



New French Song II



Alison Smart Fisher, soprano

Katharine Durran, piano

New French Song II

Alison Smart Fisher, soprano

Katharine Durran, piano

1.	Deirdre Gribbin Les arbres me parlent, dit Idir	3:07
2.	Shirley J. Thompson Calendrier	1:59
3.	Cecilia McDowall Les Yeux	2:15
4.	Emily Hall Les Amoureux	1:21
5.	Joanna Forbes L'Estrange Vous, et Moi	1:49
6.	Millicent B. James Demain, commencera le bruit	3:12
7.	Lesley-Jane Rogers Les Séparés	2:50
8.	Kerry Andrew Seulette Suis	2:52
9.	Helen Neeves Comète	2:10
10.	Gráinne Mulvey J'aime	2:46
11.	Daryl Runswick Je Vis, Je Meurs	3:26
12.	Nicola LeFanu Au Chat	2:11

Total Playing Time 30:04

Introduction

New French Song II is an innovative and inclusive commissioning project which has created a group of songs setting poems by women and non-binary poets. These poems were chosen by soprano Alison Smart Fisher and pianist Katharine Durran from eight centuries of great French literature, with writers from across the French-speaking world including two from the Caribbean. The poems are inclusive, non-gender-specific, and expressive but not intimate, to include younger readers. They are set in the natural world, with the sounds of the trees, the seasons, the awakening of love, happiness, a break-up, the pain of solitude, and a return to nature with the sighting of a comet and a blazing sunset.

Alison and Katharine chose ten women and non-binary composers for New French Song II who are all wonderfully creative. We are delighted that each of the composers has created something truly unique and we wish each and every song a long and happy life! The resulting set of songs is flexible, with the option to perform individual songs or a selection, or the whole set. The aim was to create songs of moderate difficulty, around Grade 6, for both voice and piano parts. We very much hope for these songs to be sung by people across the world with personal enjoyment of their beautiful melodies, fascinating textures and expressive power, just as we are enjoying them.

New French Song II completes a larger set of songs, bringing the total to 32! Our story began in 2004 when Alison Smart and Katharine Durran commissioned a set of 20 new songs from British composers, with the overall title New French Song. They premiered them all in one evening at the Purcell Room in London, then recorded them for *Métier* (MSV 92100). This was a ground-breaking commission of 20 British composers, each writing one setting of a French text of their choice, in most cases a Romantic poem. *Sainte* by Tarik O'Regan won the British Song Award for 2004. As it happened, the twenty texts were all written by men, and of the twenty composers, five identified as women. So twenty years later in 2024, Alison Smart (now Alison Smart Fisher) commissioned a further ten songs, known as New French Song II, all written by women and non-binary composers. These were premiered in September 2024 first in Scotland at the Moffat Distillery then in London at Burgh House.

We're delighted to include in this album two extra songs, one each by Daryl Runswick and Nicola LeFanu, which were special gifts to Alison and Katharine. The complete set of 32 songs encompasses a full range of styles, moods, and levels of complexity, and now shows equal gender representation.

A note on terminology: This album specifically features women and non-binary composers because they are often under-represented. When women are referred to, this includes cisgender and transgender women; when non-binary people are referred to, this includes all those who identify outside the gender binary.

Les arbres me parlent, dit Idir (The trees are speaking to me, says Idir)

Poem by Nadia Ben Slima (b. 1980)

Music by Deirdre Gribbin (b. 1967)

Que racontent donc ces végétaux
en leur majesté ombrageante?
Quelles vertus relatent-ils à travers
leur douce chorégraphie ...
Ainsi menée par le vent?
Sont-ce des paroles augurantes
ou le récit de leur trace séculaire?

Ces arbres demeurent le symbole
d'une nature meurtrie
qui s'époumone
Reclus dans un bastion précaire.
A l'abri de 'celui'
qui la saccage
puis la préserve

Zéphyr et brise bousculent alors
les feuillages de leur souffle salvateur
Que racontent donc ces murmures?

So what do these plants say
in their shadowy majesty?
What virtues do they convey through
their gentle choreography ...
Led thus by the wind?
Are these words of promise
or the story of their ancient imprint?

These trees remain the symbol of a
wounded nature
that is gasping for breath
Secluded within a fragile bastion
Sheltered from 'the one'
who first devastates
and then preserves it

Zephyr and breeze stir the leaves
with their life-giving breath
So what do these murmurs say?

Les arbres me parlent, dit Idir was an automatic choice for composer Deirdre Gribbin to set to music as she is particularly fond of trees. The trees are speaking to us, but what are they saying? The use of tremolando chords in the piano part contributes to the effect of constant motion, while the irregular metre and cross-rhythms add to the texture and colour. Octaves suggest the grandness of 'the one' who first devastates it, then preserves it. This gives way to the reassuring return of the trees' 'murmures'. Nature triumphs in its gentle, timeless way.

