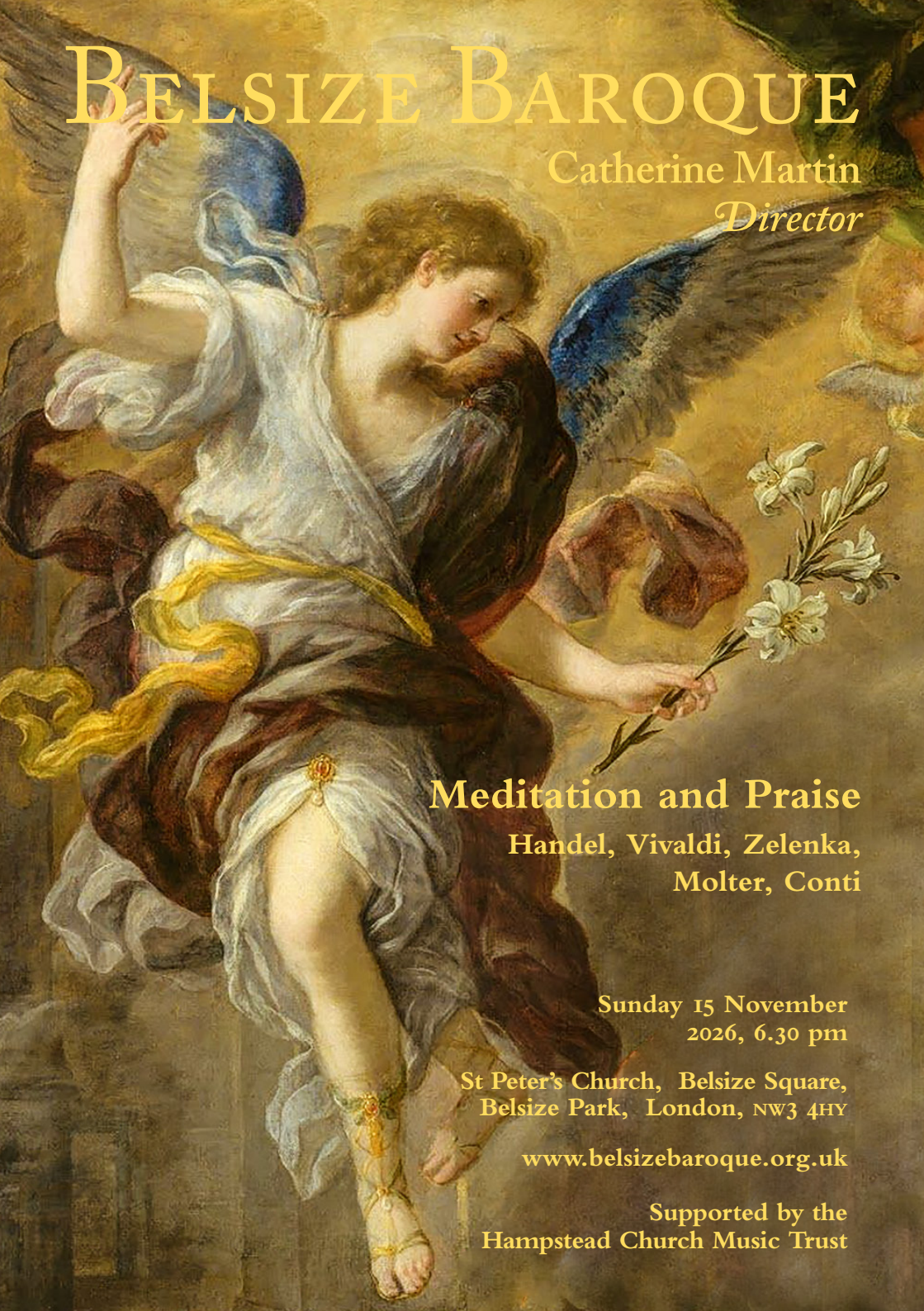


Belsize Baroque

Catherine Martin
Director

Meditation and Praise

Handel, Vivaldi, Zelenka, Molter, Conti

Sunday 15 November 2026, 6.30 pm

St Peter's Church, Belsize Square, Belsize Park, London, NW3 4HY

www.belsizebaroque.org.uk

Supported by the Hampstead Church Music Trust

Meditation and Praise

This evening's programme explores the close relationship between sacred and theatrical music in the first half of the eighteenth century. Several of the composers represented worked for courts where opera, church music and instrumental composition existed side by side, and ideas moved freely between them. The programme follows a path from the Viennese court of Francesco Conti to the Dresden chapel of Jan Dismas Zelenka, two centres that helped define sacred music north of the Alps. Along the way we hear how composers borrowed operatic expression, instrumental virtuosity and concerto styles in the service of religious texts, creating music that is both deeply devotional and strikingly dramatic. Finally, we return to two of the century's greatest figures, Handel and Vivaldi.

