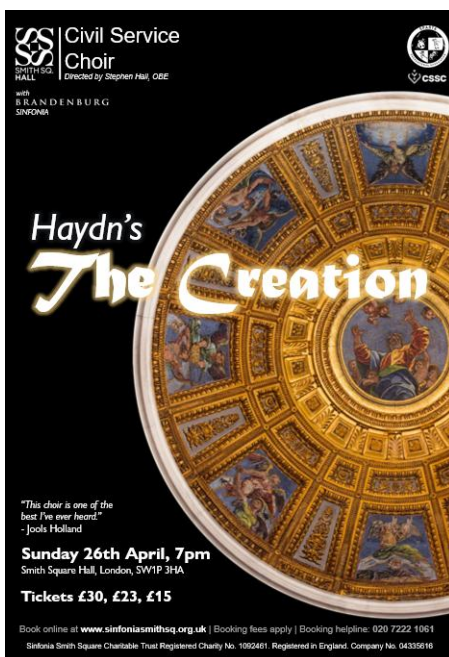


Upcoming performances

Thank you for joining us this afternoon. If you enjoyed the performance, please do join us next month for Haydn's *The Creation*. We will be returning to Smith Square Hall with the full Civil Service Choir alongside the Brandenburg Sinfonia on the evening of 26th April.

Published in 1800, it is one of the most exalted achievements in choral and orchestral music and the first choral work to be published with both German and English texts. In this performance it will be in English. Inspired by the Book of Genesis and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Haydn's oratorio captures the emergence of light, life, and order with sublime artistry. Through radiant choruses, masterful orchestration, and expressive solo passages, *The Creation* affirms the beauty and majesty of the natural world.

Tickets range from £15 to £30 and are available to purchase through the Smith Square website or directly from the box office.



Civil Service
Choir

Directed by Stephen Hall, OBE

Easter Festival

a concert of sacred work by **women composers**

Cecilia McDowall *Ave Maris Stella (Hail Star of the Sea)*
Fanny Hensel *Lobgesang (Song of Praise)*
Hiob (Job)
Lucy Walker *Give Me Your Stars*

CHARITY
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Cardinal Hume
Centre
Each Person Matters

Welcome

Since 2013, we have had the honour of performing here on the Tuesday lunchtime of what has now become the Easter Festival week. Over the years, Smith Square Hall has become our principal concert home, hosting 18 of our performances—from large-scale choral works to jazz and swing. Our debut here featured Haydn's *Nelson Mass*, and we are delighted to return at the end of April with our full choral forces and the Brandenburg Sinfonia to perform another of his great choral masterpieces, *The Creation*.

Extraordinarily, today's Easter concert, featuring our chamber choir, marks the first time we have presented music by women composers at Smith Square Hall. Sadly, we are not alone in this: women composers continue to be underrepresented in concert programmes across the country. We are therefore especially pleased to feature two cantatas by **Fanny Hensel**—an outstanding composer whose brilliance stands in its own right, even if history too often frames her primarily as the sister of Felix Mendelssohn.

Our programme also includes works by two distinguished contemporary British composers: **Cecilia McDowall**, renowned for her vibrant and expressive choral writing, and **Lucy Walker**, who is rapidly emerging as one of the most exciting compositional voices of her generation.

Normally, attending a performance here requires the purchase of a ticket—indeed, seats for our Haydn concert next month range from £15 to £30 - yet today you are here free of charge. How wonderful!

We hope that, inspired by today's performance, you will consider making an equally wonderful gesture by donating at the end of the concert. All contributions will support our chosen charities: **The Cardinal Hume Centre**, **The Charity for Civil Servants**, and **Sinfonia Smith Square**. This concert is our main fundraising event of the year, and your generosity will make a real difference.

Thank you for joining us today, and we hope you enjoy the music.

