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# Classical Music Concert programme

### No Friend but the Mountains London Symphony Orchestra Thu 19 Jun 7.30pm Hall

# Important information



When does the concert start and finish?

The concert begins at 7.30pm and finishes at about 8.30pm, with no interval.

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**I'm running late!** Latecomers will be admitted if there is a suitable break in the performance.

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**Please ...** Switch any watch alarms and mobile phones to silent during the performance.

**Please don't ...** Take photos or recordings during the performance – save it for the curtain call.



Use a hearing aid? Please use our induction loop – just switch your hearing aid to T setting on entering the hall.



**Need a break?** You can leave at any time and be readmitted if there is a suitable break in the performance.

Looking for refreshments? Bars are located on Levels -1, G and 1.

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Looking for the toilets? The nearest toilets, including accessible toilets, are located on Levels -1, G and 2.



**Carrying bags and coats?** Drop them off at our free cloak room on Level -1.

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Thu 19 Jun, Barbican Hall

### No Friend but the Mountains

### Thu 19 Jun 7.30pm, Hall

London Symphony Orchestra Joseph Young conductor Gareth Brynmor John baritone London Symphony Chorus

Luke Styles No Friend but the Mountains

There will be no interval

Produced by the Barbican

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No Friend but the Mountains က



**Tonight's concert marks** the UK premiere of Luke Styles's song-cycle No Friend but the Mountains, given by the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, joined by baritone Gareth Brynmor John and conductor Joseph Young; in it Styles presents a suitably searing setting of Behrouz Boochani's harrowing six-year ordeal as a refugee wrongly imprisoned in Australia's Manus Island detention centre.

When setting a text to music, two questions arise: can this text inspire a new musical work? and why does it resonate with me? For No Friend but the Mountains, the answers lie in Behrouz Boochani's extraordinary, award-winning book – a work born from thousands of WhatsApp messages sent from Manus Island detention centre (off the coast of Australia) translated and shaped by Omid Tofighian into a searing testament of resilience. Boochani's story is an essential Australian narrative, yet its urgency transcends borders. As nations grapple with displacement and exclusion, his words expose the paradox of a world both connected and fractured. For me, as a composer with British, European and Australian ties, this narrative resonated through its universal themes of migration, incarceration and fragile environmental beauty.

Though I do not share the refugee experience – nor would I presume to translate it literally into music – Boochani's philosophical reflections on isolation, survival and the natural world ignited my imagination. His prose, oscillating between poetic lyricism and brutal realism, evoked Australia's historical echoes: the convict ballads of Frank MacNamara, the migrant stories of Christos Tsiolkas and the endurance of First Nations cultures. In this symphonic song-cycle, I sought not to narrate Boochani's ordeal but to explore the emotional and sensory landscapes his words unveiled – the Pacific's scorching heat, the eerie chorus of jungle birds, the crushing weight of confinement and the fleeting joy of a child playing on a beach.

This work marks a milestone in my career – my largest non-operatic composition at the time it premiered – and its realisation owes much to the vision of bass-baritone Adrian Tamburini, who first proposed the project after we collaborated on my opera Ned Kelly.

#### **Structure and Sound**

The cycle unfolds in 12 songs, framed by instrumental preludes and interludes. The text – selected from Boochani's book – moves from the chaos of a perilous sea journey ('The sovereignty of the waves collapses the moral framework') to the surreal horror of Manus Prison ('Forty-eight foul-smelling mouths / Forty-eight halfnaked, sweaty bodies'). The ninth song builds around five edifice-like tutti chords, monumental pillars of sound that mirror the systemic violence of detention. Yet amid the darkness, moments of lightness emerge: the shimmering celesta and harp evoke the 'crystal plain of water' at dawn; a folk-like melody accompanies the 'little blond girl' on the shore, her innocence a stark counterpoint to the prisoners' gaze.

The final song, 'The chant of the bird and the chant of a man – both chants blend into one', resolves the cycle with a fragile unity. Here, the Chauka bird's cry – a recurring motif – merges with the choir's lament, suggesting a shared language between human and nature, both trapped yet defiant. This synthesis reflects Boochani's own words: 'Life is like an accident; destiny just carries on like a beat.'