The texts themselves trace a journey from reflection on Christ's suffering, through personal prayer and supplication, to the confident praise and thanksgiving that conclude the evening in Vivaldi's *Confitebor tibi*. Musically this is most directly reflected in the choice of keys; beginning in gloomy C minor and closing with the sunny C major of Vivaldi.

Throughout the evening, voices and instruments are treated as equal partners, whether accompanying a single singer, engaging in dialogue, or joining together in larger concerted movements.

Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679–1745): Sinfonia (*Adagio–Vivace*) and Aria *S'una sol lagrima* from *Gesù al Calvario*, ZWV 62

Written for Good Friday in Dresden in 1735, *Gesù al Calvario* is one of Zelenka's largest and most ambitious sacred works. The oratorio reflects on the Crucifixion through a series of allegorical characters, combining the emotional immediacy of Italian opera with the depth and seriousness expected of sacred music.

The opening Sinfonia immediately establishes the dramatic world of the work. Like many eighteenth-century oratorio overtures, it prepares the listener emotionally before a word has been sung. Zelenka's gift for unexpected harmony and expressive orchestral writing is already evident, qualities that often make his music feel more adventurous than that of many contemporaries.

The aria *S'una sol lagrima* appears later in the work and is among its most moving moments. Lasting over ten minutes in full performance, it reflects on the power of a single tear of repentance, combining the intimacy of personal devotion with the larger dramatic world of the Passion story. One of Zelenka's strengths is his ability to sustain long musical paragraphs without losing focus, allowing a single emotional idea to deepen gradually rather than relying on obvious dramatic gestures. The use of C minor in both sinfonia and aria is very characteristic of Easter oratorios in Dresden. Composers, including Zelenka, reserved it for deep sadness and mourning evoking supernatural or emotional conflict. The result is music that feels both intimate and highly expressive, offering an excellent introduction to a composer whose sacred music is increasingly recognised as one of the great achievements of the late Baroque.

Johann Melchior Molter (1696–1765): Sonata Grossa in G minor, MWV 4.12

Larghetto/Allegro – Fuga – Andante – Alla Breve – Allegro

Johann Melchior Molter spent much of his career at the courts of Karlsruhe and Eisenach and is best known today for his trumpet concertos. Yet his orchestral music reveals a composer standing at an interesting point between the late Baroque and the emerging Classical style. Italian, French and early German orchestral influences all find their way into his music.

The G minor Sonata Grossa is scored for two oboes, bassoon, strings and continuo and comprises five loosely connected contrasting movements. Although the title suggests the concerto grosso tradition, the work often behaves more like a Baroque sinfonia or symphony, moving between lyrical passages, energetic fast movements and a substantial fugue. Overall it is a hybrid of different instrumental forms that defies definition. Opening with dramatic gestures, the music quickly throws us into a detailed fugue featuring a descending chromatic scale. Following is a simple Italianate opera Andante for strings that acts as light relief from the previous intensity. The *Alla breve* (a deliberately old fashioned term for duple time) brings back a solemnity to the music. The work concludes with an intense and complex take on the "throwaway" triple-time dance often heard at the end of an opera sinfonia, turning its usual lightness on its head.

Like many works by lesser-known composers, the piece offers the pleasure of hearing familiar musical languages viewed from a slightly different angle. There are echoes of Telemann, hints of the emerging Mannheim style and reminders of the Italian music that Molter encountered during his travels.

Despite this work defying definition, it does however sit comfortably alongside the vocal works in tonight's programme. The combination of expressive slow movements, dense contrapuntal writing and ceremonial wind scoring is very typical of oratorio sinfonias (such as the Zelenka work heard earlier) that were commonplace in German speaking areas. Instrumental works such as this were often borrowed for performance in a sacred context.

