

Different Trains: Made in Liverpool

About the Music

Grace-Evangeline Mason – *The Water Garden*

(for wind and harp)

The Water Garden (2022) is inspired by the poem 'Chinoiserie' by the American, Imagist poet, Amy Lowell. The poem begins 'When I looked into your eyes, I saw a garden,' before the speaker describes an idealistic landscape that becomes tinged with sadness. The piece interprets the imagery, delicate garden flowers and watery surfaces, and the feelings of both tender sentiments and apprehension in the poem.

Nneka Cummins – *finding gills (when they try to drown you)*

The piece was originally commissioned and composed during Nneka's time on nonclassical's Artist in Residence programme and premiered by Sinfonia Smith Square in 2025. The work marks their first large-scale exploration of fixed electronics alongside chamber orchestra and follows themes of destruction and creation.

Mark Simpson – *Straw Dogs*

Straw Dogs is a reaction to the following passage from John Gray's book *Straw Dogs*: "In ancient Chinese rituals, straw dogs were used as offerings to the gods. During the ritual they were treated with utmost reverence. When it was over and they were no longer needed they were trampled on and tossed aside: 'Heaven and earth are ruthless, and treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs.'"

Simpson takes the ideas of this extract and applies them to music in a piece that sets long, yearning melodies against a more reflective second half that leads towards a destructive climax.

Andrew Barney – *Into The Aether*

The piece takes its title from the ancient concept of aether: the elusive fifth element or quintessence, beyond the usual four elements of earth, water, air and fire and associated in classical thought with the heavens. Andrew was drawn to the tension between these meanings and the weightlessness and otherworldly qualities now suggested by words such as ether and ethereal.

This idea also resonates deeply with his own sense of spirituality: an unseen presence that connects the earthly and the transcendent. At the heart of the piece are questions about truth and our freedom to think for ourselves: what we know, what we are told and what

remains hidden.

Steve Reich – *Different Trains*

(with film by Bill Morrison)

The basic idea of the piece is that carefully chosen speech recordings generate the musical materials for musical instruments. In order to combine the taped speech with the string instruments, Reich selected small speech samples that are more or less clearly pitched and then replicated them as accurately as possible in musical notation. The strings then literally imitate that speech melody.

The piece presents both a documentary and a musical reality and begins a new musical direction.

About the Composers

Grace-Evangeline Mason

Named as the 'Face to Watch' for Classical Music in *The Times* 2020 Calendar of the Arts, Grace-Evangeline Mason is a British composer of orchestral, chamber, choral, electronic and operatic music, described as a 'supreme painter in sound' (*Seen and Heard International*) and as having a 'keen ear for musical texture - from dreamy hazes of electronic sound to sumptuous choral writing' (*BBC*). Mason creates ethereal sound-worlds often inspired by art, poetry and literature to take listeners on a narrative journey.

Her BBC Proms debut was in 2017 with her work *RIVER* co-commissioned with BBC Radio 4's Front Row programme, followed by the premiere of her orchestral work *The Imagined Forest* at the 2021 BBC Proms by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra under Domingo Hindoyan, described as being 'drawn with pen-and-ink precision and filled with vivid orchestral colour' (*The Times*) and co-commissioned to mark the 150th anniversary of the Royal Albert Hall.

Mason is the recipient of awards including BBC Young Composer of the Year (2013) and the prestigious Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Prize (2018). She studied at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, where she has since been made an associate; Somerville College, Oxford; and the Royal Academy of Music, London, where she completed her doctorate.

Nneka Cummins

Nneka Cummins is an award-winning composer and music producer from Liverpool, based in London. They have an electro-acoustic and acoustic practice, with a current focus on colour,

percussiveness and organic flowing melodies to form original sound worlds from new sonic combinations and timbral blends.

