



# The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music

Friday 9 May 2025, 8pm  
St George's Bloomsbury

## **“Eternal Light”: Sacred music by Will Todd**

The Elysian Singers of London  
Susan Young *soprano*  
Thomas Gray *electric guitar*  
Sam Laughton *direction*

# Programme

---

*Sacred music by British composer Will Todd, featuring the composer's haunting Requiem for soprano solo, choir, and electric guitar.*

<i>Will Todd</i>	God So Loved The World	(2015)
<i>Will Todd</i>	Requiem	(2009)
<i>Will Todd</i>	Vidi speciosam	(2012)

## Notes and Translations

---

### God So Loved The World

This gently rocking setting of the well-known text from the Gospel of John was commissioned by Oakham School and first performed in Peterborough Cathedral in 2015.

### Requiem

*The composer writes:* Some years ago I worked with guitarist Thomas Gray on a theatre work, *Whirlwind*, and was impressed by the wonderful effects he created on the guitar which greatly enhanced the dramatic impact of the piece. We agreed then that it would be wonderful to collaborate again and perhaps to attempt to weave together a choral texture with the powerful lyricism of the electric instrument: two strong emotive textures, bound together. The opportunity came quicker than expected in the form of a commission from the Fairhaven Singers and their inspirational conductor Ralph Woodward, who was unperturbed by the experimental nature of my idea, indeed enthusiastic!

This text has fascinated me ever since I was first interested in music. I have strong childhood memories of performances in Durham Cathedral of the Verdi, Fauré, and Britten *Requiem* settings, and also of the broadcast premiere of Lloyd Webber's *Requiem* in 1985. The text is a mixture of contemplative and fearful, grand and mystical. I began by considering why one should write a Requiem setting: what does it mean today – for me – for us? Many such settings are inspired directly by the death of a loved one, but not this one. This is an attempt to work through my ideas and feelings about death: my own death, as well as the deaths of those I love. My setting is an intimate examination of the original text, challenging at times (like death), beautiful at others (also like death), always, I hope, yearning and lyrical, searching for answers and peace, confronting the mystery of the unknown. “The Mysterious” became stronger as the work progressed; in the original draft of this work the final cadence was on a strong and unequivocal E minor (since E is the first note of the 12 note row upon which much of the music is structured), but

in the finished version the performers move off into a chromatically dense and unresolved texture, an attempt to portray the limits of our understanding, that point at which life turns into actual death and we are no more: back to creation, back to star-dust. There is a dialogue in this work between music which has a strong nostalgic lyricism and sounds which are uncompromising and harsh; these represent for me the edges of music: on the one hand strong and sonorous tonality, on the other dense chromaticism. For me all music lies somewhere between these extremes, and where we find ourselves on that spectrum will depend on our mood and our needs at any given time.

*The following brief descriptions at the head of each section are written by the composer to provide a possible journey through the setting.*

## 1 Introit

*In this sequence the guitarist sets up the 12-note row against a soft, oscillating choir texture. The solo voice sings the opening lyrical phrases, a voice crying out at a time of pain and uncertainty.*

Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine,	Grant them eternal rest, O Lord,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.	and may perpetual light shine on them.

## 2 Kyrie

*The music resolves to A major and the choir sings these wonderful words of supplication. At the end, the floating guitar theme re-enters.*

Kyrie eleison.	Lord, have mercy.
Christe eleison.	Christ, have mercy.
Kyrie eleison.	Lord, have mercy.

Thou that hearest the prayer: unto thee shall all flesh come.

## 3 Dies iræ

*The music of the guitar is agonized; this is the searing pain of death, physical and emotional. The dissonance heaps up as the music progresses.*

Dies iræ, dies illa	The day of wrath, that day
solvet sæclum in favilla,	will dissolve the earth in ashes
teste David cum Sibylla.	as David and the Sibyl bear witness.