#### **Legacy and Reflection**

Premiered at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl in March 2021 – a venue dubbed the 'People's stage' – this performance was more than a concert. It was an act of solidarity, streamed live to Boochani in New Zealand and to me in the UK, while refugee artist Farhad Bandesh (a former Manus detainee) performed his song The Big Exhale alongside the orchestra. The event, supported by Arts Centre Melbourne's Refugee Appeal, underscored art's power to confront injustice and forge empathy.

As audiences today encounter this work, I hope they hear not only the darkness of Manus but also the resilience that defies it. Boochani's story, like the music it inspired, is a reminder that even in isolation, creativity persists – a testament to the voices we too often ignore.

© Luke Styles

## No Friend but the Mountains

#### Prelude

Thumbed on a phone Smuggled out Thousands of text messages

The near impossibility of its existence On Nauru and Manus Island, they live in a zoo of cruelty

#### I Under moonlight

Under moonlight An unknown route A sky the colour of intense anxiety.

The dimensions of a boat Unfamiliar waves Waves of a foreign ocean.

The sovereignty of the waves has collapsed the moral framework.

The decision is made Pursue the adventure We feel that we have burned our bridges Only one option remains Only one way forward Advance Move forward into the expanse of the ocean.

#### II The sounds of small children

The sounds of the small children The heart-wrenching and painful sounds of the little children These sounds transform the chaotic boats into hell.

It seems to me the women are fighting off death even more bravely than the men. Their maternal instincts make of them predatory she-wolves; they stare down the ocean, revealing their sharp teeth. The musical sound of the spiritual odes infuse horror The cacophony of religious recitation is deathlike The haunting performance of lament evokes anxiety An alarm into the atmosphere, and into the hearts and minds of the travellers The harrowing harmony of holy verse brings Judgment Day down to earth from the heavens.

Those odes mix with the children's whimpers until it is like being stabbed by needles.

#### III In that moment everything is absurd

In that moment everything is absurd I search in my unconscious For whatever shaped my existence In the depths of my mind and soul

Pure absurdity Futility A feeling similar to living life itself The very essence of life.

#### IV All our dreams

All our dreams, all our fears, all our brave souls ... All drowned A massive disaster into a massive disaster Sinking into mountains of waves Drowning into the darkness Sinking into the bitter ocean Swallowed up by the ocean Swallowed up without mercy. Down ... I sink further down I sink further down The boat is pursuing me Trying to catch me Catch me and pull me within it Death has arrived

#### V Joy

Joy and kindness ... all because of that cargo ship.

The razor-sharp rays of the sun illuminate the surface of the water

A crystal plain of water encompasses my view A blinding white blaze engulfs my vision Silence has suddenly enveloped the entire boat The surface of the water is bleached white The sea is glaring.

The waves have freed us from their clutches The waves have spared our lives I laugh at them I laugh in triumph Laugh to express the feeling of victory deep inside.

#### VI This rescue

This rescue occurs to me as a series of distorted and broken images.

Rescued. Relocated A second boat Another journey from Indonesia Another trial; a test of the will Unsure we will reach safety Purgatory.

#### VII The tugboat arrives at the pier

The tugboat arrives at the pier. The waves along the shore are tame. A little blond girl is bathing there, playing in the water. She takes no notice of the weary and worn-out people.

She is free She is innocent She is like the cool gentle breeze on this sunny day My first real impression of Australia

Where in the world do they take children captive and throw them inside a cage? What crimes are those children guilty of?

#### VIII Two open entry-exit points

Two open entry-exit points Twelve small rooms, approximately one-and-a-half metres by one-and-a-half metres Flyscreened windows Four imprisoned individuals, in bunk beds Forced to adapt to each other's sweaty bodies and the elimination of personal space Twelve rusted fans facing the same direction Forty-eight individuals Forty-eight beds Forty-eight foul-smelling mouths Forty-eight half-naked, sweaty bodies Frightened Arguing.