Francesco Bartolomeo Conti (1681–1732): Sinfonia from *Penelope* (*Allegro–Allegro*) and *Pie Jesu ad te refugi*

Francesco Bartolomeo Conti was one of the leading musicians at the Viennese imperial court during the early eighteenth century. A celebrated theorbo player and composer, he enjoyed enormous success in his own day, and his operas were among the most important works performed in Vienna before the arrival of Fux and later Hasse. He was also associated with some of the highest paid singers there. After the death of his first wife, Theresia Kugler, Conti remarried to the prima donna Maria Landini, at that time the highest paid singer in Vienna. She sang the main soprano roles in Conti's operas from 1714 and 1721, but died in 1722. After her death Anna Maria Lorenzani was appointed prima donna and became his third wife in April 1725.

The sinfonia comes from the opera *Penelope*, first performed in Vienna in 1724. Like many operatic overtures of the period, it functions as a compact orchestral introduction, while also standing perfectly well on its own in concert performance. Although it is clearly not sacred music, we chose this sinfonia for its particularly suitable musical setting for the standalone *Pie Jesu*. Unusually for a Sinfonia, Conti chose a minor key and employs a highly contrapuntal style more commonly associated with sacred oratorios.

Pie Jesu ad te refugi is a simple appeal to the merciful Christ, and Conti responds with music that is intimate and restrained. It is scored for tenor, strings and continuo, and the strings act less as accompaniment than as expressive partners in the musical argument. Particularly striking is Conti's use of chromaticism to destabilise the key centre, creating a sense of unease as the melody twists and moves into unexpected harmonic territory. The work has survived solely because Zelenka preserved a copy in his personal collection, suggesting that it held particular significance for him.

Conti's appearance in tonight's programme is significant because he represents an earlier generation of composers working within the Habsburg court tradition. The musical connections between Vienna and Dresden were strong, and much of the sacred music later performed by Zelenka grew out of the same blend of Italian lyricism and Central European contrapuntal craft that can already be heard in Conti's music. Zelenka encountered Conti's music during his time in Vienna, while Bach also took a particular interest in Conti's work: he copied and adapted Conti's *Languet anima mea* and retained copies of his music. Conti's influence can therefore be heard within a much wider musical network that connected Vienna, Dresden and Leipzig, linking the Italianate dramatic style of the Habsburg court with the contrapuntal traditions of composers such as Fux, Zelenka and Bach. Handel, too, directly engaged with Conti's music, reusing material from his opera *Cleotide* in his *Ormisda*.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759): Concerto Grosso Op. 6 No. 4 in A minor, HWV 322

Larghetto affetuoso – Allegro – Largo – Allegro

Handel composed his Opus 6 Concerti Grossi in 1739, almost certainly with one eye on the towering legacy of Corelli. By this stage the concerto grosso had already existed for several decades, but Handel expanded the form in ways that point towards later orchestral music while remaining firmly rooted in the Baroque tradition.

The Fourth Concerto opens with a noble *Larghetto affettuoso*, one of Handel's most expressive slow movements. The music constantly shifts between minor and major colours, creating an atmosphere that feels both warm and gently melancholic. A vigorous fugue follows, demonstrating Handel's ability

to combine contrapuntal complexity with irresistible momentum. The third movement provides a moment of calm before a lively finale returns to the concerto's darker A minor world.

One of the reasons the Opus 6 set remains so compelling is that Handel treats every instrument as an important participant. What had begun with Corelli as a contrast between soloists and orchestra becomes something richer and more varied, with individual lines constantly contributing to the musical conversation.

Although entirely instrumental, the Opus 6 concertos were intended for performance during one of Handel's English oratorios. Handel had advertised this fact in 1739 when he announced that *Twelve Grand Concertos* would be performed during the 1739–1740 oratorio season at Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre. In that respect the concerto occupies much the same role as the instrumental works elsewhere in tonight's programme, providing reflection and contrast (and in the case of Handel; entertainment) within a larger sequence of sacred music. Many eighteenth-century listeners would first have encountered Handel's concerti grossi in exactly this context.

Jan Dismas Zelenka (1679–1745): *Dignare Domine* from *Te Deum*, ZWV 145

Zelenka's *Te Deum* was probably composed around 1724 for a ceremonial occasion at the Dresden court. Scored for soloists, chorus, trumpets, oboes, strings and continuo, it is among his grandest sacred works.

The bass aria comes near the end of the composition and provides one of its most personal moments. Surrounded by festive choruses and brilliant orchestral writing elsewhere, this movement turns inward, the text being part of the closing section of the *Te Deum*, a prayer asking for God's continued protection and guidance. In this context, the rapid whirling themes and stabbing effects in the orchestral parts can be heard as representative of a chaotic world trying to destabilise the singer.