Calendrier (Calendar)

Poem by Rosemond Gérard (1871-1953)

Music by Shirley J. Thompson (b. 1958)

Janvier nous prive de feuillage;
Février fait glisser nos pas
Mars a des cheveux de nuage,
Avril, des cheveux de lilas;
Mai permet
les robes champêtres;
Juin ressuscite
les rosiers;
Juillet met l'échelle
aux fenêtres,
Août, l'échelle aux cerisiers.
Septembre, qui divague un peu,
Pour danser sur du raisin bleu
S'amuse à retarder l'aurore;
Octobre a peur; Novembre a froid;
Décembre éteint les fleurs;
et, moi,
L'année entière je t'adore !

January deprives us of greenery;
February makes our steps slippery
March has cloudlike hair,
April, lilac hair;
May gives us the occasion
to wear our country dresses;
June brings the rose
bushes back to life;
July props the ladders
against the windows,
August, against the cherry trees.
September, which rambles a little,
To dance about on the ripened grape,
Enjoys delaying the dawn;
October is afraid; November is cold;
December snuffs out the flowers;
as for me,
All year round I love you!

Translation © Jemima L. Hodgkinson

Calendrier by Rosemond Gerard is an enduringly attractive, ordered poem, and a perfect foil for this whimsical, extrovert setting by composer Shirley J. Thompson. She gives to each month its own musical character, with a lovely rising scalic melody for the summer months, like the ladder for the growing cherry trees.

Les Yeux (Eyes)

Poem by Hélène van Zuylen (1863-1947)

Music by Cecilia McDowall (b. 1951)

Les yeux noirs, où l'éclair
des ténèbres reluit
Et s'éteint, les yeux noirs
sont plus beaux que la nuit.

Les yeux gris, où l'ardeur des étés
passe et brûle,
Les yeux gris sont plus beaux
que le doux crépuscule.

Les yeux bleus, clairs miroirs
du rêve et de l'amour,
Rayons frais, les yeux bleus
sont plus beaux que le jour.

Les yeux verts, où l'azur
des feuilles tremble encore,
Lueurs d'eau, les yeux verts
sont plus beaux que l'aurore.

Angoissants comme l'abîme
et le désespoir,
Ombres d'or, les yeux bruns
sont plus beaux que le soir.

Black eyes, in which the glint
of darkness first gleams
And then dies, black eyes
are more beautiful than the night.

Grey eyes, through which the summer
heat passes and burns,
Grey eyes are more beautiful
than the gentle twilight.

Blue eyes, clear mirrors
of a dream and of love,
Fresh rays of light, blue eyes
are more beautiful than the day.

Green eyes, in which the azure
of leaves still trembles,
Glimmers of water, green eyes
are more beautiful than the dawn.

Fear-inducing like the depths of despair
and desperation,
Golden shadows, brown eyes
are more beautiful than the evening.

Translation © Jemima L. Hodgkinson

Les Yeux describes eye colours and the moods that go with them for the different times of the day. Van Zuylen was part of the Rothschild family but was cut off from them when she married a Catholic. She was a pioneering motorist. She wrote some of her poetry jointly with her lesbian partner Renée Vivien using the pen-name Paule Riversdale. Cecilia McDowall's song is itself full of colour, with more sombre tones for dark eyes and night-time, contrasted with the brightest and highest music for the blue eyes of the day. A low pedal E in the piano suggests that the eyes are for looking, but there's no physical contact.

Les Amoureux (The Lovers)

Poem by Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-1701)

Music by Emily Hall (b. 1978)

L'eau qui caresse le rivage,
La rose qui s'ouvre
au zéphyr,
Le vent qui rit
sous le feuillage,
Tout dit qu'aimer
est un plaisir.

De deux amants
l'égale flamme
Sait doublement
les rendre heureux.
Les indifférents
n'ont qu'une âme;
Mais lorsqu'on aime,
on en a deux.

The water that caresses the shore,
The rose that opens itself
to the zephyr,*
The wind that laughs
beneath the leaves,
All things testify that to love
is a pleasure.

Of two lovers
the steady flame
Knows how to make
them both happy.
The indifferent
have only one soul;
But when you love,
you have two.

Translation © Jemima L. Hodgkinson

*west wind

Les Amoureux is a happy poem of equal love, compared with the beauties of nature. Emily Hall has chosen to set her song in compound time with a clear tonal centre, giving a truly grounded feeling to the melody and harmony. The minor mode contrasts with the dance-rhythms to give a warm glow to the harmonies.

Vous, et moi (You and Me)

Poem by Pernette du Guillet (1520-1545)

Music by Joanna Forbes L'Estrange (b. 1971)

Prenez le cas que,
comme je suis vôtre -
Et être veux -
vous soyez tout à moi:
Certainement par ce commun bien nôtre
Vous me devriez tel droit que je vous dois.

