Text:

Collect after the Offertory, 1549 BCP

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom,
which knowst our necessities before we ask,
and our ignorance in asking:
We beseech thee to have compassion
on our infirmities; and those things,
which for our unworthiness we dare not,
and for our blindness we cannot ask,
vouchsafe to give us,
for the worthiness of thy Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

1549 BCP

(1572–1656)

Soprano

Al - migh - ty God, the foun - tain of all wis - dom, of

Alto 1

Al - migh - ty God, the foun - tain of all wis - dom, of all

Alto 2

Al - migh - ty God, the foun - tain of all wis - dom,

Tenor

8 Al - migh - ty God, the foun - tain of all wis - dom, of all wis

Harry Rees (b. 2002) - *The Fountain of all Wisdom*

Tasked by the ORA Singers with composing a reflection piece based on Thomas Tomkins's *Almighty God the Fountain of All Wisdom*, I used a variety of techniques to ensure that the musical material in this piece were both original and fresh as well as directly inspired by and reflecting on Tomkins's work.

Each section of this piece is signposted by groups of homophonic chords. Each of these sections take their harmonic and melodic material directly from small motives contained within Tomkins's original. The chords themselves are formed from the melodic content of Tomkins's piece. I develop each chord by sustaining the dissonances over harmonic changes creating a blurred effect, almost like a sustain pedal that's been held too long.

I was also greatly inspired by Tomkins's use of false relations; notice how each of the chordal signposts as well as a great deal of the contrapuntal material utilises them as a technique for development.

On the programmatic side, in this work I establish a juxtaposition between the divine nature of God and the baseness of human sin, which I found deeply inspiring in the text. This is achieved by creating a harmonic juxtaposition between the two ideas; divinity and God are associated with more consonant and "traditional" harmonies, whereas sin and humanity are associated with more dissonant and discordant harmonies. To further explore this idea with reference to the text, the climax of the work - which mentions Christ - contains both the chords of the divine sections and the dissonance of the human sections simultaneously; a deliberate reference to the joint human and divine nature of Jesus.

I would like to especially thank ORA Singers, who commissioned this piece as part of their Graduate Composers scheme.

Text:

Collect after the Offertory, 1549 BCP

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom,
which knowst our necessities before we ask,
and our ignorance in asking:
We beseech thee to have compassion
on our infirmities; and those things,
which for our unworthiness we dare not,
and for our blindness we cannot ask,
vouchsafe to give us,
for the worthiness of thy Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Peter Philips (1561 - 1628) - *Ecce Vicit Leo*

Peter Philips was one of the most accomplished English composers of the late Renaissance. A Catholic who left England in 1582, he spent much of his career on the Continent, working in Rome and later in the Spanish Netherlands. His music reflects this international experience, combining the clarity of English polyphony with the sonorities and expressive energy of Italian and Flemish traditions.

Ecce vicit Leo was published in Philips' collection *Cantiones Sacrae* of 1613, a volume of thirty double-choir motets. Its Latin text, drawn from Revelation 5, proclaims the triumph of the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" and the worthiness of the slain Lamb to receive power, wisdom, honour, glory and blessing. The repeated Alleluia gives the motet an unmistakably celebratory character, making it especially appropriate to the Easter season.

Written for double choir, the piece is exuberant and richly theatrical. Philips uses antiphonal exchanges, brilliant vocal figuration and shifts between duple and triple metre to create a sense of movement and splendour. Much of the writing is homophonic, allowing the words to be powerfully projected, while the interplay between the choirs generates a vivid dialogue. Particularly striking is the vigorous exchange at 'accipere virtutem', which builds towards a powerful climax. The final 'Alleluia' section combines rhythmic vitality with radiant sonority, revealing Philips' mastery of the polychoral style and his gift for turning sacred text into music of triumphant joy.

Text:

The Book of Revelation, 5:5, 5:12

Ecce vicit Leo de tribu Juda radix David, aperire librum, et solvere septem signacula ejus, alleluia. Dignus est Agnus, qui occisus est, accipere virtu et divinitatem, et sapientiam, et fortitudinem, et honorem, et gloriam, et benedictionem, alleluia.

Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof, Alleluia. Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing, Alleluia.