Earlier in the programme we heard music by Conti, who belonged to the preceding generation of Habsburg court composers. While their musical personalities are quite different, both composers share an ability to combine Italian vocal lyricism with the richer harmonic language favoured by central European courts. Heard together, the *Pie Jesu* and *Dignare Domine* provide a fascinating glimpse of how sacred music evolved across the first decades of the eighteenth century.

Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741): *Confitebor tibi, Domine*, RV 596

Confitebor tibi – Memoriam fecit – Sanctum – Intellectus bonus – Gloria Patri – Et in saecula

The programme concludes with one of Vivaldi's most attractive sacred vocal works. Scored for alto, tenor, bass, two oboes, strings and continuo, *Confitebor tibi, Domine* combines all the qualities audiences most readily associate with Vivaldi: clarity, energy, memorable melody and an instinctive understanding of instrumental colour. Setting Psalm 111, the work is fundamentally an expression of praise and thanksgiving, making it a particularly fitting conclusion. Rather than focusing on a single soloist, over six movements Vivaldi distributes the music among three voices, creating a constantly changing sequence of solos, duets, ensembles and orchestral interjections. The oboes play a particularly important role, adding colour and helping to define the character of individual movements.

One of the pleasures of the piece is the extent to which Vivaldi brings concerto thinking into the church. The three singers often behave like concerto soloists, passing ideas between one another and interacting with the orchestra in much the same way as soloists in one of his instrumental concertos. Of all the works in tonight's programme, your ears may tell you that this is the most obviously operatic; and in fact, you would be right. The final movement, *Et in saecula*, is an almost exact adaptation of a trio from Act One of his opera *La fida ninfa*, first performed in Verona in 1732. Rather amusingly, the original opera text concerns the instability and reversals of Fortune, whereas here *Et in saecula saeculorum* celebrates the eternity and unchanging nature of God.

As a conclusion to tonight's concert, we think the work neatly brings together many of the programme's recurring themes. Throughout the evening we have heard sacred music influenced by opera, orchestral music shaped by devotional settings, and composers borrowing freely between vocal and instrumental styles. Vivaldi's *Confitebor tibi* stands at the meeting point of all those traditions.

Programme notes by Richard Austen
Design/layout by Andrew Welsh



Catherine Martin read music at St Anne's College, Oxford, completing her postgraduate studies with David Takeno at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, on the Advanced Solo Studies course.

During this time, she became interested in historical performance, playing the baroque violin alongside her modern violin studies. Catherine spent twelve years as a member of The English Concert under the direction of Trevor Pinnock, before leaving in 2005 to take up the post of leader of the Gabrieli Consort and Players. In 2010 Catherine was also appointed concertmaster of Die Kölner Akademie in Germany. She has been the leader of the orchestra of the Early Opera Company since its inception in 1994.

Catherine was invited by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra in 2012 to coach the players on baroque and classical repertoire. She also runs weekend workshops and concert performances with many amateur baroque orchestras and modern chamber orchestras who wish to know more about the field of historical performance. Catherine has a particular interest in Norwegian folk music, playing the hardanger fiddle.

In 2003, Catherine joined the Salomon String Quartet as second violin to Simon Standage, with whom she also plays trio sonatas in Collegium Musicum 90. Catherine appears on many recordings; for Deutsche Grammophon and Winged Lion with The Gabrieli Consort and Players, EMI with Ensemble Galant, and Chandos with I Fagiolini. She teaches historical violin at the Royal College of Music in London.

Our 2027 Leader Scholar



Belsize Baroque Orchestra is delighted to announce that the Leadership Scholarship for the calendar year 2027 has been awarded to **Fernando Santiago**.

Fernando studied at both the São Paulo State School of Music and São Paulo State University Institute of Arts. He completed a Masters at the Royal Academy of Music, studying with Pavlo Beznosuik, Nicolette Moonen and Rachel Podger, before becoming a Scholar at the Royal College of Music, where he completed his Artist Diploma in Performance under Bojan Čičić and Lucy Russell.