Et si Amour voulait rompre sa Loi,
Il ne pourrait l'un de nous dispenser,
S'il ne voulait contrevenir à soi,
Et vous, et moi,
et les Dieux offenser.

Consider that,
since I am yours -
And want to be -
you are all mine:
Certainly by this common good of ours
You owe me such a right as I owe you.

And if Love wanted to break its Law,
It could not excuse one of us,
it did not want to deny itself,
And you, and me,
nor to offend the Gods.

Translation © Jemima L. Hodgkinson

Vous, et moi is the title chosen by composer Joanna Forbes L'Estrange for her setting of the poem *Prenez le cas* (Consider that...) by Renaissance poet Pernette du Guillet. Du Guillet was fortunate to be recognised as part of the Lyonnaise school of writers, scientists and artists. Her use of formal, logical language is highly persuasive in this music which reaches out and up towards the beloved in caress and embrace. The two lovers cannot - either logically or practically - be separated.

The composer has chosen to adopt as the song's title three words from the last line of the poem, "vous, et moi" which summarise beautifully the overall sentiment of the poem and which are repeated in the final passage of the song. The song's style is partly reminiscent of the French Romantic composers such as Fauré and partly influenced by the music of Michel Legrand who is one of Joanna Forbes L'Estrange's favourite songwriters of the twentieth century.

Demain, commencera le bruit (Tomorrow, the Noise Will Begin)

Poem by Jeanne Mègnen (fl. 1940-1945)

Music by Millicent B. Jones (b. 1998)

La lumière crie, elle m'épaule.
Le rayon perpétue l'ardeur étale,
Les cordes sont tendues
à se rompre...

...Vous vous taisez...
Je me heurte de front
à l'arbre décharné.
Parce que tout est muet,
j'entends l'air craquer...
Patiente.

Les ailes étendent leur ombre
sur nos prés et nous gardent.
Tous les chiens sont rentrés.
Les clochettes archent en couronne
vers la falaise.

Je suis seule, sur un roc,
et la fumée propage mon espoir
J'avance,
parée de toile d'or
Ma barque passe

...Au loin, l'air a craqué encore
dans une brume terne.
Tu pleures et mes yeux
rient à l'arc-en-ciel.
L'espoir blanc tourne vertigineux.
Rien de ce qui est nous ne perd.
Demain, commencera le bruit.

The light cries out, it supports me.
The ray of light feeds the still heat,
The ropes are stretched
to breaking point...

...You fall silent...
I collide head-on
with the bare tree.
As everything else is silent,
I hear the air crack...
Patient.

The wings extend their shadow
over our meadows and protect us.
All the dogs have come home.
The bells arch in a crown
towards the cliff.

I am alone, on a rock,
and the smoke lifts my hope
I move forward,
adorned with gold canvas
My boat sails past

...Far off, the air has cracked again
in a dull haze.
You weep and my eyes
laugh at the rainbow.
White hope swirls at a dizzying speed.
Nothing that comes from us is lost.

Tomorrow, the noise begins.

Translation © Jemima L. Hodgkinson

Demain, commencera le bruit was published in a collection of poetry by Caribbean writers. Composer Millicent B. Jones here sets fragments from the poem which create a sense of anticipation of something 'noisy' (we don't know what) beginning tomorrow.

Perhaps this couple will marry in a public ceremony. Or will one of them sign up for military service? Whatever the case, it's important - even the dogs have stopped barking.

As if recalling ancient words of wisdom the poet's final statement is clear:
'Nothing that comes from us is lost,
Tomorrow the noise will begin'.

The music has a slightly baroque flavour in its harmonic sequencing, while the meandering melody reflects the varied elements of the landscape described by the poet including the bells close to the farmhouse.

Les Séparés (Apart)

Poem by Marceline Desbordes-Valmore (1786-1859)

Music by Lesley-Jane Rogers (b. 1962)

N'écris pas! Je suis triste,
et je voudrais m'éteindre.
Les beaux étés sans toi,
c'est la nuit sans flambeau.
J'ai refermé mes bras
qui ne peuvent t'atteindre,
Et frapper à mon cœur,
c'est frapper au tombeau.
N'écris pas !

N'écris pas ces doux mots
que je n'ose plus lire:
Il semble que ta voix
les répand sur mon cœur;
Que je les vois brûler
à travers ton sourire ;
Il semble qu'un baiser
les empreint sur mon cœur.
N'écris pas !

Do not write! I am sad,
and I wish to snuff out my life.
The beautiful summers without you
are like a night without passion.
I fold my arms
as they have no-one to wait for.
To knock at my heart
is to beat on my tomb.
Do not write!

Do not write those sweet words
that I cannot bring myself to read.
It would seem that their voice
enfolds my heart.
I see your smile,
and the words burn!
It would appear that a kiss
sears them on my heart.
Do not write!

