



Leicester  
International  
Music  
Festival

## Lunchtime Concert: Thursday, 11th April 1pm



Theo Platt (baritone) & Keval Shah (piano)

Macmillan: *The Children*; Schumann: *Kerner Lieder*; Poulenc: *La fraîcheur et le feu*; Shawn E. Okpebholo: *Two Black Churches*; Richard Farina (arr Will Liverman): *Birmingham Sunday*; Margaret Bonds: *The Negro speaks of Rivers*; William Grant Still: *Grief*; Florence Price: *My Dream*



Rising British-Russian baritone, **Theodore Platt**, is considered one of the most promising young voices of the opera world today celebrated for his "warm and powerful English baritone" (Music OMH). He was a member of the Bayerische Staatsoper's Opera Studio and in 2022 was named recipient of the prestigious Borletti-Buitoni Trust (BBT) Fellowship.

In the 2023/24 season, Theodore Platt sees his first performances of Belcore in *L'elisir d'amore* in a return to the Glyndebourne Opera Festival, and makes his role and house debut as the titular character in *Guillaume Tell* at St. Gallen Opera House.

Platt gives recitals with pianist Keval Shah at Wigmore Hall, the Oxford International Song Festival, and the Sibelius Academy Concert Hall in Helsinki. He returns to the Mozart Week in Salzburg with the Vienna Philharmonic and Andrés Orozco-Estrada in works by Mozart, Haydn & Salieri, and will also be heard as soloist in Bent Sørensen's St Matthew Passion with the Danish National Symphony Orchestra at the DR Concert House in Copenhagen, led by Ludovic Morlot.

More at: <https://www.theodoreplatt.com/>

British-Indian pianist, **Keval Shah**, is at the forefront of a new generation of collaborative artists. Recognised for the artistic and intellectual originality of his playing and approach to programming, Keval has performed at many of Europe's leading concert halls and festivals, including Wigmore Hall, Heidelberger Frühling, Schubertiade Schwarzenberg, Aldeburgh Festival and the Oxford International Song Festival. Keval is Lecturer of Lied at the Sibelius Academy, Helsinki, an appointment which made him the institution's youngest professor, and which is testament to the strength of his artistic vision and his gifts as a communicator.

Highlights of recent seasons include a recital at Wigmore Hall with Karita Mattila, Schubert's Winterreise with Roderick Williams, and a debut recital with Theodore Platt at the Mozarteum Stiftung.

Deeply committed to the performance of new music, Keval has had the honour of working with composers including the late Kaija Saariaho, and this year he gives the premiere of song cycles by Cheryl Frances Hoad and Reena Esmail.

More at: <https://www.keval-shah.com/>

### **James Macmillan: *The Children***

William Soutar (1898-1943) was a Scottish poet who wrote in two languages, English and Scots. I have set a number of his Scots language poems (The Tryst and Ballad) in a style which relies on traditional folk song. *The Children* is an

English language poem and was inspired by Soutar's anguish at the Spanish Civil War. The song for medium voice and piano is very simple but in a significantly different way from the other folk-inspired Soutar songs. The vocal line employs only a few basic intervals and is reminiscent of a child's song. As it progresses repetitively, the sparse piano accompaniment provides a more threatening contrast to the song's basic innocence and tranquillity. Some of this material was also drawn upon in my opera, *Inés de Castro*.  
James MacMillan

Upon the street they lie  
Beside the broken stone:  
The blood of children stares from the broken stone.  
Death came out of the sky  
In the bright afternoon:  
Darkness slanted over the bright afternoon.  
Again the sky is clear  
But upon earth a stain:  
The earth is darkened with a darkening stain:  
A wound which everywhere  
Corrupts the hearts of men:  
The blood of children corrupts the hearts of men.  
Silence is in the air:  
The stars move to their places:  
Silent and serene the stars move to their places.

**Robert Schumann: *from Kerner Lieder, Op.35*  
*Words by Justinus Kerner (1786-1862)***

Schumann's song-cycle, *Kerner Lieder*, is his least well-known; possibly due to the intense subject-matter, but also because it presents significant musical challenges for both singer and pianist. Written immediately after his wedding to Clara in 1840, it has been suggested that the mood of the songs reflects his new circumstances. Schumann was apparently a dutiful husband, but he worried both about earning enough money from songs alone and about how to balance the duties of married life with his need to compose.

***IV Erstes Grün***

You fledgling green, you fresh grass,  
how many a heart you healed  
that was made ill by the winter's snow.

Oh, how my heart longs for you.  
Already you are waking from the night of earth;  
how my eyes laugh in delight at the sight of you!  
Here in this quiet valley I press you,  
green of spring, to my heart and mouth.  
I am impelled to shun humankind;  
no word of man will ease my pain.  
Only young springtime green laid to my heart  
will make it beat more calmly.