Fernando is a Spanish Brazilian violinist with a special interest in historical dance and drama. At the Royal Academy of Music he explored the various connections between music and gesture through the lens of the old dancing masters, winning the 2025 Nancy Nuttall Early Music Prize and also receiving the Citi Award — Young Talents in Music from his home town in Brazil. As an Enlightenment Award holder, Doggett Family Foundation awardee and Hogwood Scholar, he worked with dance specialist Mary Collins, regularly joining the Académie Pécour for early dance in Paris too. Fernando's current engagements include projects alongside the Jeune Orchestre Baroque Européen, for the ongoing production of Antonio de Literes' harmonic opera "Los Elementos", leading the group directed by Margaux Blanchard, and the European Union Baroque Orchestra, throughout their 2026 season of artistic residencies. Fernando has been selected to participate in a project with the Orchestre des Champs-Élysées under Philippe Herreweghe in April 2027, having already collaborated with Les Arts Florissants, directed by Paul Agnew, as a Junior Fellow. A dedicated teacher, he is part of Camden Music Service and the DaCapo Music Foundation, and also assists Mary Collins within the baroque dance course at the Academy.

Fernando has commented: "I feel extremely honoured to have been selected for the Belsize Baroque Leader Scholarship and very much look forward to joining such a vibrant and welcoming ensemble throughout the coming year, in what I am sure will be a truly enriching chapter of my artistic life!"

We at Belsize Baroque feel that having a scholar who is both an exceptional musician and a highly skilled dancer will bring an exciting new perspective in the coming year.

Belsize Baroque

The orchestra comprises music professionals, music students and amateur players. Our amateur musicians come from many different walks of life, and our players in general come from all over the world. Many musicians who joined us as students over the years have gone on to successful careers in top orchestras. Since 2016 the generosity of supporters has in addition made our formal scholarship programme possible.

Over the past two decades, we have been privileged to work with renowned directors and many talented musicians. We have performed many large-scale works with numerous choirs, and have given performances in aid of charities, as well as working with the Handel House and the London Handel Festival. Our first concert at St Peter's was on 22 June 2013, since when we have been orchestra in residence at the church, enjoying the support of its staff and the local community.

Belsize Baroque Orchestral Swociety Ltd is a registered charity (number 1108596) and company (number 5267265). The orchestra can be hired for orchestral or choral concerts and other events, and is delighted to assist other charities. www.belsizebaroque.org.uk; Twitter: @Belsize_Baroque

Belsize Baroque would like to thank Richard Link and The Rofeh Trust for their generous donations in support of the orchestra, and the churchwardens of St Peter's for their assistance.

First violins
Catherine Martin
Graham Nicholson
Miranda Ford
Camilla Nelson
Val Hudson

Second violins
Nick Hardisty
Michael Jenner
Jenny Frost
Trisha Montague
Elliot McCaffrey

Violas
Elizabeth Hart
Deborah Miles-Johnson
Roger Mears

Cellos
Mary Walton
Paul Woodmansterne
Isaac Harrison Louth

Bass
Tess Miles

Harpsichord
Michael Strange

Theorbo
Quentin Miller

Oboes
Susan Cooksley
Craig White

Bassoon
Hilary Ougham

Save the date! Our next concerts at St Peter's wwill be on Sunday 4 April 2027, Sunday 13 June 2027, Saturday 10 July 2027, Sunday 12 September 2027 and Sunday 5 December 2027. We are also delighted to be part of a new opera company, London Opera Ensemble, and will be performing Handel's Rodelinda at The Tabernacle, Notting Hill, on 27 and 28 February 2027. Please see www.belsizebaroque.org.uk for details.



Mezzo-soprano **Stephanie Franklin** enjoys a diverse career as a soloist and ensemble singer. She is accomplished on the concert platform, where the work of Bach sits at the heart of her repertoire. Recently, she has performed a recital of Bach's alto arias with London Bach Players and has been the soloist in performances of St John Passion (Konzertchor Darmstadt), St Matthew Passion (London Baroque Sinfonia), Christmas Oratorio (Oxford Bach Soloists) and Magnificat (Instruments of Time & Truth). She has also performed much of the standard concert repertoire for mezzo-soprano and alto, including Handel's Messiah and Jephtha, Mozart's Requiem and Copland's In the beginning. Her recent operatic highlights include the Grandmother in the world premiere of Will Todd's Angels on the Underground (The Sixteen/Harry Christophers) and Carlotta in Salieri's La scuola de' gelosi (New Chamber Opera/Steven Devine). Stephanie is an experienced ensemble musician and regularly performs internationally with ensembles including Arcangelo, The Sixteen, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the BBC Singers at major festivals such as the BBC Proms, Grange Festival Opera and Tanglewood Festival. Stephanie completed undergraduate and doctoral studies in music at Oxford, where she held choral and academic scholarships. She also enjoyed an extended research stint in Vienna. She has established her performance career alongside her academic pursuits.



