

MEDIA RELEASE

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OAE announces *Das Jahr* commissions to create new music in response to Fanny Mendelssohn's composition.

- Four women composers commissioned to write original works for 1840s period instrument orchestra
- Roxanna Panufnik, Electra Perivolaris, Freya Waley-Cohen and Errollyn Wallen will each respond to a movement from the cycle of piano pieces
- Fanny Mendelssohn's 1841 composition will be performed by Olga Pashchenko on fortepiano as part of the OAE's 2024/25 season alongside the new commissions.
- The project is supported by Cockayne Grants for the Arts: a donor advised fund held at The London Community Foundation.

The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment has today announced its *Das Jahr* (The Year) commissions. The project will see four composers – Roxanna Panufnik, Electra Perivolaris, Freya Waley-Cohen and Errollyn Wallen – create new work based on a cycle of piano pieces composed by Fanny Mendelssohn in 1841.

Fanny's own description of the piece as a "small work that is giving me much fun" perhaps reflects the pervasive disparity in the 19th Century in how the work of women composers was valued in comparison to their male counterparts. *Das Jahr* is a substantial piece with the entire cycle taking around 50 minutes to perform; and the popular 'Charakterstücke' genre included now well-established pillars of the piano repertoire such as Schumann's *Davidsbündlertanzen*, whilst Fanny's work predates Tchaikovsky's *The Seasons* by over 30 years.

Electra Perivolaris, one of the commissioned composers, commented on the theme of equality for women composers:

"The *Das Jahr* commission provides an interesting opportunity to reflect not only on the work of one of the most prolific composers of the German early Romantic era, Fanny Mendelssohn, but also to address and consider the consequences that led to her having to publish many compositions under her younger brother's name, remaining relatively unknown within her life with her talents only being fully appreciated from the 1980s onwards. Although the situation for composers

identifying as women has certainly improved since Fanny Mendelssohn's lifetime, certain challenges still remain and the OAE's *Das Jahr* commission brings together current female composers from across different generations, cultures and backgrounds to compose original music for this reimagining of *Das Jahr* from a contemporary perspective."

The project developed from conversations around how the OAE, an orchestra which focuses on music from the 17th to 19th Centuries, could address the issue of programming more works by women composers. Double bassist Cecelia Bruggemeyer, who chairs the OAE's Players Artistic Committee, explains the issues involved:

"Not many people can list female composers of the 19th Century in Europe. Even with the desire to raise their profile, and recent research work that is broadening the canon, there's very little for us to draw on when putting programmes together. The commissioning structures of the time meant that women simply didn't get the opportunities to write for orchestras, or get published. Fanny Mendelssohn is a prime example: she's an incredibly talented composer that had very little opportunity or encouragement to write orchestral music. She did, however, leave a legacy of over 400 pieces of chamber music and songs."

Max Mandel, principal viola of the OAE, who has acted as an artistic co-ordinator on the project, further comments that:

"The piano cycle, *Das Jahr*, stands out as a particularly ambitious work and the idea came to us that we could work with living composers to reimagine it as a multi-movement work for our orchestra... a vision of what Fanny might have created in 1841 in a more equal world."

The project continues the OAE's tradition of working with composers to create new repertoire for period instruments, with its most recent commission being Sally Beamish's *The Judas Passion* in 2017. Freya Waley-Cohen, another of the composers involved in the project, observes of the unique challenge of writing for very specific historical instruments:

"I'm really excited to dive into the sound worlds opened up by the period instruments of the OAE: the quirks of each instrument, the possibilities, the restrictions, and all the ways these interact with each other in different and unexpected combinations of instrumentations as well as the ensemble at large."

Das Jahr is a set of thirteen pieces ('Charakterstücke'). Twelve describe a month of the year with the thirteenth being a Postlude. Each is prefaced by a quote from a German poet and Fanny's husband, Wilhelm Hensel, provided illustrations for each. Each composer's commission will be inspired by one of the pieces within the cycle. Electra Perivolaris' will take 'March' as her starting point, followed by a contribution inspired by 'April' from Errollyn Wallen. Freya Waley-Cohen's commission will draw on "her beautiful and elegant June serenade with visitations or memories of the darkly playful February scherzo". Finally, Roxanna Panufnik will compose a piece inspired by the closing movement, 'Nachspiel', which she says "appealed to me with its intense focus on harmony which moves and never really settles until the very end."