Stephen

Performers

Soloists

Harriet Mountford (soprano) and Charlotte Tetley (mezzo soprano)

Civil Service Chamber Choir

Soprano: Phoebe Clapham, Abi Coskun, Sally Donaghey, Gill McManus, Kate Nicholls and Tricia Vincent

Alto: Maria Freeman, Clare Gwynne, Sue Harling, Jane Houghton, Eileen Mortby, Eden Portman, Kim Sibley, Vicky Vale and Rachel Worledge

Tenor: Robert Bradburne, Tim May, Peter Swift and Gordon Woods

Bass: Nick Boorer, David Freeman, Chris Mason-Thom, Matt Sayles and Alexander Walford

Rehearsal accompanists: Matthew Reed, Daniel Leung and James Housego

Orchestra

Christian Halstead (leader), Stephen Brown (violin 1), Francis Dickinson (violin 1), Jeremy Cook (violin 2), Rachel Moyce (violin 2), Charlotte Town (violin 2), Alexander Campbell (viola), Rosemary Cook (viola), Alison Holford (cello), Susan Moss (double bass), Linda Penn (flute) and James Housego (piano)

Acknowledgements

Sinfonia Smith Square's Easter Festival is sponsored by Boardroom Review Limited. The Civil Service Choir would like to thank the Civil Service Sports Council (CSSC) and SPARTA Recreational Association for their financial support.



Lucy Walker

Lucy Walker (b. 1998) is emerging as one of Britain's brightest compositional talents. She completed her undergraduate and postgraduate studies at Gonville & Caius College in 2020 with double first-class honours, and the Sir Rudolph Peters Prize for Excellence in Music, and subsequently in 2021 with the college Graduate Prize for music. Bob Chilcott has described her choral pieces as "full of light, and beautifully crafted." Lucy Walker was appointed as Composer in Residence with St Martin's Voices in 2022. She has received commissions from the BBC Singers, VOCES8, The Sixteen, Anna Lapwood and the Choir of Pembroke College, Cambridge.

Give Me Your Stars was commissioned by VOCES8 for their 20th anniversary. Walker has chosen a setting of Sara Teasdale's poem, *Peace*, for her composition. In the programme note to the piece, the poem is described as "lyrical and romantic, rich in natural imagery, first of the ocean and its tide, then of the skies and stars beyond....Like the text, the music is structured in three stanzas with parallel melodies presented in different harmonic and atmospheric guises in each repetition".

PEACE flows into me
As the tide to the pool by the shore;
It is mine forevermore,
It ebbs not back like the sea.

I am the pool of blue
That worships the vivid sky;
My hopes were heaven-high,
They are all fulfilled in you.

I am the pool of gold
When sunset burns and dies, --
You are my deepening skies,
Give me your stars to hold.

Sara Teasdale (1884-1933)

Programme

Cecilia McDowall

Ave Maris Stella (Hail Star of the Sea)

Fanny Hensel

Lobgesang (Song of Praise)

Hiob (Job)

Lucy Walker

Give Me Your Stars

Cecilia McDowall

Cecilia McDowall (b. 1951) was born in London. She read music at the University of Edinburgh and continued her studies at Trinity College of Music in London. She later completed an MMus in composition. She studied with Joseph Horowitz, Robert Saxton and Adam Gorb. McDowall has won many awards and has been shortlisted seven times for the British Composer Awards. In 2014, she won the British Composer Award for her choral piece *Night Flight*. Since 2015, she has been Visiting Composer in Dulwich College, London. In 2015, she served on the panel for a Women Composers Competition of The Arcadian Singers of Oxford.

McDowall derives inspiration from extra-musical influences; for instance, a commission from the Portsmouth Festival Choir, *The Shipping Forecast*, gained her national media attention in June 2011. *70 Degrees Below Zero* was commissioned by the Scott Polar Research Institute and the City of London Sinfonia and premiered at Symphony Hall, Birmingham in February 2012. *Night Flight* was composed in 2013 to commemorate the pioneering flight of American aviator Harriet Quimby across the English Channel and first performed by the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge at the Fringe in the Fen Festival in July 2013. Among her other works are *the Girl from Aleppo* (2018) and the *Da Vinci Requiem*, written to mark the 500th anniversary of da Vinci's death and premiered by the Philharmonia Orchestra at the royal Festival Hall in May 2019.