Quantus tremor est futurus	What dread there will be
quando judex est venturus	when the judge shall come
cuncta stricte discussurus.	to judge all things strictly.

Tuba mirum spargens sonum	A trumpet, spreading a wondrous sound
per sepulchra regionum	through the graves of all lands,
coget omnes ante thronum.	will drive mankind before the throne.

Mors stupebit et natura  
cum resurget creatura  
judicanti responsura.

*Death and nature shall be astonished  
when all creation rises again  
to answer the judge.*

A book will be brought forth  
in which everything is contained,  
out of which all the world shall be judged.

When therefore the judge takes his seat  
whatever is hidden shall reveal itself,  
and nothing shall remain unavenged.

4 Rex tremendæ

*Sudden tranquillity as the solo voice searches for hope of salvation, joined by the choir. The guitar softens once more.*

What then shall I say, wretch that I am,  
what friendly voice will speak out for me,  
when even the righteous may hardly be secure?

King of awful majesty,  
who freely saves the redeemed,  
O fount of goodness, save me.

Remember, blessed Jesu,  
that I am the cause of your pilgrimage,  
and do not forsake me on that day.

5 Lacrimosa

*The opening Requiem motif returns and the choir sings the haunting Lacrimosa.*

Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine.

*Grant them eternal rest, O Lord.*

Lacrimosa dies illa  
qua resurget ex favilla  
judicandus homo reus.  
Huic ergo parce, Deus.

*Tearful will be that day  
when from the dust shall rise  
the guilty man to be judged.  
Therefore spare him, O God.*

6 Pie Jesu

*This setting of the iconic text starts in G minor and finishes in G major. The soft, eerie guitar weaves a strange counterpoint to the intensely lyrical melody of the solo voice. This is a dialogue between the*

*two solo timbres, entwined in their shared need of peace, accompanied by soft choral chords.*

Pie Jesu Domine, dona eis requiem.

*Merciful Lord Jesus, grant them rest.*

## 7 Offertorium

*An urgent prayer from the choir set against a pulsating guitar accompaniment.*

Domine, Jesu Christe, Rex gloriæ, libera  
animas omnium fidelium defunctorum  
de poenis inferni, et de profundo lacu:  
libera eas de ore leonis, ne absorbeat eas  
tartarus, ne cadant in obscurum.

*Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory, deliver the souls of  
all the faithful departed from the pains of hell and  
from the bottomless pit: deliver them from the lion's  
mouth, nor let the black abyss swallow them up, nor  
let them fall into darkness.*

Sed signifer sanctus Michael repræsentet  
eas in lucem sanctam.

*But let Saint Michael, your standard-bearer,  
lead them into the holy light.*

Hostias et preces tibi, Domine, laudis  
offerimus: tu suscipe pro animabus illis,  
quarum hodie memoriam facimus.

*We offer unto you, Lord, this sacrifice of prayer and  
praise: receive it for those souls whom today we  
commemorate.*

Allow them, Lord, to cross from death into the life which once you promised to Abraham  
and his descendants.

## 8 Sanctus

*Long pedal notes underscore this movement, which is tranquil and prayerful. The texture builds and  
builds, with many-layered vocal writing - this is the promise of a beautiful and heavenly afterlife.*

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus,  
Dominus Deus Sabaoth!  
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.  
Hosanna.

*Holy, holy, holy,  
Lord God of Sabaoth!  
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna.*

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in excelsis.

*Hosanna in the highest.*

## 9 Agnus Dei

*In contrast to the previous movement, as the moment of death approaches the music becomes  
troubled and desperate. A final outpouring of lyrical music precedes a guitar cadenza – the last cry  
of life in this world – after which the music becomes distorted and painful as we sink into death. The  
cadenza is improvised by Thomas Gray.*

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi:  
dona eis requiem.

