

The music

Fanny Mendelssohn	There be none of Beauty's daughters
Felix Mendelssohn	Suleika
Libby Larsen	Jane Seymour
Rebecca Clarke	Infant Joy
Amy Beach	- In the Twilight
	- Cradle Song of the Lonely Mother (piano solo)
Kaija Saariaho	Sua katselen
Judith Weir	Breasts!! Song of the Innocent Wild-Child
Diana Burrell	Love Song (with Yoga)
Libby Larsen	- Marriage...Divorce
	- When I am an Old Woman

INTERVAL

Robert Schumann	Er, der Herrlichste von allen
Clara Schumann	Die stille Lotosblume
Judith Weir	The Mothership: When a Good Mother Sails From This World
Emma-Ruth Richards	'Still I Think Alive' (Festival commission and premiere)
Rebecca Clarke	One that is ever kind

The Festival is delighted this year to be able to commission a new 20-minute-long song cycle by the young British composer Emma-Ruth Richards. *Still I Think Alive* lies at the heart of tonight’s programme.

Each half of the programme starts, however, with a reminder of how matters stood two centuries ago. As professional and exceptionally talented musicians and composers in their own right, Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann each lived in the shadow of their far better known brother and husband, and society’s expectations of women’s roles at the time meant that the vast majority of their songs lay unpublished and unperformed until comparatively recently. But, as we’ll find, their works in many cases prove more interesting both harmonically and rhythmically than those of their male counterparts — and of course reflect a perspective inaccessible to Felix and Robert.

Fanny Mendelssohn (1805-1847) *There be none of Beauty’s daughters* (1836)

Fanny Mendelssohn (later Hensel) wrote over 200 songs in her lifetime, barely any of which were published before her death — and most of those came out under her brother’s name. As

well as her sex, her social status was also thought by her family to preclude a composer’s life. *There be none..* typically puts Woman on a pedestal where she can be worshipped from afar, rather than appreciated as she is.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) *Suleika op34 no4* (1832)

Felix wrote a great many songs in his lifetime but they weren’t at the centre of his musical output — meant rather for private than for public performance. *Suleika* voices a woman assuring a distant lover of her unfailing love. This time it’s the man’s turn on a pedestal.

Libby Larsen (b1950) *Jane Seymour* (2000)

Jane Seymour comes from the sequence *Try Me, Good King*, a group of five songs drawn from the final letters and gallows speeches of Henry VIII’s first five wives. In this song there is deliberate allusion to a lute version of Pretorius’s ‘Lo. how a Rose E’er Blooming’ and in the cycle as a whole Larsen notes the use of a repeated lute-like note to create psychological tension as well as abstract bell-tolling, releasing the spiritual meaning of the words.

Rebecca Clarke (1886-1979) *Infant Joy* (pub.1924)

A simple setting, Clarke beautifully conveys the joy which the poet (Blake) himself feels about the embodiment of as yet uncorrupted innocence.

Amy Beach (1867-1944) *In the Twilight op85* (1922)

Although her many other works are now starting to be properly appreciated, it was Beach’s songs (over 150 of them) that were most widely performed in her own lifetime. *In the Twilight* shows her particular skill in harnessing words and a turbulent piano to create the powerful sense of dread and foreboding felt by the waiting daughter and the wife, each in their different ways.

Beach *Cradle Song of the Lonely Mother op108* (1924)

A solo piano piece which starts gently, like a lullaby, and quickly moves into darker, more disturbing territory. In remarkably economical fashion Beach charts the changing emotional impact of her loneliness on the mother, before fading to a resigned acceptance that life must go on.

Kaija Saariaho (1952-2023) *Sua katselen* (2004)

Sua katselen is one of Saariaho’s four *Leino Songs* from texts by one of Finland’s most prominent poets, Eino Leino. In the composer’s words: “ the long vocals allowed for interesting,

purely musical encounters between the voice and the piano texture, without breaking the text’s prosody. To me these songs are something like letters to a friend, to whom one wishes to send fresh news at given moments. In that respect these texts too were intertwined into my life.”