Translation © Lesley-Jane Rogers

Les Séparés is a poem of longing. Lesley-Jane Rogers has set this in sections alternating freer, recitativo declarations with punctuating chords in the piano, with a melancholy aria over a light, fast-moving arpeggiated piano part which uses pedal notes to express the fixity of the emotions. The poet describes the emptiness of the arms trying to recreate the embrace, and the frustration that any letter that is sent will cause only more heart-ache. The refrain "Do not write" is at once sad, frustrated, and asking for the beloved to return. As Lesley-Jane herself writes, "I have tried to give the song a mix of exultation and desolation, of hope and despair, of joy and sadness/dramatic and defeated all in the same chord(s)!"

Seulette Suis (Alone Am I)

Poem by Christine de Pisan (1364-1430)

Music by Kerry Andrew (b. 1978)

Seulette suis et seulette veux être,
Seulette m'a mon doux ami laissée.
Seulette suis, sans compagnon ni maître,
Seulette suis, dolente et courroucée,
Seulette suis, en langueur malaisée,
Seulette suis, plus que nulle égarée,
Seulette suis, sans ami demeurée.

Alone am I, and alone do I want to be,
Alone has my sweet friend left me,
Alone am I, without friend nor master,
Alone am I, mournful and wrathful,
Alone am I, in an uncomfortable languor,
Alone am I, more confused than anyone,
Alone am I, and I remain without a friend.

Translation © Jemima L. Hodgkinson

Seulette Suis by the prolific Late Medieval poet Christine de Pisan is the oldest poem in this album. This poem inspired Alison to collect poetry from each of the following centuries right up to the present day for New French Song II. This short poem, of which Kerry Andrew's song sets the first stanza, creates a truly empty landscape with only occasional sounds and thoughts. The repeated, almost mantra-like 'Seulette suis' rises to its highest point in a desperate complaint at being alone, entirely lost.

Comète (Comet)

Poem by Symone Yoyotte (1910-1933)

Music by Helen Neeves (b. 1971)

Comète vivante sur le dessus
telle
qui s'enfonce également
n'a pas la source du plaisir
j'étais pareille aux roches
comparse
immanente
tronquée
malfaisante
mais la rumeur me fait changer
de place et d'encre
à ma mesure
tel
un poids
liquide qui m'obsède
retrouve sa route en rêve
et tourne

Living comet on the surface
such
that is also sinking
does not have the source of pleasure
I was like the rocks
bystander
inherent
cut short
evil
but the murmur makes me change
place and ink
to within my reach
such
a liquid weight
which vexes me
finds its way in a dream
and spins

Translation © Jemima L. Hodgkinson

Comète by Martinican poet and intellectual Symone Yoyotte (also known as Symone Monnerot) is filled with joyous anticipation and excitement. Composer Helen Neeves writes, "A feeling of energy beyond space and time....something almost tangible bubbling away in the background of all things".

In the song this idea never really stops, however there is a brief pause to the momentum at the words 'j'étais pareille aux roches'; this provides some contrast before the 'perpetual motion' becomes evident again.

J'aime (I Love)

Poem by Isabelle Callis-Sabot (b. 1958)

Music by Gráinne Mulvey (b. 1966)

J'aime ce grand moment,
fluide comme un mirage,
Quand la vive clarté
tend à s'évanouir ,
Quand le vent mollissant
caresse le rivage
Et quand déjà le jour
n'est plus qu'un souvenir...

J'aime cette heure ambrée,
sublime et solennelle
Où la montagne
exhale un arôme de miel,
Où seul le vol léger
de quelques hirondelles
Trouble encore le silence
et déchire le ciel...

J'aime ce riche instant,
cet unique intervalle
De grâce d'espérance
et de félicité,
Cette douce harmonie
lorsque la mer étale
Reflète du couchant les beaux
rayons dorés.

I love that great moment,
fluid like a mirage,
When the bright light
begins to fade,
When the softening wind
caresses the shore
And when the day
is already but a memory...

I love this amber hour,
sublime and solemn
When the mountain
breathes out a honey scent,
When only the soft flight
of a few swallows
Disturbs the silence
and tears through the sky...

I love that rich moment,
that singular pause
Filled with grace
and hope and bliss,
This sweet harmony
when the sea spreads out
Reflecting the beautiful golden
rays of the sunset.

Translation © Jemima L. Hodgkinson

J'aime is a hymn to the beauties of nature at the ending of the day, adding the emotions of hope and happiness to the poet's blessings as the sun's golden rays shine out. Gráinne Mulvey builds up layer upon layer of caressing melodies over a ground bass to create a thrilling final phrase in which the sun's golden rays shine out over spectacularly vibrant piano chords.

Je Vis, Je Meurs (I live, I die)
Poem by Louise Labé (1522-1566)
Music by Daryl Runswick (b. 1946)

Je vis, je meurs, je me brûle et me noye,
J'ay chaut extreme en endurent froidure.
La vie m'est trop molle et trop dure.
J'ay grans ennuis entremêlés de joye.