Translation: Anthony DiCello

The image displays a musical score for the motet 'Ecce Vicit Leo' by Peter Philips. It consists of five staves of music, likely representing two choirs (Soprano and Alto for the first three staves, Tenor and Bass for the last two). The music is written in a key with two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a common time signature. The lyrics are in Latin and are written below the notes. The lyrics are: 'for - ti - tu - di - nem, et glo - ri - am, et be - ne - dic - ti - o -'. The score includes a page number '38' at the bottom left.

Eluned Davies (b. 2000) - *the quiet one*

The quiet one is a short unaccompanied choral piece for 18 voices, commissioned by ORA Singers as a reflection upon Peter Philips' *Ecce Vicit Leo* to be performed as a part of their graduate composers scheme.

I reflected upon Philip's use of double choir and the context from which the text was taken. The text for Peter Philips' *Ecce Vicit Leo* is from Revelations 5:5 and 5:12. Calling upon librettist Ariella Stoian to write an original text for this piece, we explored the wider chapter of Revelations 5; its evocative images, the idea of obtaining knowledge (revelation) and receiving that within the self. Ariella's text has a dual natured quality: a response to the spaces between self and other, and self and self - a relationship with a quiet you.

Its interest in the intimacy of this divided self, situated within an unstitching, transforming body, and in the meeting place of uncanny tenderness and visceral revelation. How do we relate to another, whose edges we might feel only for a match-flare moment? Reaching through this porous encounter towards a silent, formless knowing. What is it to receive what cannot be understood: knowledge that arrives too large for the body? What might break the egg of the head? Where are we kept?

Two soprano soloists extracted from the choir may represent the dual self, leaving 4 sets of SATB to correspond with the original Revelations chapter, which describes "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders".

The soprano soloists may reflect the lamb, encircled by the remaining 4 choral units to correspond to the four living creatures, as well as often combining into a double choir reflective of Philip's *Ecce Vicit Leo*. Musically it collapses as "four living creatures... fell down before the Lamb" in the chapter and resonant within Ariella's text.

Text:

By Ariella Stoian

Eyes meadow wide
Shiver with dusk
Irises tangle spine
Roots grip nerves (us)

Touch the warm wet of my back
Fingers on shoulder blades Press
open, skin like clay
My broken head leaking
Egg white
Boiled pale by nightwords
Not words

A Quiet shape
Where you are not / where I am not

Evie Atkin (b. 2003) - *Everywhere. Beautiful. Alive*

The process for writing *Everywhere. Beautiful. Alive* began with a reflection of the original translated text, taking inspiration from a Heidi Andrea Restrepo Rhodes poem to reframe the original meaning as an anthem of authenticity and personal freedom. I took a short section from Philips' work - the second setting of "Dignus est Agnus qui occisus est" - and applied a process to extend this material to last three minutes. This becomes the music of the downstage choir: a personification of rigidity and repression. This is countered by the upstage choir whose material sits across the beat and epitomises a sense of freedom.

In the central section of the piece, I took inspiration from the antiphonal writing of *Ecce Vicit Leo*. The upstage choir breaks free from the rigidity of the first section, increasing the tempo and leading us through a range of distant tonal centres as music is passed between the two choirs.

When we return to the opening material, it has been changed by this journey. The piece ends with the repetition of the word "alive" - this story is just beginning.

"we are a transgression. everywhere, beautiful & alive."

Text:

By Evie Atkin

Behold, the lion has won.
The lion of the self,
the root of all being,
which opens the body and releases the soul from carnal oppression.
The spirit of transgression is worthy to receive power,
and beauty,
and wisdom,
and strength,
and honour,
and blessing.
Everywhere. Beautiful. Alive.

John Sheppard ^(1515 - 1558) - *Libera nos, salva nos I*

John Sheppard was one of the foremost English composers of the mid-sixteenth century, serving as a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary I. His career spanned the religious upheavals of the English Reformation, and his music reflects the changing liturgical world of Tudor England.

Libera nos, salva nos sets a Latin prayer for deliverance and salvation: "Free us, save us, defend us, O blessed Trinity" - the text commonly used as an Antiphon for Trinity Sunday.

The piece is a fine example of Sheppard's expressive command of Renaissance polyphony. Its long, flowing vocal lines unfold with a remarkable sense of breadth, often moving in closely interwoven imitation. The music's restrained harmonic language and sustained phrases create a mood of contemplative intensity, while the contrast between the pleading text and the more affirmative 'Alleluia' gives the motet a subtle dramatic arc. Sheppard's ability to balance contrapuntal intricacy with clarity of expression makes this motet a deeply affecting example of Tudor sacred music.

