

British soprano Nadine Benjamin celebrates the music of black women and opens doors and opportunities with classical arias

Nadine Benjamin is passionate about performing music by female composers and diverse musicians, and performs a number of concerts across December opening up classical music to everyone. On Friday 1 December Nadine performs Shirley J. Thompson's *The Woman Who Refused to Dance* in a concert as part of the Victoria and Albert Museum's *Opera: Passion, Power and Politics* exhibition. This is followed by a performance on Tuesday 5 December at Steinway Hall celebrating black woman in song. Nadine will also be supporting Opening Doors London on Friday 8 December, and performing in her annual free concert in Covent Garden on Thursday 14 December.



**Friday 1 December 2017,
6.30pm-9.45pm**

Hochhauser Auditorium
Victoria & Albert Museum, London
Part of the V&A *Opera: Passion,
Power and Politics* exhibition

Shirley J. Thompson *The Woman
Who Refused to Dance*

Nadine Benjamin *soprano*
Shirley Thompson *speaker*
Jennifer Carter *piano*

Nadine Benjamin performs **Shirley J. Thompson's** *The Woman Who Refused to Dance* at the **Victoria and Albert Museum's** *Opera: Passion, Power & Politics* exhibition on **Friday 1 December**. Nadine premiered the opera for soprano, speaker, dancer, instrumental ensemble and video at the TêteÀTête opera festival earlier this year. The opera is being rescored with solo piano accompaniment as part of "Spotlight Noir – Other Opera Chronicals", an event at the Victoria and Albert Museum's exhibition. Then evening unpacks hundreds of years of dismissal, challenge and triumph within opera.

Shirley J. Thompson is a pioneering female composer – being the first woman to compose and direct music for a major drama series at the BBC, and the first woman in Europe to have composed and conducted a symphony within the past 40 years. *The Woman Who Refused to Dance* is one from Shirley J. Thompson's ground-breaking series of operas, HEROINES OF OPERA, where she unearths submerged narratives of overshadowed women in history. The opera features a young, 'unknown woman', being hung by the ankle on a boat filled with enslaved people, portrayed in a political illustration by Isaac Cruikshank. After refusing the daily order by the ship captain, Captain Kimber, to dance, she was hung as punishment for her defiance.

Together the V&A and the Royal Opera House present a landmark exhibition *Opera: Passion, Power & Politics*, which explores the vivid story of opera from its origins in late-Renaissance Italy to the present day. Told through the lens of seven premieres in seven European cities, this immersive exhibition takes you on a journey through nearly 400 years, culminating in the international explosion of opera in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Prior to the concert, writer, law lecturer and historian, Dr Onyeka Nubia unpicks the fallacy that classical music is offered as a 'sacred' white male space, and reveals

the African compositions and composers that throughout history helped to shape 'western' classical music.

Tuesday 5 December 2017, 6.30pm

Steinway Hall, London

Hidden Too Long - Black Woman in Song

Nadine Benjamin soprano

Siv Iren Misund mezzo-soprano

Errollyn Wallen piano and voice

Allyson Devenish piano

Michael Harper curator

Featuring music by Margaret Bonds, Florence Price, Brittney Boykin, Dominique Le Gendre, Shirley J. Thompson, Errollyn Wallen and Undine Smith Moore.



Mezzo-soprano **Siv Iren Misund** and composers **Errollyn Wallen** and **Allyson Devenish** join Nadine for a concert celebrating black women in song on **Tuesday 5 December**, a recital curated by **Michael Harper**. The concert includes works by a number of prominent living female black composers such as Errollyn Wallen, Shirley J. Thompson and B.E. Boykin. Many of the composers have fought to be heard and have been part of ground breaking performances, including Florence Price who was the first African-American woman to have a composition played by a major orchestra, and Errollyn Wallen who was the first black woman to have a piece performed at the BBC Proms.

The recital continues Nadine Benjamin's passion for performing music by female composers and diverse musicians. Previous performances have included the 5th London Festival of American Music, where Nadine performed the principal role of Imoinda in the UK premiere of *The Crossing* by Cuban-American composer Odaline de la Martinez.



Friday 8 December 2017, 7pm

St. Saviour's Church, Hampstead

Opening Doors - Funding Raising Concert

Nadine Benjamin and friends

After supporting Opening Doors London (ODL) earlier in the year, Nadine Benjamin has been invited back in concert for a fundraiser for ODL, a charity that supports older members of the LGBT community.

Nadine will be performing popular arias by Puccini, Verdi and Mozart, including *Mi chiamano Mimì* and *Quando m'en vo* from Puccini's *La Bohème* in the first half. Nadine will then be joined by a group of younger singers for the second half – opening doors also for amateur musicians.

Thursday 14 December 2017, 1pm

St Paul's (Actors Church), Covent Garden

Nadine Benjamin soprano

Kamal Khan piano

Nadine performs annually at St. Paul's church in Covent Garden, a free event to open up the opportunity to listen to classical music to all. The acclaimed American

conductor and pianist Kamal Khan will accompany Nadine. The recital features a selection of classical arias paired with a song cycle; this year will be Samuel Barber's evocative masterpiece *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*. Nadine performed Barber's song cycle back in February with the West London Sinfonia alongside a recital of Gershwin, Copland and Glass.

