



## Spotlight gig: Con Anima

Conducted by James Weeks

Saturday 29th October 2022, 3pm

Aberdeen Art Gallery

### Programme

Melissa Rankin	<i>Rupture of Wraith (world premiere)</i>
Chris Hutchings	<i>I Brought Your Name to the River</i>
Annabel Kershaw	<i>Solar Licht (world premiere)</i>

In association with Aberdeen Archives, Gallery & Museums.



### Programme notes

#### Melissa Rankin *Rupture of Wrath*

Through this spatialised performance work, I am inviting you to explore both the physical and sonic space around you. Take a moment to observe the imperceptible progression of intensity and texture through ghostly harmonies and sonic meditation. Allow yourself to be grounded through the bassy drone yet lifted as this immersive experience transcends both you and the space into an otherworldly delicate cosmos.

#### Chris Hutchings *I Brought Your Name to the River*

*Your Name  
on Camino Portugues*

*I brought your name  
to the river,  
called it on the wind.*

*Words whispered in water,  
the river carried  
your name to the sea.*

*Your voice  
in the ocean's drum  
echoed back to me.*

*I sent my longing onto a breeze  
through a forest  
of silver leaves*

*You returned on the wing  
of a song bird  
to move a while with me.*

*Three times I called it,  
a gift  
to the sky - the blue*

*of your eye -  
felt myself swim  
in the air you filled.*

*I still.  
A falcon sways;  
drifts away.*

Words © Aine McAllister 2017

Aine's words were written as she walked the Camino route, a pilgrimage in Spain - the poem is "about longing and letting go", in her words. I found a lot of passion in the text (as I hope you can hear in the setting) - rather like the Song of Solomon, this could be read as being about a relationship with God, but there's a clear subtext of a more intimate connection to another human being.

The choir is divided into six equally weighted parts for the piece, rather than the usual four. This is partly because the first section that I wrote was "your voice in the ocean's drum..." with the men singing in three sections; here, all the chords are built from stacked fifths and fourths, rather than being major triads (so for example, the first chord you hear the men sing there is G-D-A, where G-D-B would be more typical), and it seemed natural to balance this throughout. The rest of the piece uses more traditional harmony built on major triads, with added notes throughout; using six parts also allowed me to write expansive stacked chords towards the end of the piece, but despite having six different notes in them they still build on "conventional" harmony.

In 2016 I also worked with Aine on three other choir pieces, "Three Memories of Kurdistan", with words drawn from her experiences of working with Kurdish refugees to whom she was teaching poetry.

I would like to thank Alistair Digges and the Edinburgh Singers for commissioning this piece (intended as a companion piece to Joby Talbot's "Path of Miracles", another piece based on the Camino pilgrimage), and Creative Scotland for providing additional funding for the commission.

### **Annabel Kershaw *Solar Licht***

When I began work on this commission, I had two initial guide ropes into the piece. I knew I wanted to set text in Doric and I also knew that I wanted to write a piece that could utilise the multi-levelled architecture of the Art Gallery building.

My initial searches for Doric writing quickly led me to the Elphinstone Kist website, where I found myself reading the poetry of Sheena Blackhall. Her poem, *Solar Siblings* instantly jumped out at me. I loved the colourful and contrasting images of the different planets, and the sense of lightness and humour in her writing. And so it was that in thinking about filling the musical space within the Art Gallery, I started composing a "space-piece" in a very literal sense.

For the performance of *Solar Licht*, four singers (drawn from the sopranos and altos) perform from the 1<sup>st</sup> floor balcony above the main body of the choir. At times they take on the character of energetically twinkling stars of "yalla" light, and at other times, as observers of the world below. The sounds of deep space are explored vocally as focus moves to the distant planets of Saturn, Neptune, and Pluto, (sounds based on NASA's radiographic recordings made from their space craft and then converted into sound waves). The Sun's magnetic power and

strength whirls in a canonic vortex, eventually casting focus back on Earth. A sense of coming home prevails, of rest, as “*soond*” and “*licht*” dissipate, and the piece ends.