Ave Maris Stella was commissioned by the Portsmouth Grammar School and premiered by the Portsmouth Chamber Choir and the London Mozart Players on Armistice Day 2001, at St Thomas's Cathedral, Portsmouth.

The composer writes: "I had already started work on *Ave Maris Stella* when the events of 9/11 forced me to reconsider my choice of words. Suddenly, my original selection of war poetry seemed too disturbing, too provocative and raw, for such a sensitive occasion as Armistice Day. As a result, I thought again about the text, wanting to bring something to the work that would have a more personal significance for Portsmouth Grammar School and for the City of Portsmouth with its great naval heritage." McDowall uses for her text the Vesper hymn to the Virgin Mary, *Ave Maris Stella* (Hail, Star of the sea) and two psalms in the Vulgate: Psalm 106, *Qui descendunt* (They that go down to the sea in ships) and Psalm 26, *Dominus illuminatio mea* (The Lord is my light).

Fanny Hensel

Fanny Hensel (née Fanny Cäcilie Mendelssohn Bartholdy) (1805 - 1847) was born in Hamburg to Abraham Menselssohn and Lea Salomon, both of whom were from distinguished Jewish families. In 1816, Fanny was baptised as a Christian, and, at the instigation of her father, the family changed their name to Mendelssohn Bartholdy with the intention of distancing the family from their Jewish origins, a move that was unpopular with the children.

Fanny showed exceptional talent from an early age. For instance, in honour of her father's birthday in 1819, she played all 24 preludes from Bach's *The Well-Tempered Clavier* from memory. Hensel has over 450 compositions to her name. These include over 250 lieder, over 125 pieces for solo piano, four cantatas, a piano trio, a piano quartet, a string quartet and an orchestral overture.

Fanny's younger brother was composer Felix Mendelssohn, with whom she had a close bond and shared the same thorough musical education. However, unlike her brother, she was hampered by the social conventions of the time concerning the roles of women. Several of Hensel's compositions were published under her brother's name. Indeed, her *Easter Sonata* was erroneously attributed to Felix as recently as 1970, before detailed research showed the true composer to be Fanny.

In 1829, Fanny married Wilhelm Hensel, an artist, and in 1830 gave birth to their only child, Felix Ludwig Sebastian Hensel. Her family had reservations towards her musical life, believing that her life as a wife and mother came first, while her music, her father believed, should be regarded as merely an "ornament". However, her husband and brother were supportive of her musical career. Hensel died in 1847, after suffering a stroke.

Lobgesang (Song of Praise) was written in 1831, in honour of Hensel's son's first birthday. The text is taken from the Gospel of John, the Song of Solomon and from the Psalms. The cantata opens with an orchestral *Pastorale* which is reminiscent of Bach. Following the first chorus, *Meine Seele ist stille zu Gott* ("My soul finds rest in God"), there is an alto recitative which relates the pain experienced by a woman giving birth, giving way to her joy once the child has been brought into the world. A soprano aria then fervently sings God's praises, which is reaffirmed in the final chorus, before a gentle ending, in keeping with the last words, which is a promise to continue God's praises *wenn der Mund wird kraftlos sein, so stimme ich doch mit Seufzen ein* ("even when my mouth is powerless, I will still join in with sighs").

Hiob (Job), was written the following year in 1832. The text explores themes of suffering and the transience of life and questions divine judgement. Hensel reorders the biblical sequence and uses text from Chapters 7, 13 and 10 respectively. The work starts with Job's existential question to God: *Was ist ein Mensch dass du ihn so gross achtest* ("What is man, that you make so much of him?"). In the central movement, Job continues to question God and asks why He hides his face from him, and treats him like an adversary, rather than a friend. In the final movement, Hensel's choice of text from Chapter 10 serves to give the piece an uplifting end, as Job expresses his thanks for a God who given him life and kindness, and keeps a watchful eye on him (*leben und wohlthat hast du an mir getan und dein Aufsehn bewahret mich*).