#### IX The prison

The prison is like an enormous cage deep in the heart of the jungle The prison is like a grand cage next to the tiny gulf of water A body of water that merged with the ocean The tall coconut trees that line the outskirts of the camp have grown naturally in rows But unlike us, they are free Their grand height allows them to peep into the camp at all times To know what is going on in the camp To see what is happening in the camp To witness the anguish suffered by the people in the camp.

The prison is in the middle of a clenched fist Now loosening, now tightening On the verge of exploding Then, all of a sudden, balance is re-established

A twisted interlocking chain of hungry men Bodies mutate under the burning sun Heads in an oven fired by the sun Undergoing sickening transformations A long line of men of different heights, weights, ages and colours.

Groups of men are up against the wall Groups of men are embedded into the wall The spectacle of the prison queue is a raw and palpable reinforcement of torture.

Starvation is a drill It drills down into the stomach Then it drills down into the mind It drills down into all the nerves It drills down and makes holes In the end it just drills all the way down.

A razor with a blue handle He holds it in his hand He slides it along his exquisite skin Slides it along skin quivering with fear

(The depth of the slit, the severity of the wound. The more terror inflicted, the greater the credibility. It is unwritten and cryptic – but it is real.) It is quiet. It seems gloomy. This night, and the nights that follow, the Chauka bird continues to sing that song. Its calling heralds terror. Its calling expresses apprehension, an anxiety for what is ahead. Its calling makes one's hair stand on end

Chuaka fears the prison Sunsets are frightening Sunsets deliver the scent of death Chauka sings the song of impending death.

#### X First, out of the darkness, a bird

First, out of the darkness, a bird arrives to choose the ripest fruit hidden between the leaves Next, trapped in silence, the bird starts to eat At once, the weight of the eaten fruit shifts It loses equilibrium The fruit is left dangling after a peck of the beak And so it drops down onto the roof It rolls over and falls again, this time onto the grimy dirt floor Finally, the hungry prisoner follows the sound of the fall Follows it to the place where the fruit lies Finds it among the piles of dirt and dried leaves.

#### XI Life is like an accident

(My mother always sighed and would say: 'My boy, you came into this world in a time we called the flee and flight years.')

Life is like an accident; destiny just carries on like a beat; the light of the world appears like a miracle, like an explosion that eventually cooled down.

The freedom of standing face to face with the stars The freedom of standing face to face with the immensity of the ocean The freedom of standing face to face with the splendour of the jungle The freedom of the dignified coconut trees.

An island A prison A jungle An ocean Squadrons of birds Casts of crabs Armies of frogs Orchestras of crickets Until then they had not encountered the breath of humans Political slogans Pristine nature Paradox A landscape of contradictions.

#### XII Chauka is chanting

Chauka is chanting. The melody wandered through Chauka is screaming Screaming Chanting Screaming and chanting fused in the voice of the bird Silence for a moment Chauka screams once more A harmony linked by screams A chain extending into the furthest depths of the jungle Down into its darkest cavern Screams reverberate from the throats of all the birds on Manus Island All of the birds on Manus are in Symphony All reach their climax in the voice of the Chauka

The chant of a bird and the chant of a man Both chants blends into one This lament ... of nature ... this lamentation of nature This lament ... of a human ... this lamentation of the human being.



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#### Joseph Young

American conductor Joseph Young is known for his powerful, precise and deeply expressive performances. He boldly reframes the classical canon, pairing established composers with new and emerging voices to create contemporary narratives that consistently draw new and diverse audiences.

This season sees debuts and return engagements with the National Philharmonic, Orquesta Sinfónica RTVE, Liverpool Philharmonic and the Louisville Orchestra, among many others. He makes his Lyric Opera of Chicago debut, conducting Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson's opera *Blue*, which he led to great acclaim with the Washington National Opera. Last summer he led the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in the Cincinnati Opera's world-premiere staging of Sir Paul McCartney's Liverpool Oratorio.