In January 1947, Samuel Barber encountered James Agee's "Knoxville: Summer of 1915", a short essay which would eventually become the preamble to the author's Pulitzer Prize-winning *A Death in the Family*. Agee's poignant look back at his childhood struck a chord with Barber, and when soprano Eleanor Steber commissioned a work from him in February, he immediately decided to set it to music. Barber looked to the text for his melodic cues in this way, using word painting to create atmosphere and emphasize words.

Nadine is the founder of Everybody Can!, a mentoring programme that provides a platform to encourage others to stop holding themselves back and to support them in recognising that whatever they envision can be achieved. Everybody Can! Opera's first production (Verdi's *Otello*) took place in October 2015 at St. James' Church, Piccadilly, and helped raise awareness of mental health. The company's productions are henceforth planned bi-annually, with the next opera (*La Traviata*) scheduled for October 2018, in which issues of sexuality and gender will be brought to the fore. This innovative opera company is very much about making traditional opera relevant in today's world.

Performances in 2018

February-June 2018

Mozart *Marriage of Figaro*

English Touring Opera

Nadine Benjamin Countess

Blanche McIntyre director

Christopher Stark conductor

July 2018

Opera Holland Park

Mascagni *Isabeau*

Nadine Benjamin Ermytrude

20 October 2018

Everybody Can! Opera

Verdi *La Traviata*

Nadine Benjamin Violetta

Nadine Benjamin



British lyric soprano Nadine Benjamin is a charismatic and versatile artist who is in increasing demand on both the operatic stage and the concert platform. She is also developing great renown as an exponent of song, in particular Verdi, Strauss, Berg and contemporary American song.

Nadine's career to date includes performances at the Edinburgh International Festival, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Royal Festival Hall, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden (Floral Hall and Clore Studio) and with Opéra National de Lyon. Her principal roles include the title role in *Aida*, *Cio-Cio-San* (*Madama Butterfly*), *La Contessa* (*Le nozze di Figaro*), *Nadia* in Tippet's *The Ice Break* with Birmingham Opera Company directed by Graham Vick ("outstanding performance", *The Times*), *Desdemona* (*Otello*) with Everybody Can! Opera, *Violetta* (*La traviata*), *Tosca* (*Tosca*) and *Musetta* (*La bohème*) for the Mediterranean Opera Festival in Sicily and *Tosca* for English Touring Opera. She recently sang *Musetta* for Scottish Opera and will sing the role of *The Countess* in *The Marriage of Figaro* for ETO in spring 2018, *Ermytrude* in *Isabeau* with Opera Holland Park in July 2018 and the role of *Violetta* in *La Traviata* in October 2018.

In 2014 Nadine created the principal role of Imoinda in the UK premiere of *The Crossing*, an opera by the Cuban-American composer Odaline de la Martinez, at the 5th London Festival of American Music. She has a long-running relationship with LFAM, and has performed song cycles by Bolcom, Child and Barber at the Festival as well as the European premiere of John Harbison's *Milosz Songs*. At the 6th Festival in 2016, Nadine led a programme of works by female American composers, accompanied by Susanna Stranders. Nadine recorded the role of Mrs. Waters in Dame Ethel Smyth's opera *The Boatswain's Mate for Retrospect Opera*, also under the baton of de la Martinez, which was released in 2016 to critical acclaim and broadcast on BBC Radio 3. She recently sang the title role in *The Woman Who Refused to Dance*, a dance with voice by British composer Shirley Thomson, at the Tête à Tête Festival.

In concert, Nadine has performed Berg's *Seven Early Songs*, Canteloube's *Songs of the Auvergne*, Dvorak's *Stabat Mater*, Schubert's *Mass no. 5*, Strauss's *Four Last Songs* and the soprano solos in both Mahler's *Symphony no. 4* and Handel's *Eternal Source of Light Divine*. She made her Purcell Room debut in 2014 with a programme of song cycles by Copland, Harbison and Previn and later that year made her US recital debut at the National Opera Center, New York with Verdi songs and arias, a programme she repeated in London. She has sung the soprano solo in Poulenc's *Gloria* at Coventry Cathedral and in Villebon, France, as well as with The Waynflete Singers and the English Chamber Orchestra at Winchester Cathedral, and has given numerous solo recitals at St Paul's Church, Covent Garden. Performances throughout 2017 include Barber's *Knoxville – Summer of 1915*, Strauss's *Four Last Songs* and Mahler 4 with West London Sinfonia, Poulenc's *Gloria*, Dvorak's *Te Deum* and Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem* with the Cohen Ensemble, Strauss's *Four Last Songs* with Norfolk Symphony Orchestra, Poulenc's *Gloria* with the Diversity Choir under Jan Rautio, Handel's *Messiah* at Winchester Cathedral and numerous concerts including a private recital at the Palazzo Doria Pamphilj in Rome and a performance at the London Song Festival.

Nadine founded the mentoring programme 'Everybody Can!', to provide a platform to encourage others to not hold themselves back and to support them in recognising that whatever they envision can be achieved. She was shortlisted in 2012 for the inaugural Genesis Prize, awarded to outstanding mentors who give others confidence and inspiration to achieve artistic excellence in their chosen profession. Nadine is an Ambassador for London Music Masters, a charity that encourages opportunity, diversity and excellence in classical music. Nadine was "highly commended" at the 2016 Aviva 'Women of the Future Awards' and invited to Buckingham Palace in recognition of her work as a mentor.

Hailed by 'Opera Now' magazine as one of their favourite top ten sopranos in "a new generation of sopranos who are destined to have impressive careers", Nadine won the inaugural Fulham Opera Robert Presley Memorial Verdi Prize in 2015.

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