Tout en un coup je ris et je larmoye,
Et en plaisir maint grief torment j'endure.
Mon bien s'en va, et à jamais il dure.
Tout en un coup je seiche et je verdoie.

Ainsi amour inconstamment me meine,
Et quand je pense avoir plus de douleur,
Sans y penser je me trouve hors de peine.

Puis quand je crois ma joye estre certaine,
Et estr'au haut de mon désiré heure
Il me remet en mon premier malheur.

I live, I die, I burn and I drown,
I am extremely hot while living through frosts.
Life for me is too soft, and too hard.
I have great troubles mixed with joy.

At the same time I laugh and also weep,
And I endure much sadness mixed with pleasure.
My beloved is gone, and yet he stays for ever.
At the same time I am dried out and overflow.

Thus love, inconstant, leads me,
And when I think I might have more sadness
Without thinking, I find more pain.

Then when I believe my joy is certain,
and that I am at the height of my happy time
it brings me back down to my first sadness.

Translation © Alison Smart Fisher

Louise Labé's poem *Je Vis, Je Meurs* focuses on the extremes of emotion endured by the poet who is so in love. By contrast, the steady repetition of the piano accompaniment (created in a quasi-Renaissance style) gives a gentle pace to the song, with the effect of endurance and time passing.

Daryl Runswick wrote 'Je vis, je meurs' in just half an hour while he was an undergraduate student at Cambridge University in the late 1960s, for a student production of *War and Peace*, to be sung by Natasha and played by Pierre. We are delighted to include this song in New French Song II.

Au Chat (To the Cat)

Poem by Gwen John (1876-1939)

Music by Nicola LeFanu (b. 1947)

Oh mon petit chat,
Sauvage dans le bois,
As tu donc oublié
Ta vie d'autrefois?

Peut-être que tu es
Fâché avec moi,
Mais j'ai taché de comprendre
Tout ton petit cœur.

Je me sentais jamais
Ton supérieure,
Petit âme mystérieuse
Dans le corps du chat.

J'ai eu tant de chagrin
De ne pas te voir,
Que j'ai pensé de m'en aller
Dans le pays de morts.

Mais je serais ici
Si tu reviens un jour,
Car j'ai été confortée
Par le dieu d'Amour.

Oh my little cat,
Wild in the woods,
So have you forgotten
Your past life?

Maybe you are
Angry with me,
But I tried to understand
All your little heart.

I never felt myself to be
Your superior,
Little mysterious soul
In the cat's body.

I had so much sorrow
Not seeing you,
That I thought of going
To the land of the dead.

But I will be here
If you come back one day,
Because I was comforted
By the God of Love.

Translation © Alison Smart Fisher

Nicola LeFanu wrote *Au Chat (To the Cat)* in 2002 and generously gave it as an extra song for New French Song. Alison and Katharine recorded it in 2024 to add to the NFS (2) set. LeFanu chose a poem by artist Gwen John whose tortoiseshell cat, Edgar Quinet, went missing in the forest of St-Cloud on the outskirts of Paris. The owner's longing for the return of her playful, wilful cat, is expressed in winding and rhythmically unpredictable melodies as if summoning the cat home. There are many depictions of this cat in Gwen John's work. The text is used by kind permission of the Estate of Gwen John.

Biographies

Alison Smart Fisher and Katharine Durran are passionate about contemporary song and have hugely enjoyed creating *New French Song* (2) and its predecessor *New French Song*. This has resulted in a whole new recital repertoire for the 21st century. Their other joint album is *Peripheral Visions: British Music for voice and piano since 1975* (MSVCD92025) which includes songs by James Macmillan, Judith Weir, Elizabeth Maconchy, Gabriel Jackson and others.

Alison Smart Fisher (soprano) studied Classics at Clare College Cambridge and worked as a book and music editor while developing her singing career. She took Postgraduate Performance Diplomas at RNCM and TCM. Alison was on the staff of BBC Singers as first soprano for many years and travelled widely for concerts, recordings and educational outreach events. Alison is particularly known for the Baroque, Classical and Contemporary music performances and has a wide oratorio and recital repertoire in several languages. She teaches singing in London privately and at North London Collegiate School. She is Director of Music at St Mary-at-Finchley Parish Church where she also curates a long-running concert series. As Musical Director of Alyth Choral Society, she has directed major concert works including Handel: *Jephtha*; Haydn: *Creation and Seasons*; Purcell: *Dido and Aeneas* and Gilbert and Sullivan's *Trial by Jury*.

