

The Bach Choir commissions ten composers this season, including Richard Blackford & Gabriel Jackson at the Royal Festival Hall



Sunday 24 October 2021, 15:00
Royal Festival Hall

Gabriel Jackson *The Promise* **WORLD PREMIERE**
Tallis *Hymn*
Vaughan Williams *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*
Richard Blackford *Vision of a Garden* **WORLD PREMIERE**
Fauré *Cantique de Jean Racine*
Fauré *Requiem*

The Bach Choir | **David Hill** conductor | **Philharmonia Orchestra**
Katy Hill soprano | **Gareth Brynmor John** baritone

★★★★★

“I have to keep reminding myself that these people are amateurs: I can’t imagine a professional choir giving a more perfect and passionate performance.”

The Independent on the Choir’s performance of Bach’s *B Minor Mass*, February 2020

As they return to live music-making after a year and a half of silence, **The Bach Choir** and Music Director **David Hill** announce the premieres of **ten newly-commissioned contemporary choral works**.

Three of the works to be performed this season use texts written by members of the Choir, including the Royal Festival Hall premiere of **Richard Blackford’s covid-inspired cantata** setting the medical diaries of a Choir member who spent three months in intensive care, and a climate-change inspired commission from **Gabriel Jackson**. This July, the Choir announces a call for scores for the **Sir David Willcocks Carol Competition** to premiere two new carols at Cadogan Hall, and heads to the studio to record **six newly-commissioned chorales** from award-winning young composers in its *Bach Inspired* project.

The Bach Choir, David Hill and the Philharmonia Orchestra are joined at the **Royal Festival Hall** on 24 October 2021 by soprano Katy Hill and baritone Gareth Brynmor John for a post-

COVID programme of music for reflection and hope including the **world premiere** of **Richard Blackford's *Vision of a Garden***, based on the COVID diaries of The Bach Choir member Peter Johnstone, who spent three months in intensive care with the virus in Spring 2020.

Professor Peter Johnstone, a tenor with The Bach Choir and a fellow of St John's College, Cambridge, contracted coronavirus at the start of the pandemic. Johnstone was admitted to Addenbrooke's Hospital on 19 March 2020 and was put on a ventilator. He remained in intensive care until June 2020 and his recovery has since continued.

Setting moving words by Johnstone himself, Ivor Novello award-winner Richard Blackford's *Vision of a Garden* incorporates text from the COVID diaries filled out by NHS staff at Addenbrooke's Hospital while Johnstone was sedated on a ventilator. The diaries, which explained that the medical team played music to him while he was sedated, helped Johnstone to separate out fact from delirium and to come to terms with his harrowing experiences:

*“A nurse gives me diaries of my time in ICU.
Reading them, I am overwhelmed with love
For these people I never knew,
Who only knew me as a bundle of symptoms.”*

The Bach Choir hope to be joined by a choir of singers from the NHS.

Vision of a Garden is premiered at the Royal Festival Hall as part of a programme of music for reflection and hope that includes Fauré's *Requiem* and Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. The Bach Choir will sing the original theme by Tallis to **new words**, composed by a Choir member especially for the performance.

The Royal Festival Hall concert opens with the **world premiere live performance** of **Gabriel Jackson's *The Promise*** following its release online in July 2021. Commissioned by The Bach Choir, *The Promise* is a new unaccompanied piece for choir setting words of optimism by **Laura-Jane Foley**, a soprano with The Bach Choir. Foley took inspiration from the journey of darkness to light during the pandemic, with shops and theatres being shut and dark, but an optimistic outlook ahead.

Members of the Choir recorded their parts individually during lockdown in 2020 and made video recordings in groups of six. The **powerful short film** by CDC Films presents a modern fairytale, following a young child entranced by the beauty of a forest in spite of the grave threats of climate change. The Bach Choir perform the work with the film at the Royal Festival Hall in October ahead of the UN Climate Conference in Glasgow in November 2021.

*“On the blackest of nights, a star-less sky,
All light extinguished, all plans abandoned,
Still we can trust that the light will return.
In darkness there's hope; the promise of dawn”*
The Promise, written by Laura-Jane Foley

Now open for entries, The Bach Choir's **Sir David Willcocks Carol Competition** once more invites composers of all ages to contribute to the Christmas carolling tradition, with the winning carol premiering at The Bach Choir's *Carols at Cadogan* on Monday 20 December 2021. The

Competition is named for Sir David Willcocks, musical director of The Bach Choir for 38 years and a prolific arranger and composer of carols.

First held in 2017, this year's Competition will select **two winners for the first time**, allowing composers both young and old to contend in a year of reduced opportunities. The winning entry will be judged by David Hill, John Rutter and Jonathan Willcocks. Full terms and conditions for entry are available at: thebachchoir.org.uk/outreach/the-bach-choir-sir-david-willcocks-carol-competition/.