*My thanks to Sheena Blackhall for her kind permission to set her poem to music.*

## Biographies

**Chris Hutchings** is a composer based in Edinburgh; his works have been performed around the world and been broadcast on Radio 3 and Radio 4, and won several prizes. Chris is passionate about social and environmental justice, and runs #ChoirsForClimate, providing resources and music to choirs who are passionate about the environment, and #ChoirsAgainstRacism, sharing anti-racism and social justice music and more. Most of the music on those sites is available under Creative Commons licenses. Chris' recent competition wins include the first prize at the 2019 Murau International Music Festival, Austria, the 2019 Wicker Park Singers composition competition in Chicago, and Kantos Choir's 2021 composition competition "Snow on Snow".

**Melissa Rankin** is a composer and sound artist from Glasgow who experiments with the parameters of psychoacoustics. Creating works for acoustic and electronic forces, she often explores timbre and texture in fine detail in the form of intense and fragile soundworlds, while also encouraging a state of deep listening. Her work takes interest in sonic and spatial ambiguity, often creating a sense of immersion within physical environments and performance installations; doing so with the intent to alter audience perception and create borderline hypnotic, multi-sensory experiences for the listener. Melissa gained her undergraduate degree at the University of Glasgow and is currently pursuing an MMus Composition degree at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. She has worked with Red Note Ensemble, GAIA duo, Scottish Clarinet Quartet, and vocalist Stephanie Lamprea, while also an active committee member of Sound Thought; a Glasgow-based series promoting new music and sound research, composition, and performance.

**Annabel Kershaw** is a composer and pianist based in Midlothian. Originally from Aberdeenshire, Annabel studied composition at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, going on to have a rich and varied career within music education. Her most recent work in this area has included devising and delivering a composition and animation project on behalf of Youth Music Initiative/Screen Education Edinburgh, exploring children's experiences and responses to the COVID-19 pandemic within Edinburgh primary schools. Annabel has also worked as a teaching musician with Sistema Scotland (Big Noise Raploch) from 2014 – 2022. In March 2015, her orchestral composition *Approaching the Horizon* was performed by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra as part of the orchestra's *Side by Side* project involving children from the Big Noise Raploch Symphony Orchestra. As a composer, Annabel seeks to explore aspects of narrative and texture with a strong leaning towards jazz harmony and language, following her study of jazz piano on the Graduate Diploma Jazz programme at St Andrews University (2011 – 2014) headed by jazz educator, Richard Ingham. Most recently, Annabel performed at the 2022 Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival as part of the *Take On Mingus* project led by bassist Emma Smith, exploring the life and music of Charles Mingus.

**James Weeks:** Hailed as ‘one of the most inventive young composers and conductors out there’ by The Guardian, James Weeks read Music at Cambridge before completing a PhD in Composition at Southampton University, studying with Michael Finnissy. James’ music has been commissioned and performed by many leading performers including Alison Balsom, EXAUDI, Darragh Morgan and Mary Dullea, Uroboros Ensemble, Endymion, Anton Lukoszevieve and Christopher Redgate. He has been featured at UK and European festivals including City of London, Spitalfields, Vale of Glamorgan and Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festivals, Soundwaves Brighton, Cutting Edge (London), Gaudeamus (Amsterdam), Weimarer Frühjahrstage and Mafra (Portugal). His music is heard regularly on BBC Radio 3’s Hear and Now, and is represented by Sound and Music’s New Voices promotion scheme. James is the Artistic Director of Exaudi Vocal Ensemble.

**Con Anima Chamber Choir** has been performing in Aberdeen and Northeast Scotland for just over 20 years. Its repertoire spans sacred and secular music from six centuries, including well-loved classics such as Händel’s Messiah, Mozart’s Requiem, Bach’s Magnificat, and Brahms’ Ein Deutsches Requiem. The choir also enjoys performing choral music by contemporary European and American composers and has given world premières of many new works, particularly by composers associated with The University of Aberdeen Music Department. In 2019 Con Anima took part in the world premiere of *The Big Picture* by Judith Weir (Master of the Queen’s Music), commissioned for the re-opening of The Aberdeen Art Gallery. Con Anima is a “self-managing” group of singers who enjoy working with different guest conductors for different projects, and is delighted to be working with James Weeks for the first time in this **soundfestival** collaboration.

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