Text:

Antiphon for Trinity Sunday

Libera nos, salva nos, justifica nos, O beata Trinitas.

Free us, save us, defend us, O blessed Trinity.

Translation: Anthony DiCello

nos, jus- ti- fi- ca, nos, jus- ti- fi- ca, ti- fi- ca, nos, jus- ti- fi- ca, ca, nos, jus- ti- fi- ca

Marcello Palazzo (b. 1999) - *Libera nos*

For my piece, I chose to draw on the beautifully simple text of John Sheppard's *Libera nos*, setting these words in a way that illuminates their urgency, whilst celebrating the unique possibilities of this wonderful choir. The piece is written specifically for the forces available, requiring a minimum of six sopranos, who at times divide into separate lines, weaving above the others below. In its intertwining lines, the piece hopes to re-examine the techniques of luxurious counterpoint best represented by Sheppard, and his fellow Renaissance compatriots, Tallis and Byrd, but in a distinctly modern way. Here, the harmony is directed by a three-note motif – a cipher drawn from the choir's own name: ORA; the rhythm is often constructed from multiple layers, shuffling along unsynchronised, yet meeting at important structural moments; singers are also required to navigate the performance space, moving between three positions on the stage, and at one point, even dividing into three choirs – perhaps an embodiment of the 'beata Trinitas'.

Enormous thanks go to Suzi Digby and ORA Singers, for all their work and support through this process. Furthermore, many congratulations are due for reaching their 10 year anniversary – may there be many more years to come!

Text:

Antiphon for Trinity Sunday

Libera nos, salva nos, justifica nos, O beata Trinitas.

Free us, save us, defend us, O blessed Trinity.

Translation: Anthony DiCello

Sarah Henderson (b. 2002) - *Libera Nos*

Libera Nos is a setting of an antiphon for Trinity Sunday, reflecting on John Sheppard's 16th century setting of the same text. What really struck me about Sheppard's setting is the feeling of expanse that he is able to create: the cantus firmus being sung by the basses ensures that the harmony develops slowly, unfolding bar by bar throughout the piece. Over the top of these sustained bass notes, the polyphonic lines flourish and create a glorious wall of sound. That said, my initial reaction to the text itself was that it felt potentially more desperate or pleading than the calm glory of Sheppard's setting might suggest. The series of imperatives creates a powerful call towards God, but also reveals a vulnerability in the speaker's current position, not yet having been freed, saved or defended. It is the dichotomy between this vulnerability and the salvation that is sought that has guided my setting of the piece.

Throughout the piece I have divided the ensemble into a solo quartet on stage and a main choir body performing from the balcony. Beginning with just the quartet, the music opens from a place of vulnerability. Pleas mix with uncertainty as the harmony meanders, searching for resolution. Then the main choir enters, with a wall of major tonality representing the coming of salvation. The support of the sustained chords allows the quartet to ascend into gloriously virtuosic lines inspired by Sheppard's melodic material. These two contrasting sound worlds continue to develop throughout the piece, with the harmonic comfort of the main choir coming in and out of the texture, revealing and resolving vulnerabilities. The music reaches a climax with a big chord of A-flat major, a harmonic moment which also appears very strikingly in Sheppard's setting.

After this climax, however, the music does not simply remain in a state of resolution. A final glimpse of vulnerability leads into an antiphonal coda, derived largely from Sheppard but repositioned harmonically. In returning to Sheppard's musical world, the coda brings the two strands of the piece together: the vulnerability of the solo quartet and the expansive, reassuring sound of salvation. Rather than presenting salvation as a single moment of arrival, the ending leaves these two states in dialogue, allowing the plea for deliverance and the vision of its fulfilment to exist simultaneously.

Text:

Antiphon for Trinity Sunday

Libera nos, salva nos, justifica nos, O beata Trinitas.

Free us, save us, defend us, O blessed Trinity.

Translation: Anthony DiCello



"The lightbulb moment which led me to found ORA Singers was in 2016. The realisation that we are in a new Golden Age of choral composition made it incumbent on us to create a legacy for future generations. A snap-shot of the genius of our age. Now is the time to be commissioning the many brilliant choral composers who are composing, with increasing confidence, music that is beautiful, powerful and original, with the potential to have a 'transfigurative' effect on new audiences. The last comparable Golden Age was that of the Renaissance. Hence our 100 commission target, each commission 'reflecting' a Renaissance masterpiece. A bridge between the two Golden Ages."