The commissions will be presented at a concert on Sunday 23 March 2025 at the Southbank Centre's Queen Elizabeth Hall as part of the OAE's 2024/25 season. The new works will frame a performance of Fanny Mendelssohn's cycle on fortepiano by Olga Pashchenko.



Clockwise from top left: Roxanna Panufnik, Olga Pashchenko, Electra Perivolaris, Fanny Mendelssohn, Errollyn Wallen, Freya Waley-Cohen.

Das Jahr is supported by Cockayne Grants for the Arts: a donor advised fund held at The London Community Foundation.

Reflecting on the parallels and changes between the times and working conditions of composers in Fanny Mendelssohn's era and now, Roxanna Panufnik said:

“Women composers are in an incomparable position today - our work is widely programmed now and there are clear role models and pathways which wouldn't have been available to Fanny. I hope she's looking down on us and cheering loudly - and happy that her music still relates to our sense and emotions, after 200 years.”

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Notes to editors:

Roxanna Panufnik (born in 1968) is one of the most versatile and beloved British composers working today. She studied composition at the Royal Academy of Music and her works for opera, ballet, choirs, orchestras and chamber music and music for film and television are performed all over the world.

Recent work has included the premiere of the reworking of her father Andrzej Panufnik's *Five Polish Folk Songs* for the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and conductor Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla and her debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus at the Ravinia Festival. She was commissioned by King Charles III to write *Coronation Sanctus* for the Coronation in May 2023. Recent premieres have included a BBC Proms and VOCES8 co-commission *Floral Tribute* (in memory of the late Queen Elizabeth II), a song cycle *Gallery of Memories* co-commissioned by the Oxford Lieder and Presteigne Festivals (for whom she was 2023 composer-in-residence), choral pieces for The Exultate Singers and Edmund's Trust and *Tears, no more* for harpsichordist Jane Chapman and the London International Festival of Early Music. 2024/25 is packed with multi-faith projects in the UK and internationally. Roxanna has been raising funds through her epic 'Diamond Cycles' for the Diamond Fund for Choristers, and is Associate composer with the London Mozart Players and Composer-in-Residence with VOCES8. Her compositions are published by Peters Edition Ltd and recorded on many labels including Warner Classics, Signum, Chandos, and EMI Classics.

Olga Pashchenko is one of today's most versatile keyboard performers on the international stage and equally at home on fortepiano, harpsichord, organ, and contemporary piano. Most recently she opened the 2023/24 season with Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor and the Beethoven Orchester Bonn and was celebrated for her virtuosity which is seen as "the key to the musical soul, which she lets shine not only in the melodic sections, but also in every run, every figure and ornamentation" (General-Anzeiger Bonn).

From Bach and Beethoven on historical instruments to Ligeti on contemporary piano, Olga enjoys a busy and eclectic concert career as a soloist, recitalist, and chamber musician. The variety of her repertoire and performance styles can be seen throughout her next season – from recitals with Alexander Melnikov at Musikfest Berlin or Georg Nigl in Vienna, to tours with Clara Schumann's piano concerto with the Orchestra of the 18th century or Mozart's Piano concerto No. 24 in March 2024.

Electra Perivolaris (born in 1996) is a composer and pianist from Scotland of mixed British and Greek heritage, described as 'A Classical Star of the Future' by BBC Introducing and 'One of a new generation of female trailblazers' by BBC Radio 3. Her music draws inspiration from her mixed Scottish and Greek island heritages, focusing on the natural world as a fragile living organism and engaging with natural processes from her home on the Scottish Isle of Arran and from her family's roots on the Greek Aegean island of Chios. Recent commissions have included works for the London Sinfonietta, BBC Singers, BBC Concert Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra Composers' Hub. Electra has been awarded the Young Classical Artists Trust 2024-2025 Composer Fellowship in its inaugural year, composing new Wigmore Hall commissions for YCAT performers.

Recent premieres include two performances in the Queen Elizabeth Hall of commissions composed for the BBC Concert Orchestra, one of which was the culmination of Electra's work with Streetwise Opera, creating an opera in collaboration with The Magpie Project, a homeless shelter for women and children in East London. As Associate Composer for The Carice Singers, Electra's new commission for the choir will be premiered in the Holst 150 celebrations at St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square on the 18th April 2024. Electra's recent commission, *A Winged Woman*, for The Marian Consort vocal ensemble is the titular track on their album with the Linn Records label, released in November 2023. Electra was a 2022-2023 Royal Philharmonic Society Composer and received a joint RPS/ Presteigne Festival Commission to compose a new work for string orchestra, premiered at the Presteigne Festival in August 2023. Reviewing Electra's piece in Musical Opinion, critic Paul Conway wrote that it 'served notice of a fresh, original and questing musical voice'.