www.alisonsmartfisher.com



Katharine Durran is a solo pianist, chamber musician, song accompanist, recording artist and educator. She read Music at the University of Cambridge, before studying at the Royal College of Music where her teachers included Kendall Taylor and Geoffrey Parsons. Katharine's debut solo album was a much-praised recording of the complete *Toccatas* of J.S. Bach, and for ten years she was pianist of the award-winning and pioneering ensemble Tapestry. Tracks from her CD recordings are frequently featured on BBC Radio 3 and she has performed new works for solo piano and for ensemble live on radio and television, as well as discussing the rôle of song accompanist in today's musical society. Katharine also conducts choirs, teaches singing and runs choral singing groups for all ages. She is the founder director of Moffat Children's Choir, for whom she has recently devised, designed and directed the world premières of Peter Cowdrey's two mini-operas *The Death of Hook* (2019) and *The Horse and the Greyhound* (2024). She is also musical director of the Balliol Singers, Dumfries and Galloway's only specialist chamber choir.

www.katharinedurran.org.uk



Belfast-born **Deirdre Gribbin** won the Arts Foundation award for her opera *Hey Persephone!* commissioned by Aldeburgh Festival. She has written numerous song cycles including *Kindersang*, performed at Lincoln Center, New York and Centre Irlandais, Paris. She studied in London and Denmark and is a Fulbright, Leverhulme and Churchill Fellow. Several of her works respond to the political climate of her homeland including her percussion concerto *Goliath*; and cello concerto *Mna/Woman*, commissioned by Radio 3. Deirdre has written for film including *My Kingdom* (Sky Pictures), starring Richard Harris which won a Screen International Award, and *Stolen* (Wildfire Productions) which premiered at Chicago Film Festival. Her string quartet *Hearing Your Genes Evolve*, based on DNA premiered at the EU Innovations Convention, Brussels and featured at Berlinale Film Festival. *Empire States*, for orchestra was 'highly recommended' at UNSECO Rostrum of Composers in Vienna. Richard Morrison (*TheTimes*) described her as 'one of the most original thinkers in years.'

deidregribbin.org.uk

Shirley J. Thompson is a multi-award-winning English composer, known globally as a 'change-maker', bringing new audiences to classical music with her 'New Classicism' style (*The Guardian*, 2018). She has composed extensively for TV, film, dance, ensembles, choirs, instrumentalists and singers. *New Nation Rising: A 21st Century Symphony* was commissioned to mark the Golden Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II in 2002 then became the conceptual framework for the Opening Ceremony of the 2012 Olympics. Shirley's co-score for the ballet, PUSH, toured to forty of the world's leading opera houses (2005–2014). Her ground-breaking opera series, *Heroines of Opera*, has created electrifying new roles for women, especially those of African heritage. Commissioned by King Charles III to compose orchestral music for The Coronation, she is now claimed as 'the present and future of British classical music.' (*Gramophone*, May 2023).

shirleythompsonmusic.com

Cecilia McDowall is one of the UK's leading composers of sacred and secular choral music and has won many awards including the British Composer Award for her haunting work, *Night Flight*. In 2020 McDowall was presented with the prestigious Ivor Novello Award for a 'consistently excellent body of work'. This was a 'Gift' from The Ivors Academy. Many of her works have been recorded, including her sacred works by the Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge, in 2021. In the same year McDowall was given the coveted annual commission by King's College, Cambridge, to write the carol for the Choir of King's College *Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols* broadcast world-wide on Christmas Eve. The carol, *There is no rose*, is published by Oxford University Press. In 2023, Signum released a CD of McDowall's *Da Vinci Requiem* and orchestral song cycle, *Seventy Degrees Below Zero* and in 2025 McDowall was awarded by the Royal College of Organists its highest honour, the RCO Medal, in

recognition of her 'distinguished achievement in choral composition'.

ceciliamcdowall.co.uk

Emily Hall is a composer known first and foremost for her songwriting. Much of her music is formed from close creative relationships with singers, instrumentalists and writers and finding her own ways of using technology and live performance. She has written for the BBC Singers, Manchester Collective, London Sinfonietta, LSO, LCO, BBC NOW, Brodsky Quartet, Opera North, Mahogany Opera, Hungarian Radio Choir, Aldeburgh Music, Streetwise Opera. Emily has written 5 operas, none of which are traditional in form, and many songs, including a trilogy of song cycles with author Toby Litt, on love (*Befalling*), motherhood (*Life Cycle*) and death (*Rest*). Her music has been recorded by BBC Singers, LSO, Allan Clayton, Olivia Chaney, Lady Maisery, The Hermes Experiment, Juice Vocal Ensemble and Onyx Brass. Emily Hall is the recipient of several significant prizes including Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award for Artists, Genesis Opera Prize, Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Award and the Corinthia AIR. Emily is a member of Bedroom Community, the Icelandic record label, and is signed to Manners McDade publishing.