Recent engagements include debuts with the Detroit, National, New Jersey San Francisco, Seattle and Sphinx Symphony orchestras, LA Phil at the Hollywood Bowl, Orquestra Sinfónica do Porto Casa da Música, Portugal, and the Mzansi National Philharmonic Orchestra, South Africa.

Joseph Young is Music Director of the Berkeley Symphony, a role he has held since 2019. Also a noted music educator, he is the Artistic Director of Ensembles and Chair of the conducting programme at the Peabody Conservatory. His long-time affiliation with Carnegie Hall's National Youth Orchestra culminated in 2023 with his Carnegie Hall debut, followed by the group's first international tour to the Dominican Republic.

Joseph Young began his career as a League of American Orchestras Conducting Fellow with the Baltimore Symphony and Buffalo Philharmonic, and went on to roles with the Atlanta and the Phoenix Symphony orchestras. He holds an Artist's Diploma from the Peabody Conservatory. His mentors include Jorma Panula, Robert Spano and Marin Alsop, with whom he maintains an artistic partnership. He sits on the board of New Music USA.



#### **Gareth Brynmor John**

Gareth Brynmor John is the 2013 winner of the Kathleen Ferrier Award. He studied at St John's College, Cambridge, the Royal Academy of Music where, in his final year, he won the Royal Academy of Music Patrons' Award and the National Opera Studio where he was supported by the Royal Opera House.

He made his Welsh National Opera debut in 2017 singing Schaunard (*La bohème*) and has returned to WNO to sing the title-role in Eugene Onegin, Masetto (Don Giovanni), Robert (Les vêpres siciliennes), Papageno (The Magic Flute), Sharpless (Madama Butterfly) and the English Clerk (Death in Venice). Other roles include Papageno, Sid (Albert Herring) and Theseus (A Midsummer Night's Dream) for Shadwell Opera, the Count (The Marriage of Figaro) for the Amersham Festival and Papageno for Wild Arts Opera. He created Carl in Gervasoni's Limbus Limbo, which was premiered at the Strasbourg Festival. He also sang Ishmeron (The Indian Queen) for Opéra de Lille, Opera de Caen, Opera de Luxembourg and Antwerp Opera under the direction of Emmanuelle Haïm.

He has appeared with many of the UK's leading orchestras and ensembles. Highlights and plans include *Elijah* with the Really Big Chorus at Birmingham Town Hall, the Queen Elizabeth Hall and Cadogan Hall; Carmina burana with the Bach Choir at the Royal Festival Hall, Hertfordshire Chorus at the Barbican and at the Royal Albert Hall; Messiah and Fauré's Requiem at the Royal Albert Hall: The Dream of Gerontius with the Leeds Philharmonic Chorus and also at the Windsor and Barnes Festivals: Vaughan Williams's A Sea Symphony at Salisbury Cathedral and with the English Arts Chorale at Dorking Halls; Israel in Egypt at the Saffron Walden Concert Hall; and the War Requiem at Guildford and Chichester Cathedrals and with the Cambridge University Music Society.

Gareth Brynmor John is sought after as a lieder singer and has given recitals at St John's Smith Square, Wigmore Hall, Barber Institute, Kings Place, and at many UK music festivals. He has shared two recitals with Roderick Williams as part of the Momentum Artists project. His recordings include Mahler's Lieder eines fahrenden gesellen, Stanford's Children's Songs and a recital titled The Children's Hour.

#### London Symphony Orchestra

The London Symphony Orchestra believes that extraordinary music should be available to everyone, everywhere – from orchestral fans in the concert hall to first-time listeners all over the world.

The LSO was established in 1904 as one of the first orchestras shaped by its musicians. Since then, generations of remarkable talents have built the LSO's reputation for quality, ambition and a commitment to sharing the joy of music with everyone. The LSO performs some 70 concerts every year as Resident Orchestra at the Barbican, with its family of artists: Chief Conductor Sir Antonio Pappano, Conductor Emeritus Sir Simon Rattle, Principal Guest Conductors Gianandrea Noseda and François-Xavier Roth, Conductor Laureate Michael Tilson Thomas and Associate Artists Barbara Hannigan and André J Thomas. The LSO has major artistic residencies in Paris, Tokyo and at the Aix-en-Provence Festival, and a growing presence across Australasia.