*Lamb of God, that takes away the sins of the world:  
grant them rest.*

*The call of Requiem æternam from the opening returns. We are perhaps moving into an afterlife as the music opens out into softly glowing harmonies, which represent the 12-note row melded with diatonic harmony – we hope for the angels – we hope to be with Lazarus – we hope for rest. At the end the soul moves into its journey of the True Unknown and drifts from our sight.*

Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine.  
In paradisum deducant te angeli.

*Grant them eternal rest, O Lord.  
May the angels lead you into paradise.*

May the martyrs receive you on your arrival, and may they guide you into the holy city, Jerusalem. May the chorus of angels receive you. And with Lazarus, once poor, may you have eternal rest.

Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine.

*Grant them eternal rest, O Lord.*

## Vidi Speciosam

*The composer writes:* This anthem was commissioned in 2012 by Simon Winters to celebrate 25 years of the chamber choir Felicitas. Thinking about the unaccompanied vocal texture brought me back to my 1995 setting of the words of The Venerable Bede, “Christus est stella”, which in turn made me think of the beautiful words of “Vidi speciosam”. The setting seeks to convey the ecstatic nature of the text, set almost exclusively in a homophonic style; the harmonies are rich and opulent like the text.

Vidi speciosam sicut columbam  
ascendentem desuper rivos aquarum;  
uius inæstimabilis odor erat nimis  
in vestimentis eius.

*I saw my fair one like a dove  
rising above the streams of water;  
whose wonderful fragrance was powerful  
in her clothing.*

Et sicut dies verni circumdabant eam  
flores rosarum et lilia convallium.  
Quæ est ista quæ ascendit per desertum  
sicut virgula fumi  
ex aromatibus myrrhæ et thuris?

*And, as on a spring day, she was encircled  
by blooms of roses and lilies of the valley.  
Who is it that rises from the desert  
like a plume of smoke  
suffused with the scent of myrrh and incense?*

*Responsory at Matins on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

## Biographies

---

### The Elysian Singers of London

The Elysian Singers of London is one of the UK’s leading chamber choirs. Founded in 1986, the group quickly developed an interest in contemporary music, giving world premieres by a number of composers including John Tavener, who was the choir’s Patron until his death in 2013. World

premieres include a performance of Tavener's *Monument to Beethoven* at the Royal Festival Hall (2014), Ian Stephens' *Timepieces* (2011), John Habron's *Salve Regina* (2008), and *Exile Lamentations* (2009) by Paul Stanhope. The group's first CD of James MacMillan's music, *Cantos Sagrados*, received a five-star rating from BBC Music Magazine. TV and radio highlights include the first broadcast performances of Górecki's *Miserere* and *Three Lullabies* on BBC Radio 3, and live performances on Radio 3's "In Tune" programme.

In 2015 the upper voices of the choir made their debut performance at the BBC Proms, providing the offstage chorus for Holst's *The Planets* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and in 2017 the lower voices were delighted to make their debut with the renowned violist Lawrence Power at the West Wycombe Chamber Music Festival.

The Elysian Singers are now privileged to have Sir James MacMillan as the choir's patron. In 2019 the group released its second CD of his music, *One Equal Music*, receiving a five-star rating in Choir and Organ and the accolade of "first among equals" in Gramophone. The CD was launched at a concert conducted by James MacMillan, and several tracks broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

The choir's latest disc on Signum Records, *Beauty for Ashes*, is due for release in 2025, and features a wide variety of music by the best contemporary British female and male composers.

*Soprano* Harriet Gritton Miranda Johnson Katharine von Schubert Anne Taylor  
Katie Robertson Jessica Lichtenstein Eleanor Crowe Lois Gallagher  
Katie Parker Julia Bowyer Soo-Lin Lui Sarah Teather

*Alto* Carolyn Nicholls Francesca Trundle-Martin Claire Bruton  
Alice Grattan Rosie Edge Emily Gazzard Laura Taylor

*Tenor* Richard Warren Nick Richmond-Smith Tony Zacaroli Greg Davies Chris Snow

*Bass* Andy Chan Ben Driver Mike Chambers  
Christopher Whitehouse Mark Brafield David Benedict

## Susan Young

A versatile, accomplished singer, Susan Young has developed a growing reputation in the field of contemporary opera and as a champion of neglected works, relishing the musical and dramatic challenges.