Freya Waley-Cohen (born in 1989) has been described as 'at once intimate and visionary'. Her music is characterised by contrasts between earthy rhythmic play and fragility, luminous spaces, and a sense of the otherworldly. Freya's music has been commissioned and performed by institutions and ensembles including the LA Philharmonic, BBC Proms, Wigmore Hall, Philharmonia Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, London Chamber Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, King's Singers, The Hermes Experiment, the Aldeburgh, Presteigne, Santa Fe, Tanglewood and Cheltenham festivals, and released on labels including Signum, Nimbus, Nonclassical, Delphian and NMC records. Recent commissions have included a new work co-commissioned by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, premiered at Symphony Hall under Ilan Volkov; two newly commissioned works to complete her song cycle, presented by Manchester Collective, which will be released on her debut album 'Spell Book'; and a new work for the Colin Currie Percussion Quartet.

Freya has created a number immersive works and installations including Permutations, an interactive artwork and a synthesis of architecture and music which was created and premiered at Snape Maltings before touring to Dartington International Festival, RIBA North, and the Royal Academy of Music, as well as being released as an EP on Signum Records. She was a founding member and artistic director of Listenpony concert series and record label which commissioned over 50 composers from 2012-2022. Her opera, WITCH, was commissioned to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Royal Academy of Music. It was directed by Polly Graham and conducted by Ryan Wigglesworth, and was nominated for an Ivors Composer Award.

Errollyn Wallen (born in 1958) CBE is a multi-award-winning Belize-born British composer. Her prolific output includes over twenty operas and a large catalogue of orchestral, chamber and vocal works, which are performed and broadcast throughout the world. She has composed for the opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games 2012, for the Queen's Golden and Diamond Jubilees, a specially commissioned song for COP 26, 2021, a re-imagining of *Jerusalem* for the Last Night of the Proms 2020 and a new work for BBC Proms 2023. BBC Radio 3 featured her music for Composer of the Week, and she has made several radio documentaries including *Classical Commonwealth*, nominated for the Prix Europa. Errollyn collaborated with artist Sonia Boyce on her installation, *Feeling Her Way*, for the British Pavilion at the 2022 Venice Biennale, which won the Golden Lion prize. Her critically acclaimed opera, *Dido's Ghost* (libretto by Wesley Stace) was premiered at the Barbican in 2021 and received its US première in San Francisco in November 2023. Recent premieres include a Wigmore Hall debut performance of songs from *The Errollyn Wallen Songbook*, a violin concerto for Philippe Quint, *Dances for Orchestra* for Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Swedish Chamber Orchestra and Irish Chamber Orchestra, *Night Thoughts*, a song cycle for Dame Sarah Connolly and pianist Joseph Middleton and *PARADE* commissioned by Academy of St Martin in the Fields.

With Myleene Klass, Errollyn recently co-presented a three-part series, *Musical Masterpieces*, for SkyArts television. Errollyn's book, *Becoming a Composer* was published by Faber in November 2023 to critical acclaim and will be translated into Spanish. Errollyn is amongst the world's top twenty most performed living classical composers. She has recently been elected Honorary Member of the Royal Academy of Music.

Errollyn composes in a Scottish lighthouse and her recordings have travelled 7.84 million kilometers in space, completing 186 orbits around the Earth on NASA's STS-115 mission.

The **Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment** is renowned for its curious, challenging and trailblazing approach to making music. It performs music from the 17th to the early 20th Centuries on instruments or replicas and using techniques from the time the music was composed. It is a Resident Orchestra at London's Southbank Centre, an artistic associate at Kings Place, and regularly tours the UK and internationally. It works with a network of schools and music hubs to deliver its education programme across the UK with over 16,000 participants in 2021/22. In 2020 it became the first UK orchestra to be based in a school when it became resident at Acland Burghley School in Tufnell Park, North London... our office is literally in the playground. Website: oae.co.uk

Full details of the OAE's 2024/25 season at the Southbank Centre will be announced in due course.

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