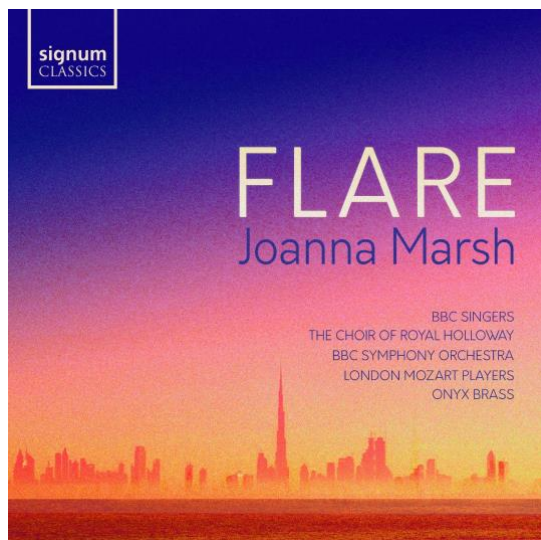


Signum releases *Flare*, featuring compositions by Joanna Marsh celebrating ten years in Dubai



Friday 18 September 2020

Signum | SIGCD644

Marsh *Pearl of Freedom*

Marsh *Arabesques*

Marsh *Weighing the Earth*

Marsh *Flare*

Marsh *Sheikh Zayed's Parade*

Marsh *The Tower*

Chapel Choir of Royal Holloway

BBC Singers

London Mozart Players

BBC Symphony Orchestra

Onyx Brass

Monday 21 September 2020

The Fridge, Dubai & online

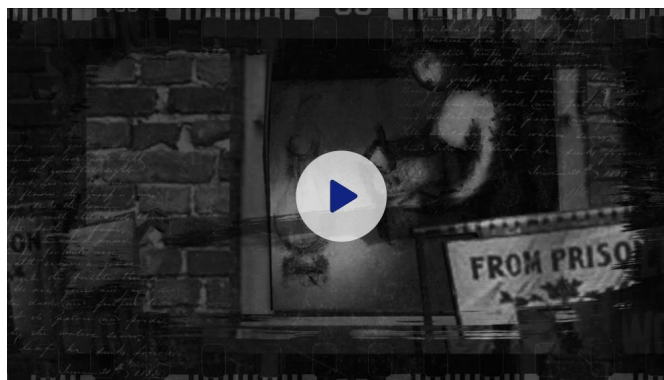
Launch event

including 'Pearl of Freedom' film premiere, discussions & performances

In her new album, to be **launched online** on 21 September 2020, British composer **Joanna Marsh** reflects on her first ten years living in Dubai, releasing the first recordings of six pieces with the **BBC Singers**, **BBC Symphony Orchestra**, **London Mozart Players**, **Onyx Brass** and the **Chapel Choir of Royal Holloway**.

The collection weaves together themes of identity, conflict and concord in the Middle East and the UK, from a cantata celebrating votes for women to a piece inspired by Dubai's iconic skyline. The album is released for digital download on **Signum** from 18 September 2020.

The album will be launched at a hybrid event at the Fridge Dubai on the 21 September at 8pm (5pm BST) featuring discussions, performances and the premiere of a film by Ivo Lemmerlijn with illustrations by artist harriet Morris telling suffragette Emily Davison's story to the soundtrack of *Pearl of Freedom*. The event will be available afterwards for 30 days online at www.thefridgedubai.com/scene.



[Watch the 'Pearl of Freedom' trailer here](#)

'Pearl of Freedom', commissioned by Royal Holloway in honour of former student Emily Wilding Davison, the suffragette whose tragic collision with the King's horse on the Epsom race track led to her death. Marsh's twenty-minute cantata to a libretto by David Pountney, sets extracts of diaries, news reports and anecdotes to recount the events surrounding the Derby. Marsh wrote 'Pearl of Freedom' to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Representation of the People Act which first gave women the vote.

The five further works on the album weave together stories and identities in the Middle East, reflecting Marsh's ten years in Dubai. **'Arabesques'**, commissioned for the King's Singers, is a collection of four short poems by contemporary male Arab poets. Each tells the story of a woman they have known and each is at a different stage of life. **'Weighing the Earth'** juxtaposes a Syrian lament of loss and destruction by Assaaleek Band with a poem by the Syrian American activist Amal Kassir, describing how her grandmother believed that the earth could not be broken by the tyrant, it would not yield to him and eventually he would be returned to it.

The titular work on the album, Marsh's **'Flare'**, takes inspiration from Saudi novelist Mohammed Hasan Alwan's story about a young boy's fascination with flares from the oil field where his father works. The mixed fortunes that the oil industry brings to his family's conservative community are revealed through a child's naive eyes. The work was premiered at the inaugural BBC Proms in Dubai in 2017 by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Edward Gardner.

Recorded by Onyx Brass, **'Sheikh Zayed's Parade'** is inspired by a poetic eulogy to Sheikh Zayed, thought of as the founding father of the UAE. Marsh captures the character of the 'Harbyia' dance, with the traditional melody quoted at the opening and at the end of the piece. The collection ends with **'The Tower'**, written as Marsh watched the construction of the one-kilometre high Burj Khalifa from the building opposite where she lived. With her first piece written following her move to Dubai, Marsh found in the Burj Khalifa a resonance with the Tower of Babel: both overwhelming architectural conceptions, products of an ambitious nation seeking to dominate the horizon.

Joanna Marsh is Co-Founder of Dubai's ChoirFest Middle East, and Founder and Artistic Director of the Dubai Opera Festival Chorus, a large body of singers set up for the BBC Proms in Dubai, which continues to undertake concert performances across the UAE. She is the current Composer in Residence, at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge.

Joanna Marsh



Described in The Guardian (2019) as one of today's leading composers for voice, Joanna Marsh is a British composer who since 2007 has divided her time between Dubai and the UK. Her life in the Middle East has led to many unique musical opportunities including writing an orchestral work to celebrate the building of the Burj Khalifa, a commission for the BBC Symphony Orchestra for the BBC Proms in Dubai and a fanfare for the Queen's visit to Abu Dhabi. Her first opera was also inspired by Dubai life: "My Beautiful

Camel", collaborating on this with librettist David Pountney.

The inspiration for Joanna's compositions often comes from the past. She has a strong interest in Tudor and Elizabethan choral music which is reflected in some of her choral output, for example her Evening Service for St. Paul's Cathedral's women's choir Aurora Nova and Martha and Mary written for the choir of Sidney Sussex College Cambridge. She also enjoys looking at contemporary subjects from an ironic historical perspective. One example of this would be, "The Tower" (2008) for the BBC Singers, a reflection on Dubai's

Burj Khalifa and its curious parallels with the mythical Tower of Babel. Another would be Dialogo and Quodlibet for Stile Antico which quotes Italian texts from the 16th century to conjure up a humorous 'mansplaining' scenario.

Joanna has been Composer in Residence, at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge from 2015 through to 2020 and during that time has written a number of choral works for the college choir and the college organ. She is a Co-Founder of ChoirFest Middle East in Dubai, an annual celebration of the region's choral music scene which has reached its eighth edition in March 2020. She is also Founder and Artistic Director of the Dubai Opera Festival Chorus a large body of singers that was set up for the BBC Proms in Dubai and continues to undertake concert performances of various types across the UAE. Joanna was an undergraduate at the Royal Academy of Music in London and following this organ scholar at Sidney Sussex College Cambridge. She studied composition with Richard Blackford and Judith Bingham.

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