ORA SINGERS GRADUATE COMPOSERS

ORA Singers launched in 2016 and has fast made a name for itself as one of the world's leading commissioners of choral music, with its completed founding aim to commission 100 composers within 10 years. In 2019, ORA launched their Young Composers' scheme, which has since provided free tutoring in composition to over 300 students from state schools across the UK. In 2023, the Graduate Composers' Showcase was introduced for early-career composers, completing ORA's 'pipeline of support' across students, graduates, and professionals.

2023 - 2025

The inaugural Graduate Composers Showcase opened in November 2023 to graduates across the United Kingdom. After a careful selection process, five successful applicants were chosen as ORA's first Graduate Composers: George W. Parris, Emma Pascoe, Jorge Ramos, Tomos Owen Jones and Liberty Richardson. Applications re-opened the following year, with Anian Wiedner, Samuel Kane, Roseanna Dunn, Ed Driver and Rachel Groves selected as the 2025 Graduate Composers. Each composer is now included in ORA's esteemed 100 Commissions Catalogue.

January - February 2026

Applications for the 2026 scheme opened on 14th January, welcoming applications from recent graduates from any UK University or Conservatoire. Applicants may have graduated with a degree in any subject. Following the success of the previous projects, ORA was thrilled to receive a high number of applications from graduates right across the UK. After a thorough and difficult adjudication process, ORA Singers selected five applicants to become their Graduate Composers for 2026.

March - October 2026

ORA officially commissioned Harry Rees, Eluned Davies, Evie Atkin, Marcello Palazzo and Sarah Henderson. After a welcome & briefing, they set about writing their new pieces and were able to arrange consultation sessions with Suzi to aid their composition process. This afternoon's performance marks the end of the 2026 Graduate Composers' programme, where we will hear the five new works premiered by ORA Singers, directed by Suzi Digby.

With thanks to...

Our generous patrons and supporters who make it all happen. We are grateful for their generosity and dedication, allowing us to champion contemporary composers, cultivate the next generation, and perform excellent music.

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ORA Singers would like to thank the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama for hosting the Graduate Composers' Showcase and for their help in making this event possible.

10th Anniversary Fund

ORA Singers is an award-winning vocal ensemble and the world's leading commissioner of choral music. 2026 marks our 10th Anniversary and the culmination of our founding aim to commission 100 composers over 10 years.

To help celebrate these milestones, we have set up a 10th Anniversary Fund designed to support the ambitions of our ensemble across our second decade.

SCAN TO DONATE



or visit
www.orasingers.com/donate

As a charity, ORA creates opportunities for aspiring young musicians, early-career composers and some of the world's finest musicians. We receive no public subsidy and rely on the generous support of individuals - please give what you can and help us to preserve the UK's unique choral heritage.

Registered Charity No. 1160228





13th October 2026 - St Mary's Church, Twickenham

ORA Singers present their celebrated programme, *The Spirit of Shakespeare*, to the Richmond Concert Society. Shakespeare echoes through this diverse programme of music exploring the spirit of the Bard, his characters, and the spirit of his time. This programme will be interspersed with readings by Philip Rham. Tickets are available to RCS members.

24th October 2026 - Wigmore Hall, London

ORA Singers mark their 10th Anniversary Year with a special concert at Wigmore Hall. This "greatest hits" programme includes 10 of ORA's most influential commissions from their ground-breaking 100 commissions catalogue, including the world premiere of their 100th commission by Brett Dean.

29th October 2026 - St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta

ORA Singers bring their 10th Anniversary Programme to the Three Palaces Festival in Malta, with a return concert in the stunning St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta. This concert features the premiere of a special commission from the *Cultural Bridges* series by Cristian Grases, who joins ORA Singers on the Cuatro.

2nd December 2026 - Ladbroke Hall, London

ORA Singers & Suzi Digby reunite with star jazz pianist Harry Baker for a swinging evening of festive choral music and celebrity readings. Join us at Ladbroke Hall for a memorable start to the season.

11th December 2026 - St Clement Danes Church, London

Join ORA Singers for their flagship festive event in the beautiful and historic surroundings of St Clement Danes Church. Featuring a programme of festive favourites old and new, the premiere of a newly-commissioned carol by Edmund Jolliffe, and readings from ORA Singers President, Stephen Fry.

Book now
www.orasingers.com/events



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info@orasingers.com