Nneka is currently one of the composers on the 2026 RPS Programme and is writing a wind quintet piece for Manchester Camerata. In 2025, Nneka was awarded the Ivor Classical Award for Best Large Ensemble for their work *finding gills [when they try to drown you]*. *finding gills* was written during their time as a nonclassical Artist in Residence 2023-2025. Nneka has composed for a number of prominent ensembles including Chineke! orchestra, the Marion Consort, Sinfonia Smith Square, Ensemble 10/10, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's new music group and Psappha.

Nneka completed their masters in composition at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in 2022 and was awarded The Gareth Neame Scholarship and The Trinity College London Scholarship.

Nneka was the winner of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic's Rushworth Composition Prize 2021.

Mark Simpson

Mark Simpson is a UK-based composer of an acclaimed body of work and an internationally-renowned clarinettist, whose programmes champion music new and old. His music for the stage, orchestra, voices, and chamber forces has been celebrated by leading conductors, instrumentalists, and ensembles; across a myriad of forms, poetic intensity is matched by technical assurance and expressive generosity.

The somnolent world of dream and hallucination has shaped numerous pieces. Simpson has long come alive at night - as a youngster in Liverpool attending concerts at the Philharmonic Hall he sneaked into the Royal Box with his friends after the house lights went down. Listening to his music is not far from taking his hand in a séance.

As the first ever winner of both the BBC Young Musician of the Year and BBC Proms/Guardian Young Composer of the Year prizes in 2006, Simpson's career has always reflected the indivisibility of his composing and performing selves. This national acclaim led to a precocious Wigmore Hall debut, as well as his first major works as a composer, now published worldwide by Boosey & Hawkes. He studied at the Royal Northern College of Music, the University of Oxford, and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Julian Anderson.

Andrew Barney

Born and raised on Merseyside, Andrew Barney has West African, Caribbean and Irish heritage which forms the foundation of his artistic identity. The only musician in his family,

he discovered his love for classical music at 13 when he began learning piano and bass guitar at secondary school.

Currently, he is the pianist in residence with Liverpool's Arts Bar Orchestra under conductor Gaia Ghazaryan. He is also a member of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir under conductor Matthew Hamilton. Committed to cultural celebration and collaboration, Barney has composed and performed original works for piano and voice, which were showcased at St George's Hall to critical acclaim during Liverpool's Black History Month. As Assistant Producer for PRS Foundation's POWER UP, he works on initiatives that support Black music creators.

His career is marked by ongoing international collaborations and performances, including concerts in Switzerland with Venezuelan folk singer Mario Espinoza. Barney won the Liverpool Philharmonic's 2024 Rushworth Composition Prize, part of which included a commission for a new composition for Liverpool. In 2025 he was one of five Opera North Resonance Artists, and he was also one of the mentees in the 2025 Ivors Academy's Co:Pilot programme.

Steve Reich

Steve Reich has been called "the most original musical thinker of our time" (*The New Yorker*) and "among the great composers of the century" (*The New York Times*). Starting in the 1960s, his pieces *It's Gonna Rain*, *Drumming*, *Music for 18 Musicians*, *Tehillim*, *Different Trains*, and many others helped shift the aesthetic center of musical composition worldwide away from extreme complexity and towards rethinking pulsation and tonal attraction in new ways. He continues to influence younger generations of composers and mainstream musicians and artists all over the world.

Double Sextet won the Pulitzer Prize in 2009 and *Different Trains*, *Music for 18 Musicians*, and an album of his percussion works have all earned Grammy Awards. He received the Praemium Imperiale in Tokyo, the Polar Music Prize in Stockholm, the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale, the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge award in Madrid, the Debs Composer's Chair at Carnegie Hall, and the Gold Medal in Music from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He has been named Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in France, and awarded honorary doctorates by the Royal College of Music in London, the Juilliard School in New York, and the Liszt Academy in Budapest, among others.

"There's just a handful of living composers who can legitimately claim to have altered the direction of musical history and Steve Reich is one of them" – *The Guardian*