For English National Opera she created the role of Wife in the world premiere of Tansy Davies' *Between Worlds*. Also for ENO, Susan has worked on *The Passenger* (Weinberg), as heard on BBC Radio 3's "Private Passions", and Duchess in *Powder Her Face* (Adès). Other notable roles include Micaëla in *Carmen* and the title role in *Kát'a Kabanová*. She has garnered critical praise for her strong dramatic sense, rich, warm sound, and poised lyricism.

Susan was an integral part of the group of musicians who founded the now internationally-renowned Oxford International Song Festival. She has an extensive song repertoire. Her numerous concert appearances include Britten's *War Requiem*, Dvorak's *Te Deum*, Elgar's *Spirit of England*,

Vaughan Williams' *A Sea Symphony*, Verdi's *Requiem*, Szymanowski's *Stabat Mater*, Mozart's *Mass in C Minor*, Rossini's *Petite Messe Solennelle*, and Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*.

Alongside her performing career, Susan runs an MA in Vocal Studies for the University of York, is Programme Manager for Vocal Studies at Morley College, and manages a successful and varied private teaching studio.

## Thomas Gray

Thomas Gray is a self-taught electric and acoustic guitarist, singer, and composer. He studied music at King's College London, receiving choral training from organist Ernie Warrell, and West London Institute where he studied composition with Francis Pott. Thomas's guitar obsession had been kept separate from his "serious" studies, but Francis encouraged him to compose for the instrument and thus the two worlds were brought together. This helped pave the way for Thomas to collaborate with Will Todd on his *Requiem*, a unique and challenging sacred work that explores the sonic possibilities of the guitar and its associated electronica.

Thomas's diverse musical life has taken him from international rock stages to the orchestral concert platform via the jazz club (including venues such as the Ahoy Stadium, the Royal Albert Hall, and Ronnie Scott's) and the UK's theatre circuit, along with many cathedrals, chapels, and churches. He has collaborated with many notable artists and ensembles including Brian May, Rod Argent, the BBC Concert, Ulster and Rambert orchestras, and St Martin's Ensemble. For several years he was a "Live Music Now!" performer, which led to community outreach work with Streetwise Opera, the Lost Chord Project, the Teenage Cancer Trust, and the Royal Albert Hall.

As a composer, songwriter, audio producer, and musical director, Thomas has worked extensively in the worlds of theatre, soundtracks, and studios, collaborating with notable directors and producers including David Pountney, Keith Warner, Laurie Sansom, David Richards, and Damien Korner. He is a member of the Royal Albert Hall's in-house "Albert's Band" and resident composer, sound designer, and musical director of Khayaal Theatre Company. He also turns his hand to New Orleans jazz in the Alvar Tree Frogs, a London-based band that has just released its first album.

## Sam Laughton

Sam Laughton was organ scholar of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, where he read music. He now juggles busy careers as both a barrister and a musician. He is musical director of The Elysian Singers, The Trinity Camerata, Aylesbury Opera, and The Craswall Players, as well as chair of trustees for two musical charities. He is in demand as a guest conductor, working with such orchestras as The Oxford Sinfonia, Kensington Chamber Orchestra, The Kew Sinfonia, The Orchestra of the City, The Crendon Chamber Orchestra, and The Royal Orchestral Society. He has also worked with groups as varied as Oxford Philomusica, The Joyful Company of Singers, ENO Baylis, and Garsington Opera.



## Will Todd

Will Todd taught himself the piano from an early age and grew up in County Durham, North East England where his grandfather was a coal miner and his parents were teachers. His love of improvising has been the central force in a wide-ranging career of composing and playing.