### ***V Sehnsucht nach der Waldgegend***

Would that I had never left you,  
forests, high marvellous woods;  
you surrounded me lovingly  
many a long year.  
Where in the shade of your branches  
birds sang, and the silver stream,  
many a song flowed fresh  
and bright from my heart too.  
Your waving, your echoing,  
your unceasing murmur,  
all your melodies  
awoke those songs of mine.  
But here in these distant plains  
all seems silent and deserted,  
and I scan the blue skies  
for clouds in vain.  
And in enforced silence  
song seldom stirs,  
as a caged bird only half sings,  
sundered from brook and tree.

### ***VI Auf das Trinkglas eines verstobenen Freundes***

Fine glass, you now stand empty;  
glass that he raised so often and so joyously.  
The spider has spun dark webs  
around you.  
Tonight you shall be filled moon-bright  
with the gold of Rhenish grapes.

I look into the hallowed gleam of your depths  
and tremble.  
What I see there is a secret  
not to be told to ordinary mortals.  
But it tells me clearly that nothing  
can part friend from friend.  
In this faith, fair glass,  
I drain you with high heart.  
Clear in your precious blood, oh chalice,  
is mirrored the bright gold of the stars.  
Silently the moon goes down the valley.  
Solemnly midnight chimes.  
The glass stands empty.  
In its crystal depths the hallowed echo still sounds.

### ***XI Wer machte dich so krank?***

Why have you been so ill?  
Who has done this to you?  
It was not any chill wind from the north,  
nor any starry night.  
Not the shade of the trees,  
nor the heat of the sun;  
not sleeping or dreaming  
among the valley's flowers.  
It is mankind that has given me  
my death-wound.  
Nature healed me,  
but mankind gives me no peace.

### **Francis Poulenc: *La fraîcheur et le feu* FP147**

These songs were written in 1950, setting Paul Éluard's poems, *Le livre ouvert* I, to music ten years after their publication during WWII. They were dedicated to Stravinsky, who was greatly admired by Poulenc.

### ***I Rayon des yeux***

Beams of eyes and of suns  
of branches and of fountains  
light of earth and of sky

of man and man's oblivion  
a cloud covers the earth  
a cloud covers the sky  
suddenly the light is unmindful of me  
death alone remains complete  
I am a shadow I see no longer  
the yellow sun the red sun  
the white sun the changing sky  
I know no longer  
the place of living happiness  
at the edge of the shadow with neither sky nor earth.

## ***II La Matin les branches attisent***

In the morning the branches stir up  
the effervescence of the birds  
at evening the trees are peaceful  
the rustling day is resting.

## ***III Tout disparut***

All disappeared even the roofs even the sky  
even the shade fallen from the branches  
upon the tips of the soft mosses  
even the words and the concordant looks  
Sisters mirroring my tears  
the stars shone around my window  
and my eyes closing their wings again for the night  
lived in a boundless universe.

## ***IV Dans les ténèbres du Jardin***

In the darkness of the garden  
come some invisible girls  
more delicate than the shower at midday  
my sleep has them for friends  
they elate me secretly  
with their blind complaisance.

## ***V Unis la fraicheur et le feu***

Unite the coolness and the fire  
unite your lips and your eyes  
await wisdom from your folly  
make a likeness of woman and of man.

## ***VI Homme au sourire tendre***

Man of the tender smile  
woman of the tender eyelids  
man of the freshened cheeks  
woman of the sweet fresh arms  
man of the calm eyes  
woman of the ardent lips  
man of the plenitude of speech  
woman of the shared eyes  
man of the useful hands  
woman of the sensible hands  
man of the steadfast stars  
woman of the enduring breasts  
There is nothing that prevents you  
my masters from testing me.

## ***VII La grande rivière qui va***

The great river that flows  
big under the sun and small under the moon  
in all directions at random  
will not have me to point it out  
I know the spell of the light  
I have enough of it to play with its brilliance  
so that I may perfect myself behind my eyelids  
so that nothing lives without me.

## **Shawn E. Okpebholo: *Two Black Churches***

The two songs which make up *Two Black Churches* were commissioned by the young American baritone, Will Liverman in 2017. The first, *Ballad of Birmingham*, sets words by Dudley Randall which were a reaction to the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, which killed four

little girls. The second song, *The Rain*, has a text by the Poet Laureate of Charleston, Marcus Amaker. It concerns the 2015 atrocity at Emmanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Charleston, in which a lone gunman killed nine people. Okpebholo composes in a modernist but accessible style, and his powerful settings are apt reflections of those devastating events.

### ***I Ballad of Birmingham***

“Mother dear, may I go downtown  
Instead of out to play,  
And march the streets of Birmingham  
In a Freedom March today?”

“No, baby, no, you may not go,  
For the dogs are fierce and wild,  
And clubs and hoses, guns and jails  
Aren’t good for a little child.”

“But, mother, I won’t be alone.  
Other children will go with me,  
And march the streets of Birmingham  
To make our country free.”