Through LSO Discovery, the LSO's learning and community programme, 60,000 people each year experience the transformative power of music. The orchestra's musicians are at the heart of this unique programme, leading workshops, mentoring bright young talent and visiting schools, hospitals and community spaces. The home of much of this work is LSO St Luke's, the LSO's venue on London's Old Street. In 2025, following a programme of works, the LSO will open up the venue's facilities to more people than ever before, with new state-of-the-art recording facilities and dedicated spaces for LSO Discovery.

The LSO's record label LSO Live is a leader among orchestra-owned labels, bringing to life the excitement of a live performance in a catalogue of over 200 acclaimed recordings, and reaching millions through streaming services and online broadcasts. The LSO has been prolific in the studio since the infancy of orchestral recording, and has made more recordings than any other orchestra – over 2,500 projects to date – across film, video games and bespoke audio collaborations.

Through inspiring music, learning programmes and digital innovations, the LSO's reach extends far beyond the concert hall. And thanks to the generous support of The City of London Corporation, Arts Council England, corporate supporters, trusts and foundations and individual donors, the LSO is able to continue sharing extraordinary music with as many people as possible, across London, and the world.

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#### London Symphony Chorus

The London Symphony Chorus was founded in 1966 to complement the work of the London Symphony Orchestra. The LSC has performed with many leading orchestras: frequently with the LSO, as well as with the Berlin, Los Angeles, New York and Vienna Philharmonic orchestras, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and, more recently, with Les Siècles, the SWR Symphony Orchestra and the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela.

This season's concerts have included Puccini's La Rondine, Vaughan Williams's A Sea Symphony, Tippett's A Child of Our Time and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony under Sir Antonio Pappano; Shostakovich's Second Symphony and Brahms's Schicksalslied under Gianandrea Noseda; Mahler's Second Symphony under Michael Tilson Thomas; Symphonic Gospel under André J Thomas; Mahler's Third Symphony under Gustavo Dudamel; Mahler's Eighth Symphony with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir under Edward Gardner; and tonight's UK premiere of No Friend but the Mountains under Joseph Young.

In recent seasons the LSC has performed Mendelssohn's Elijah and Britten's War Requiem under Pappano; Orff's Carmina burana and Shostakovich's Third and 13th Symphonies under Noseda; Mahler's Third Symphony under Tilson Thomas; Szymanowski, Janáček and Brahms under Sir Simon Rattle; Schubert's Mass in A flat, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and Ravel's Daphnis et Chloé under François-Xavier Roth; Bruckner's Te Deum under Nathalie Stutzmann; Holst's The Planets under Jaime Martín; Debussy's Nocturnes under Susanna Mälkki; The Dante Project under Thomas Adès and Koen Kessels; Howard Goodall's Never to Forget; Duruflé's Requiem under Lionel Sow; and Errollyn Warren's After Winter under Simon Halsey, the LSC's Chorus Director Emeritus.

The LSC tours extensively in Europe. Recent tours have included Paris, Baden-Baden and Luxembourg under Rattle with the LSO; Monte Carlo and Aix-en-Provence with the Monte Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra under Kazuki Yamada; and Stuttgart, Berlin, Freiburg, Dortmund and Hamburg with the SWR Symphony Orchestra under Teodor Currentzis.

With the LSO, the LSC performed Mahler and Bernstein in Maestro, the 2023 Oscarnominated biopic of Leonard Bernstein.

The LSC is an independent charity run by its members and it engages actively in the musical life of London and further afield. In addition to seeking new members and audiences it also commissions and performs new works. The LSC is an international ensemble, with members from over 25 countries.

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### Events coming up we think you might like



ANNO: Four Seasons by Anna Meredith & Antonio Vivaldi Thu 25 Sep, Hall



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Oum – A Son's Quest for His Mother Thu 2 Oct, Hall



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