Will has worked with many of the UK's leading music organisations including Welsh National Opera, Opera North, The Halle Orchestra, Opera Holland Park, The Sixteen, The BBC Singers, and the BBC Concert Orchestra. He has also visited many countries performing and directing his music. His love of choral music is reflected in a large output including masses, anthems, and larger sacred concert works including *Mass in Blue* which has been performed hundreds of times around the world since its 2003 premiere. His carol *My Lord Has Come* has become a worldwide favourite since it was included in Oxford University Press's *Carols for Choirs Five* in 2012. Other widely performed choral pieces include *Passion Music*, *Jazz Missa Brevis*, and his arrangement of *Amazing Grace*. Will also has an impressive list of theatre works, including *The Screams of Kitty Genovese* which has been produced recently by Tête à Tête Opera in London and Edinburgh, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* for Opera Holland Park, *Migrations* for Welsh National Opera, and *Song of our Heartland*, commissioned by Opera North.

Will is president and patron of a number of British choirs. He strongly believes in music making for all, and his personal motto when directing choirs is "find the passion". Outside music his interests include supporting the environmental movement in any way he can, and he is attempting to drastically reduce and ultimately phase out his use of flying during the next few years.

## The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music

The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music was founded by Christopher Batchelor in 2002 with the aim of showcasing contemporary liturgical music in both service and concert. Now more than 20 years old, the LFCCM has grown to include nearly 60 events, dozens of composers, hundreds of performers, and thousands of audience members, both live and online.

## Make the LFCCM part of your Legacy

Artistic groups across the United Kingdom have seen funding cuts and financial pressures since the global coronavirus pandemic. In the face of challenges like these, the secure future of classical music in this country can no longer be taken for granted.

The LFCCM's endowment fund ensures the Festival's ongoing financial security and independence for generations to come. Your lasting legacy will be reflected in new commissions, live performances, educational programmes, and supporting the development of church music in perpetuity.

Find out more at [lfccm.com/support/legacy](https://lfccm.com/support/legacy), or write to [legacy@lfccm.com](mailto:legacy@lfccm.com).

More events this week at  
The London Festival of Contemporary Church Music

*All events are free unless otherwise noted*

**Sunday 11 May**      **Organ Recital by Richard Moore, Sub-Organist of Christ Church, Oxford**  
1.15pm      *Southwark Cathedral, SE1 9DA*

5pm      **Organ Recital by Paul Greally, Assistant Organist of Westminster Abbey**  
*Westminster Abbey, SW1P 3PA*

**Tuesday 13 May**      **Afternoon Recital by The LFCCM Festival Singers**  
3.15pm      *Southwark Cathedral, SE1 9DA*

**Friday 16 May**      **Lunchtime Recital by The LFCCM Festival Singers**  
1.15pm      *Holy Sepulchre, Holborn Viaduct, EC1A 2DQ*

Two choral recitals by The LFCCM Festival Singers, the Festival's own professional vocal ensemble drawn from London's top-flight church and cathedral singers, featuring themed selections by both British and international composers from the Festival's "Call for Scores" incubation project for new music, including works by young composers.

**Saturday 17 May**      **Organ Recital by students of The Royal College of Music Junior Department**  
5.30pm      *Amaryllis Fleming Concert Hall, Royal College of Music, SW7 2BS*

7.30pm      **"Wisdom and Strength":**  
*Concert at St Paul's Knightsbridge, SW1X 8SH*  
*This event is ticketed. Book online at [lfccm.com/tickets](http://lfccm.com/tickets)*

Renowned British ensemble Siglo de Oro presents an exceptional programme of new sacred music by women composers to celebrate the launch of their new CD recording, *Wisdom and Strength*.

*More details about these events and many others at*  
[www.lfccm.com](http://www.lfccm.com)