

Dubai Opera hosts the inaugural BBC Proms Dubai featuring the **world premiere of Joanna Marsh's *Flare* by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Edward Gardner and the **UAE premiere of her *Arabesque*****



**BBC Proms Dubai
21-24 March 2017
Dubai Opera**

22 March | 8pm

Music by Finzi, Bingham, Parry,
Stanford, Delius, Tippett, Marsh

BBC Singers
James Burton conductor

23 March | 8pm

Joanna Marsh *Flare*
Mozart *Piano Concerto No. 20 in D
Minor*
Mendelssohn *Calm Sea and
Prosperous Voyage*
Elgar *Enigma Variations*

BBC Symphony Orchestra
Edward Gardner
Benjamin Grosvenor piano

The recently opened Dubai Opera hosts the inaugural BBC Proms Dubai featuring the **world premiere of *Flare* by Dubai-based British composer Joanna Marsh** on 23 March. Commissioned by Dubai Opera for the BBC Symphony Orchestra, *Flare* will be conducted by Edward Gardner in a popular programme featuring Elgar's *Enigma Variations* the day after the Dubai premiere of Marsh's *Arabesques* by the BBC Singers on 22 March. This will be the BBC Proms' first visit to the Middle East and the 4-day festival from 21 to 24 March sees both the BBC Symphony Orchestra and BBC Singers decamp to Dubai from where BBC Radio 3 will record their concerts for future broadcast.

In 2015, Joanna Marsh was appointed Composer in Residence to Sidney Sussex College Cambridge, following her predecessor Eric Whitacre. As a former organ scholar of the college it was fitting that her first work *Martha and Mary* premiered on October 22nd 2016, marked the 40th anniversary celebration of the admission of women undergraduates to Sidney. Marsh

will be writing two more works including a piece to celebrate the installation of the new organ in College and a setting of a psalm by Sir Philip Sidney.

Joanna Marsh has been based in Dubai since 2007. Recent commissions inspired by Dubai have included *Kahayla* (inspired by the world's tallest building the Burj Khalifa) and *Arabesques* for the Kings Singers. Marsh is now writing a new opera set in Dubai "My Beautiful Camel" with librettist David Pountney which will be showcased by the National Opera Studio in May 2017 in Wilton's Music Hall, London. Marsh is also Co-Founder of ChoirFest Middle East in Dubai, which brings together choirs from across the Arab-speaking world. For the 2016 festival, Marsh invited the The Real Group to headline and also choirs from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and the UAE.

Marsh was inspired to compose the orchestral piece *Flare* after reading a story by Saudi novelist Mohammed Hasan Alwan about a young boy's fascination with the flares from the oilfield where his father works. The story was published by the Guardian in 2011 and reveals the subtleties of Gulf social and family traditions. Marsh explains:

"The story works on three levels: a young boy's excitement on seeing the first flares of a new oilfield near his home, the adult perspective of the social change resulting from the oilfield's proximity and health concerns associated with it, the monster machine - big oil, chewing up the landscape, providing both jobs and pollution. The end of the tale is somehow both touching and devastating in its honesty. These three strata are echoed in my piece. The perspectives are, as it were, reformed into sound. The music moves between them seamlessly: childhood innocence, adult knowing, monstrous commercial demand. There are some highly melodic sections which feel as if they are toppling into an industrial landscape with driving rhythms and metallic percussion but I feel there is a harmonic richness that constantly underpins the piece. We shall see if the audience agrees!"

Joanna Marsh composed *Arabesques* for The King's Singers for their performance at the London A Cappella Festival in 2015. *Arabesques* takes inspiration from the reflective and meditative nature of Arabic poetry, using texts by contemporary Arab poets Sa'adi Youssef, Abboud al Jabiri and Khaled Abdallah.

"Living in the Middle East for seven years has been an invitation to explore the work of artists and writers that I may not otherwise have come across. The texts I have chosen for "Arabesques" are three short but highly evocative poems by contemporary male Arab poets. Each tells the story of a woman they have known: "A Woman" - remembers a passionate encounter, "Fading", observes her aging, "Seeds in Flight", finds rebirth after her death."

BBC Proms Dubai follows in the footsteps of the BBC's successful Proms Australia series. The Proms Dubai concerts will be recorded for broadcast

on BBC Radio 3. BBC Proms Dubai will give audiences the opportunity to experience some of the music, talent and tradition the festival offers. Only the second time abroad, following the inaugural Proms Australia in April 2016, this will be the first time the Proms has travelled to the Middle East and will also mark the first visit to the UAE for the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Singers. The series of six concerts will culminate in the traditional and wildly popular *Last Night of the Proms* where Edward Gardner will lead the BBC Symphony Orchestra and BBC Singers performing Last Night favourites including Henry Wood's *Fantasia on British Sea-Songs*, Thomas Arne's *Rule Britannia!* And Edward Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* March No. 1. The Festival also includes the music of composer Mohammed Fairouz and world premieres by Joseph Tawadros in addition to Joanna Marsh.

Joanna Marsh



Joanna Marsh is a British composer who has been living in Dubai since 2007.

The Middle East has provided inspiration for many of Joanna's works including "Arabesques" for The King's Singers, "A Short Handbook of Djinn" for harpist Catrin Finch and "The Travels of Ibn Battuta" for the Maggini Quartet. The British Embassy in Dubai commissioned her brass fanfare "The Falcon and the Lion" in 2010 for H.M. Queen Elizabeth II's state visit to Abu Dhabi.

The inspiration for Joanna's compositions frequently comes from seeing contemporary subjects in a historical context. For example, "The Tower" (2008) for the BBC singers, (John Armitage Trust) a reflection on the Burj Khalifa, Dubai's famously tall tower and its parallels with the mythical Tower of Babel. Her orchestral work about the Burj, Kahayla, written two years later, is called after one of the major Dubai horse races. It received its UAE premiere on 1st January 2015, with Welsh National Opera.

Joanna (b. 1970) studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London and was an organ scholar at Sidney Sussex College Cambridge. She studied composition privately with Richard Blackford and Judith Bingham and in 2015 was appointed "Composer in Residence" to her former college, Sidney Sussex.

In addition to her concert music, Joanna composed the music for the short film "The Morse Collectors" which has won prizes at seven international film festivals including the Chicago Children's Film Festival. Her songs for children's choirs based on the poetry of Brian Patten, have been performed at festivals and choral competitions internationally and across the UK including Choir of the Year. In 2005 she wrote a musical

installation for the Pier 6 Bridge at Gatwick Airport which played for 10 years from 2005-2015.

Joanna is Co-founder and Artistic Director of Middle East region's largest choral festival, ChoirFest Middle East. Last summer, Marsh piloted a new festival *SOUND TRACKS: Forest Music* introducing contemporary music through a series of walking sound installations in Furnace Wood, Fairwarp in East Sussex. Marsh hopes that those who attended the future festival will come for the experience of being in the nature and of being open to the new sound world around them, enhanced by the natural habitat.



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