“No, baby, no, you may not go,  
For I fear those guns will fire.  
But you may go to church instead  
And sing in the children’s choir.”

She has combed and brushed her night-dark hair,  
And bathed rose petal sweet,  
And drawn white gloves on her small brown hands,  
And white shoes on her feet.

The mother smiled to know her child  
Was in the sacred place,  
But that smile was the last smile  
To come upon her face.

For when she heard the explosion,  
Her eyes grew wet and wild.  
She raced through the streets of Birmingham



Calling for her child.

She clawed through bits of glass and brick,  
Then lifted out a shoe.

“O, here’s the shoe my baby wore,  
But, baby, where are you?”

## **II *The Rain***

When the reality  
of racism returns,  
all joy treads water  
in oceans of buried  
emotion.

Charleston  
is doing  
everything it can  
to only swim  
in a colorless liquid  
of calm sea  
and blind faith.

But the Lowcountry  
is a terrain  
of ancient tears,  
suffocating through  
floods of  
segregation.

When gunshots  
made waves,  
we closed our eyes,  
held our breath  
and went under.

And we are still  
trying not to  
taste the salt  
of our surrounding blues  
or face the rising tide  
of black pain.

## **Richard Farina (arr Will Liverman): *Birmingham Sunday***

The 1964 song by writer and composer Richard Farina was arranged for piano and voice by Will Liverman and was the final track on his album, *Dreams of a New Day*. It pays homage to a previous generation of song writers and protestors, and is a reminder that the struggle for Civil Rights was never finished. The song was notably used by Spike Lee in his film, *Four Little Girls* (1997).

Come round by my side and I'll sing you a song.  
I'll sing it so softly, it'll do no one wrong.  
On Birmingham Sunday the blood ran like wine,  
And the choirs kept singing of Freedom.

That cold autumn morning no eyes saw the sun,  
And Addie Mae Collins, her number was one.  
At an old Baptist church there was no need to run.  
And the choirs kept singing of Freedom,

The clouds they were grey and the autumn winds blew,  
And Denise McNair brought the number to two.  
The falcon of death was a creature they knew,  
And the choirs kept singing of Freedom,

The church it was crowded, but no one could see  
That Cynthia Wesley's dark number was three.  
Her prayers and her feelings would shame you and me.  
And the choirs kept singing of Freedom.

Young Carol Robertson entered the door  
And the number her killers had given was four.  
She asked for a blessing but asked for no more,  
And the choirs kept singing of Freedom.

On Birmingham Sunday a noise shook the ground.  
And people all over the earth turned around.  
For no one recalled a more cowardly sound.  
And the choirs kept singing of Freedom.

The men in the forest they once asked of me,  
How many black berries grew in the Blue Sea.

And I asked them right with a tear in my eye.  
How many dark ships in the forest?

The Sunday has come and the Sunday has gone.  
And I can't do much more than to sing you a song.  
I'll sing it so softly, it'll do no one wrong.  
And the choirs keep singing of Freedom.

### **Margaret Bonds: *The Negro Speaks of Rivers***

*The Negro Speaks of Rivers* is a setting of words by Langston Hughes. The poem was first published in June of 1921 in *Crisis*, the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or NAACP. Margaret Bonds (1913-1972) was an African-American composer from Chicago, Illinois. She learned to play the piano at a young age, first under the tutelage of her mother, and later under Florence Price, the well-known pianist, composer, and music educator.

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the  
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln  
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy  
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

### **William Grant Still: *Grief***

William Grant Still's setting of LeRoy V. Brant's text, inspired by seeing a statue of an angel while out on a walk, was composed in Los Angeles in 1953. Still's Symphony No. 1, *Afro-American*, was performed at Carnegie Hall in 1935, a first for an African American composer. Still was also the first African American to have an opera nationally televised, and the first African American symphony orchestra conductor.

Weeping angel with pinions trailing  
And head bowed low in your hands.  
Mourning angel with heart-strings wailing,  
For one who in death's hall stands.  
Mourning angel silence your wailing,  
And raise your head from your hands.  
Weeping angel on your pinions trailing  
The white dove, promise, stands!

### **Florence Price: *My Dream***

*My Dream* is a song by Florence Price setting a poem of Langston Hughes. The first Black American woman to have an orchestral piece played by a major American orchestra, Florence Beatrice Price was first recognised in the 1930s alongside her colleagues William Grant Still and William Dawson. Her music has recently found a new audience and is frequently played and recorded.

To fling my arms wide  
In some place of the sun,  
To whirl and to dance  
Till the white day is done.  
Then rest at cool evening  
Beneath a tall tree  
While night comes on gently,  
Dark like me—  
That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide  
In the face of the sun,  
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!  
Till the quick day is done.  
Rest at pale evening . . .  
A tall, slim tree . . .  
Night coming tenderly  
Black like me.

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