

Nadine Benjamin opens the 10th London Song Festival celebrating songs written by black British and African-American composers as part of Black History Month



A Quiet Revolution

Friday 20 October 2017, 7.15

Hinde Street Methodist Church, London

Nadine Benjamin *soprano*

Julien van Mellaerts *baritone*

Nathan Medina *speaker*

Nigel Foster *piano*

Curated by **Michael Harper**

[See programme below]

Hailed by Opera Now magazine as one of the top ten new generation sopranos who are destined to have impressive careers, **Nadine Benjamin** performs at the opening concert of the 10th **London Song Festival**. Nadine performs alongside baritone **Julien van Mellaerts**, winner of both the Kathleen Ferrier Award and Wigmore Hall International Song Competition 2017, and pianist and London Song Festival founder and artistic director **Nigel Foster**. The programme features both past and present composers including Errollyn Wallen, Florence Price, Margaret Bonds and Undine Smith Moore.

Michael Harper and Nigel Foster have brought together a programme of songs by lesser-known black British and African-American composers, in association with Black History Month and the African-American Art Song Alliance. Black History Month has been celebrated in the UK for thirty years to remember the important people and events in the history of the African diaspora.

The concert includes works by a number of prominent living black composers such as Errollyn Wallen, Shirley Thompson and B.E. Boykin amongst many from the 19th and 20th centuries celebrating 150 years of music by black composers. Many of the composers have fought to be heard and have been part of groundbreaking 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. Additionally, the late William Grant Still was the first African-American to conduct a major American symphony orchestra and the first to have his symphony performed by a leading orchestra.

Nadine Benjamin is passionate about performing music by female composers and diverse musicians. At the 5th London Festival of American Music Nadine performed the principal role of Imoinda in the UK premiere of *The Crossing* by Cuban-American composer Odaline de la Martinez. Nadine released a recording of Dame Ethel Smyth's opera *The Boatswain's Mate* with Retrospect Opera to critical acclaim, also with Odaline de la Martinez. On 1 December, Nadine is performing in Shirley Thompson's *The Woman who Refused to Dance*, a dance featuring voice, which is part of the Victoria & Albert museum's 'Opera: Passion, Power and Politics' exhibition.

"What a wonderful person she is and what a voice! She clearly has a superb future in front of her and more than one person said to me today after the recital that this was one of those days when you remember exactly where and when you were when you first heard her sing."

Paul Wing, Winchester Cathedral, 22 August 2017

2017 marks the 10th anniversary of the London Song Festival, and to celebrate this milestone they are celebrating with 11 concerts under the heading "Circles, Cycles and Revolutions". Throughout the festival there are performances of all the great iconic song-cycles of the Lieder repertoire by Schubert and Schumann, which form the heart and core of the Song repertoire. At the same time they are celebrating and commemorating several important revolutions that took place during the twentieth century by marking the 50th anniversary of the (partial) decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales, the centenary of the Russian Revolution, and the Civil Rights revolution as manifested in songs written by black British and African American composers.

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.

"As a professional soprano, I know only too well the amount of work it takes to stay dedicated and devoted to the path you love. There were days when I just wanted to throw in the towel! However, I knew that with the right support and focus, I could welcome my dreams into my life and allow them to become a reality. So I set about finding the people who had

taken a similar journey and kept asking how they had done it. What were their lessons that I could learn from? The answers were amazing and I looked at how I could make them work for me. It has been a road of challenge and adventure and I do not regret a minute of it."

Nadine Benjamin

Early next year, Nadine Benjamin will be joining English Touring Opera in their new production of one of the world's most beloved operas, Mozart's classic comedy *The Marriage of Figaro*. Blanche McIntyre (who directed *Tosca* earlier in 2017 in which Nadine performed the title role on two occasions) returns to direct this opera, with a first-class BAME cast, including Ross Ramgobin as Figaro, Rachel Redmond as Susanna and Nadine Benjamin as the Countess. The production will tour across the UK starting in Hackney Empire, London, in February and continuing to venues including Cambridge Arts Theatre, Exeter Northcott Theatre and York Theatre Royal before concluding at Grand Theatre Blackpool in June.

London Song Festival Programme includes:

William Grant Still (1895-1978) *Grief* (librettist: Leroy V. Brant)

Undine Smith Moore (1904-1989) *Watch and pray*

(librettist: Vivian Taylor)

Anon *John Brown's Body*

Florence B. Price (1887-1953) *Night* (librettist: Louise C. Wallace)

Margaret Bonds (1913-1972) *I, Too* (librettist: Langston Hughes)

Undine Smith Moore (1904-1989) *Love Let the Wind Cry*

(librettist: Sappho, translation by H. T. Wharton)

B. E. Boykin (living) *Remembering* (librettist: Maya Angelou)

H. T. Burleigh (1866-1949) *Kashmiri Song* (librettist: Laurence Hope)

J. Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954) *Lift Every Voice and Sing*

(librettist: James Weldon Johnson)

Richard Thompson (1954-) *A Black Pierrot*

(librettist: Langston Hughes)

Errollyn Wallen (1958-) *Peace on Earth*

David N. Baker (1931-2016) *A Good Assassination Should be Quiet*

(librettist: Mari Evans)

Shirley Thompson (living) *Tapestry* (librettist: Grace Nicholls)

Upcoming performances

18 November 2017, 7.30pm

Winchester Cathedral, Hampshire

Handel *Messiah*

Wessex Sinfonietta

David Hill conductor

Nadine Benjamin soprano

1 December 2017

Victoria & Albert Museum, London

Part of the V&A *Opera: Passion,*

Power and Politics exhibition

Shirley Thompson *The Woman who Refused to Dance*

Nadine Benjamin soprano

5 December 2017, 6pm

Steinway Hall, London
Hidden Too Long - Black Woman
in Song

Nadine Benjamin soprano

Siv Misund mezzo soprano

Erroyln Wallen composer

Allyson Devenish composer

Michael Harper curator

8 December 2017

St. Saviour's Church, Hampstead
Opening Doors - Funding Raising
Concert

14 December 2017, 1pm

St Paul's (Actors Church), Covent
Garden

Nadine Benjamin soprano

February-June 2018

Mozart *Marriage of Figaro*

English Touring Opera

Nadine Benjamin Countess

Blanche McIntyre director

Christopher Stark conductor

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 Tippett'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.

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.

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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