emilyhall.co.uk

Joanna Forbes L'Estrange enjoys a busy, international career as a contemporary vocalist, composer and conductor. Following seven years at the helm of The Swingle Singers, she has been a regular soloist for *Mass in Blue* by Will Todd (which she recorded for Convivium), given numerous concerts of music by such composers as Reich, Adams, Stockhausen and Berio and amassed an impressive list of Film/TV credits, most notably a duet with Jarvis Cocker for *The French Dispatch*. Her compositions, including a coronation anthem for King Charles III, are performed throughout the world and have been recorded by London Voices on two albums: *Heaven to Earth* and *Winter Light*, both for Signum. Her largest work to date, *A Season to Sing*, is a choral re-imagining of *The Four Seasons* which will receive forty performances worldwide in 2025, three hundred years after Vivaldi's original violin concertos were published.

joannaforbeslestrange.com

Millicent B. James With 'a distinctive approach to storytelling' and creating music which has 'a thoroughgoing disregard for genre' (Pinkwafer.club), Millicent B. James is an award-winning composer, arranger, performer and artist who combines gospel, jazz cinematic and afro-futurism to create a myriad of sonorities in her music. Millicent was awarded the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Composition Prize in 2021. Millicent has been commissioned by the BBC to arrange

three pieces for BBC Radio 2's Piano Room Session with Lemar. She recently performed her new commission *Come Show Them the River* with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra at Symphony Hall, where it received 4-star reviews from the *Guardian* and *The Daily Telegraph*. Millicent's music has also been commissioned by the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group for the Commonwealth Games Festival 2022, Sister Music, NMC Recordings, Spitalfields Music Festival, Manasamitra Mentoring Scheme and National Youth Choirs of Great Britain as part of the Young Composer's Scheme 2023.

millicentbjames.com

Lesley-Jane Rogers Although known primarily as a singer and secondarily a piano teacher, Lesley-Jane has nevertheless always been a 'scribbler'. In recent years she has devoted more time to composition, with choral music in particular an obvious medium for her creative outpourings. She is delighted to have had works performed at Wells Cathedral, Gloucester Cathedral, St Albans Abbey, St Bride's Fleet Street, and, most recently, by the BBC Singers. Recordings of various choral pieces (conducted by Alison Smart Fisher) together with her oboe sonata (performed by Richard & Janet Simpson) are on her website: www.lesleyjanerogers.co.uk/composer/

Kerry Andrew (they/them) is a UK-based composer, performer and author. With a PhD in composition from the University of York and four British Composer Awards, Kerry specialises in experimental vocal and choral music, music-theatre and community music, creates alt-folk as You Are Wolf and co-founded the award-winning Juice Vocal Ensemble. They've written for the London Sinfonietta, Mahogany Opera, Wigmore Hall, the Ligeti Quartet, BBC Ten Pieces at the BBC Proms and the National Theatre. They are the author of three literary novels, *Swansong*, *SKIN* and *We Are Together Because*, and have been twice shortlisted for the BBC National Short Story Award.

kerryandrew.com

Helen Neeves read Music at the University of York where she studied piano, composing and singing, with the latter leading the way to a career as a performer. Following postgraduate studies at the RCM, Helen built a successful career as a freelance soprano which led to joining the BBC Singers in 2014. In 2020, after a long break, Helen began composing again and has loved every minute since! As well as having music performed and broadcast by the BBC Singers, she has been commissioned by Radio France; her second premier took place in Paris April 2025. She is currently working on a commission for the Choir of St Bride's Church, Fleet Street. Recently her works have also been sung by Kantos, Cor Meum, and the Choir of Westminster Abbey. Helen also has a song included in the New Winter

Songbook, featuring Soprano Rebecca Lea and Pianist Caroline Jaya-Ratnam.
hellenneeves.com

Gráinne Mulvey's music takes inspiration from many sources, including the natural world, feminist politics and science. She is particularly interested in sound in itself, exploring extremes of timbre and register, deriving an individual harmonic language from the overtone series. Gráinne holds a DPhil in Composition from the University of York. She is Professor and Head of Composition at TU Dublin Conservatoire. She was elected to Aosdána in 2010. Her music has been performed across Europe, USA, China, Australia and has been broadcast on BBC Radio 3, RTÉ Lyric FM, ABC Classic (Australia), Radio Suisse-Romande, WPRB (Princeton) among others. Gráinne has received many prizes and commissions, including the 2016 Cutting Edge Film Festival and Smederevo International Composition Competition. Fion Gunn's video *Roller Coaster*, based on *Round of Applause*, featured in Beijing's NAMOC in 2022. She featured at ISCM World Music Days, International Rostrum, Finnish Biennale and the 2019 Audio Engineering Society Conference.

grainnemulvey.eu

Daryl Runswick likes to joke that he was educated at Cambridge University and Ronnie Scott's Club. He has been a jazz bass player, a composer in the classical, jazz and pop styles and has written TV and film scores. For a decade in the 1990s he was Head of Composition at Trinity College of Music in London.

darylrunswick.net

Nicola LeFanu studied at Oxford, RCM and Harvard. She was Professor of Music at University of York, 1994-2008. She has composed around 100 works, published by Edition Peters and Novello, which are widely played, broadcast and recorded. She has composed eight operas, which have been staged in UK, Ireland and USA.