THE OLD MASTERS IN NEW HANDS

Sheku Kanneh-Mason MBE plays on a cello by Matteo Goffriller, Venice c1700, the 'Ex-Goritzki', made possible by the Florian Leonhard Fellowship, and an exceptionally fine bow by Nicolas Maire c1855, lent by a private sponsor.

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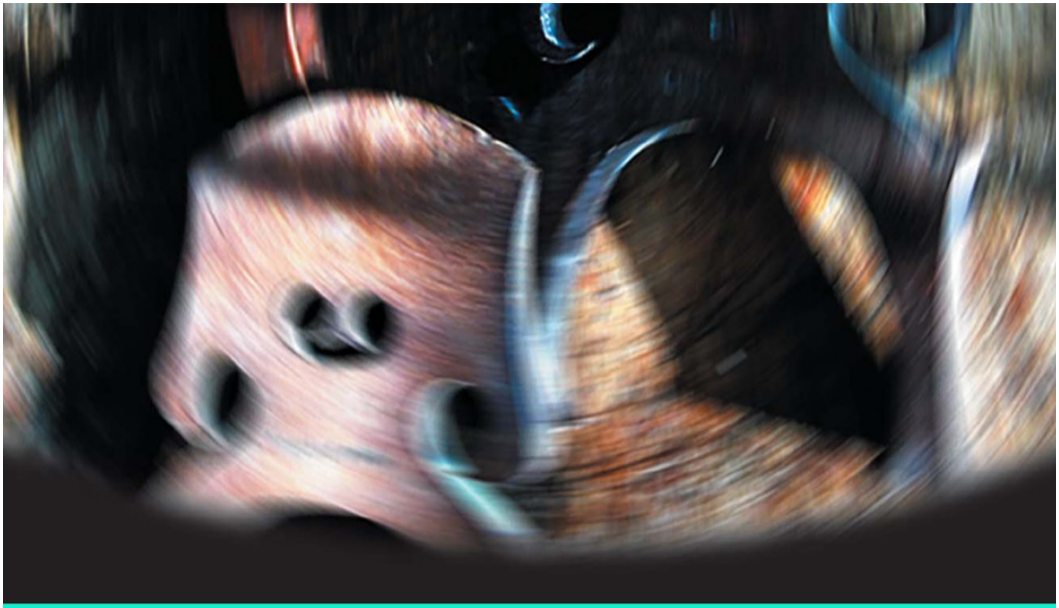
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Belfast-born baritone **Malachy Frame** divides his time between opera and concert work throughout the UK and Europe. Highlights of this season include appearances at the Wigmore Hall with Arcangelo and Solomon's Knot, Bach's St Matthew Passion with the Dunedin Consort, a Handel tour with the Gabrieli Consort, Beethoven's Fidelio with the Monteverdi Choir, Purcell's Dido and Aeneas with the Early Opera Company, Mahler's Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen with Bristol Classical Players and Ambroise Thomas' Hamlet with Chelsea Opera Group. Malachy is also Artistic Director of early music ensemble Sestina Music, this season singing and directing programmes of Italian Madrigals, overseeing the group's Next Generation Artists programme, and directing Monteverdi's Vespers of 1610.



Scottish tenor **Archie Inns** maintains a varied career across opera, oratorio, song and consort singing. He appears with ensembles including the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Arcangelo, the Gabrieli Consort and Polyphony, and is a Fellow with The English Concert. Recent operatic roles include Lelio (Scipione; The English Concert), Prince Gvidon (The Golden Cockerel; Orchestra Vox), Alfred (Die Fledermaus; Westminster Opera Company), and roles in The Fairy Queen with Vache Baroque and the Gabrieli Consort. He has been an Emerging Artist with Westminster Opera Company, held the James Bowman Young Artistship at Vache Baroque, and is currently an Associate Artist with Oxford Opera. Archie is also a Josephine Baker Young Artist, an Oxford International Song Festival Young Artist and a Countess of Munster Recital Scheme artist. He is completing a Master's in Vocal Performance at the Royal College of Music with Nicky Spence and Miranda Wright, supported by the Drapers' de Turckheim Scholarship, London Women's Clinic Foundation Award, Mason Award, Countess of Munster Musical Trust, Sir James Caird Trust, Elizabeth Izatt Trust and Kathleen Trust. He received the Sir James Caird Trust's Wiseman Prize in both 2025 and 2026.



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