In a **new recording** to be released in the Choir's 2021/22 season, The Bach Choir announces its *Bach Inspired* project, which commissioned six award-winning young composers to compose new works in response to chorales from Bach's *St Matthew Passion*. The new chorales have been composed by **Charlotte Harding, James B Wilson, Héloïse Werner, Gavin Higgins, Carmen Ho** and **Des Oliver**, each in response to a particular chorale from the *St Matthew Passion*, with each composer having complete freedom to choose their text and invited to challenge, explore and take risks. The broad text selections range from Christina Rossetti and George Herbert to Arthur Rimbaud's *Les Illuminations* and a poem by Sarojini Naidu, and match chorales including the Passion Chorale: *O Sacred Head Surrounded (O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden)* and *Be near me, Lord, when dying (Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden)*.

“[Glow] God made humanity to sparkle. Created from dust into beauty ... whatever made, radiates. We're made to give out life like the sun, the moon and stars. [Glow]”
Glow, written by Charlotte Harding in response to *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden*

The six new commissions come in response to a second year in lockdown without the Choir's sell-out Easter performance of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in English, an annual fixture in the Choir's calendar, which it hopes to resume for Easter 2022. The six new chorales will be recorded alongside the corresponding Chorales on which they are based on 9-10 July 2021, with the complete recording to be released digitally in the Choir's 2021/22 season.

Recognised as one of the world's leading choruses, **The Bach Choir** was founded in 1876 to give the first performance in Britain of Bach's *Mass in B minor*, and continues to build upon a tradition that combines musical excellence with creativity and innovation. Directed by David Hill, the Choir regularly performs and records across London and the UK in prestigious venues, from the Royal Albert Hall to Abbey Road Studios.

Full details for the second half of The Bach Choir's **2021/22 season** will be announced later this year.

Upcoming Events

July 2021

Online premiere

Gabriel Jackson *The Promise* film

Sunday 24 October 2021, 15:00

Royal Festival Hall

Gabriel Jackson *The Promise* **WORLD PREMIERE**

Tallis *Hymn*

Vaughan Williams *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*

Richard Blackford *Vision of a Garden*
WORLD PREMIERE

Fauré *Cantique de Jean Racine*

Fauré *Requiem*

with

Philharmonia Orchestra

David Hill conductor

Katy Hill soprano

Gareth Brynmor John baritone

Monday 20 December 2021

Cadogan Hall

Carols at Cadogan

Including:

New carols **WORLD PREMIERE**

with

London City Brass

The Bach Choir

Founded in 1876, The Bach Choir is recognised as one of the world's leading choruses, building upon a tradition that combines musical excellence with creativity and innovation.



From the first performance in Britain of Bach's *Mass in B minor* 145 years ago to the soundtrack for Ridley Scott's epic *Prometheus*, the Choir's musical heritage is as rich as it is diverse. Directed by David Hill, one of the country's most eminent conductors and choir trainers, the Choir regularly performs and records across London and the UK in prestigious venues, from the Royal Albert Hall to Abbey Road Studios.

Described by the London Evening Standard as ‘probably the finest independent choir in the world’, The Bach Choir values the freedom that its independence brings, allowing it to work with the very best orchestras and soloists, and to choose the music it performs. To date the Choir has sung over 400 works in more than 120 venues, and continues to share its work with audiences around the world. Following an invitation from the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, the Choir gave two performances of Bach’s *St Matthew Passion* in Hong Kong’s Cultural Centre just before Easter 2014, and it gave further concerts in Shanghai and Hangzhou. In October 2017, the Choir gave six concerts in the Netherlands of *a cappella* music and works for choir and organ, one of which was broadcast on Dutch radio. A five-city concert tour of the USA in March 2020 was cancelled at very short notice due to COVID-19.

With a strong commitment to new music, The Bach Choir has commissioned works from some of the world’s leading composers including the late Sir John Tavener, Bob Chilcott, Jonathan Dove, Will Todd and Carl Rütti. In June 2017 the Choir gave the world premiere performance of James MacMillan’s *Blow the trumpet in the new moon*, and commissioned Roxanna Panufnik to complete her *Four Choral Seasons*, which was premiered by the Choir in October 2019. This commitment continues over the 2021/22 season with the premiere of ten new pieces written for The Bach Choir.

The Bach Choir has always been characterised by the commitment of its members. With over 250 talented singers coming from all walks of life, an international touring schedule, and a pioneering participation programme, *Vocalise!*, that takes its passion for music into inner-city schools and dementia care homes, the Choir takes pride in performing, recording and sharing music for all to enjoy.

thebachchoir.org.uk

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