Recent commissions include a string quintet, a fantasy for saxophone orchestra, a horn trio and solo works for violin, piano, horn, clavichord, harpsichord. Pieces for voice include two cantatas, short liturgical pieces and a scena 'The Moth Ghost'.

nicolalefanu.com

The performers, composers and poets at Burgh House 25th September 2024

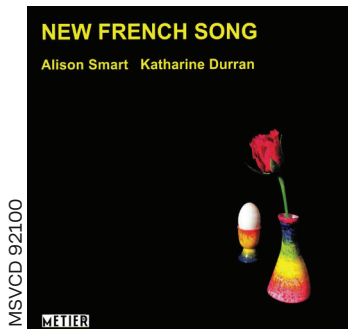


Left to right:

Katharine Durran, Joanna Forbes L'Estrange, Helen Neeves, Cecilia McDowall, Grainne Mulvey,
Alison Smart Fisher, Shirley J. Thompson, Lesley-Jane Rogers, Deirdre Gribbin, Emily Hall,
Nadia Ben Slima (poet of the song composed by Deirdre Gribbin)



Also Available From Métier



New French Song has created a whole new repertoire of songs by British composers. The artists commissioned twenty exceptional British composers, some of whom were well established, others of whom were yet to receive the recognition they deserve. The composers were asked to set French literature of their choice from the past two hundred years. The result is a fascinating and enduring rainbow work covering all the major literary movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, overlapping into the twenty-first century – Romanticism, Symbolism, Surrealism, Cubism, Modernism and post-Modernism.

Tarik O'Regan:
Sainte

Sadie Harrison:
..issu stellaire..

Will Todd:
Le Pont Mirabeau

Edward Cowie:
Les Hiboux

Bob Chilcott:
L'enfant dort

John Casken:
Colloque Sentimental

Laurence Crane:
Tour de France Statistics 1903-2003

Adam Gorb:
La Cloche Fêlée:

Gabriel Jackson:
À la Mémoire de
Claude Debussy

Michael Finnissy:
Salomé

Andrew Keeling:
Artémis

Hugh Wood:
Alicante

Diana Burrell:
Longtemps ce fût l'été

Helen Roe:
Pourquoi?

Nicola LeFanu:
Billet à Whistler

Edward McGuire:
Rêves de la Bonne Heure

Judith Bingham:
La Jeune Morte

Roger Redgate:
Mirlitonades

Howard Skempton:
Le Pont Mirabeau

Graham Fitkin:
Les Aliments Blancs

www.metierrecords.com

New French Song II was recorded on 10th October 2024 at SJE, Oxford, UK

Produced and engineered by Vidda Lefeber.

Layout design: James Cardell-Oliver

Cover painting: Erin Bullard

Au Chat Nicola LeFanu published by Peters Edition

Je Vis, Je Meurs Daryl Runswick published by PRS

All other works Copyright Control

All text, images and devices are copyright, all rights reserved

© &© 2025 Divine Art Ltd

Many supporters made it possible to record New French Song II:

Alison Wells, Sarah Down (vocal advisors)

Erin Bullard (design)

Helen Marrion Photography (photos of Alison)

Hazel McDonald (photos)

Dr Jemima Hodgkinson (poetry advisor)

Vidda Lefeber (producer)

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of The Golsoncott Foundation towards the making of this Album.

We are so grateful for financial support from Hilary and Andrew Apps, James Barber, Hilary Bowman, Nicky Carling, Sheila Carter, Rajan Chetsingh, Fiona Cotton, Rachel Crowther, Carola Darwin, Julia Davis, Ann de Renais, Andrew Fisher, Priscilla Fisher, Rachel Fisher, Vicky Fox, Elizabeth Hall, Fiona Hewitt, Ruth Hickling, Penny Jeffries, Olga Karpeko, Michael Lewin, Sophie Lindo, Chris Little, Karen Malyali, Yuki Osedo, Ruth Rigby, Howard Smith, Ollie Smith, Will Smith, Gary Snapper, Marina Solarek, Helen Skelton, Eva Sonaïke, Warren Viegas, John Waldsax, Alison Wells, and many anonymous donors.



THE GOLSONCOTT FOUNDATION



Over 700 titles, with full track details, reviews, artist profiles and audio samples, can be browsed on our website. Available at any good dealer or direct from our online store in CD, 24-bit HD, FLAC and MP3 digital download formats.

email: info@first-inversion.com

www.metierrecords.com

find us on facebook, youtube, bluesky & instagram

WARNING: Copyright subsists in all recordings issued under this label. Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording thereof in any manner whatsoever will constitute an infringement of such copyright. In the United Kingdom, licences for the use of recordings for public performance may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd, 1, Upper James Street, London, W1R 3HG.