Judith Weir (b1954) *Breasts!! Song of the Innocent Wild-Child* (2000)

Breasts!!... is the second song in a seven-part work, *woman. life.song*, conceived by Jessye Norman to create an extended cycle about a woman’s life from youth to old age. Using words by Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Breasts!!* conveys a young girl’s expectations for the woman she’s about to become.

Diana Burrell (b1948) *Love Song (with Yoga)* (2008)

Written by Australian soprano and lyricist Adey Grummet, *Love Song* is a brief but enthusiastic paean to the glories of singing, the words wrapping themselves around us before leading back lovingly to the singer.

Larsen *Marriage...Divorce* (1987)

One of eight songs in the cycle *Me (Brenda Ueland)*, which describes different phases of the writer and feminist’s long and thrice-divorced life, *Marriage...Divorce* sets a high standard for a successful marriage. Ueland’s personal philosophy was apparently ‘to tell the truth, and to not do anything she didn’t want to’ and the song’s lyrics show the almost inevitable result of this when applied to relationships.

Larsen *When I am an Old Woman* (1990)

Larsen’s version of ‘Warning’, Jenny Joseph’s most well-known and well-loved poem, is brief and very much to the point.

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) *Er, der Herrlichste von allen* (from *Frauenliebe und -leben op42/2*) (1840)

1840 was the year Schumann finally succeeded in marrying Clara Wieck. It was also his so-called year of song, when he produced the great cycles *Liederkreis*, *Dichterliebe* and *Frauenliebe und -leben*. The last contains eight songs which together describe the development of a woman’s love, from first meeting to widowhood. *Er, der Herrlichste...* conforms to contemporary mores in its message that only the worthiest of women can possibly deserve her beloved and, if that’s not her, she will give him up to someone more worthy.

Clara Schumann (1819-1896) *Die stille Lotosblume* (pub. 1844)

Clara wrote only a handful of songs (30 or so), all after her marriage in 1840, as Christmas or birthday gifts for Robert. They were largely forgotten until about fifty years ago. Nevertheless, and in the words of Nancy Reich's introduction to the *Hyperion* CD of Clara's songs, *Die stille Lotosblume* "with its poignant melody, symbolism, and its unresolved question in the closing phrases of the vocal part... was the quintessential romantic Lied and was found in many anthologies of 19th-century music."

Weir *The Mothership: When a Good Mother Sails From This World* (2000)

The earlier song we heard from this cycle came from near the beginning of a woman's life. *The Mothership* comes at the end, when a daughter expresses the grief she feels at her mother's passing from life and the need now to voyage on by herself, but with her mother's example to guide her.

Emma-Ruth Richards (b1985) *Still I Think Alive* (Festival Commission, 2026)

1 Night Song ~ 2 Subject of Interruption ~ 3 List ~ 4 Tooth & Nail ~ 5 Rooms

To use the composer's own words "*Still I Think Alive* is a song cycle about modern motherhood in many of its contradictions. Drawing on personal experiences of soprano Jennifer France and writer Kate Wakeling, the five songs move between moments of wonder, exhaustion, joy, overwhelm and absurdity. The cycle embraces interruption, vulnerability and resilience while reflecting on the emotional complexities that shape the experience of balancing work, creativity and care. In composing the work, I wanted to explore a wide spectrum of vocal expression to authentically reveal moments of raw honesty, maternal ferocity, and tenderness through a vocal line that moves freely between speech, song and other vocal sounds."

Clarke *One that is ever kind* (1911?)

The calm voice of reason opposed to the real feelings of the heart are perfectly contrasted here in Clarke's interpretation of the Yeats' text. Being told to accept what time has done to the loved one has no effect when a single glance from her will instantly rekindle the old feelings.

Notes by Dick Ware

(Continued on insert) >>

Festival Patron: David Matthews

Grateful acknowledgements

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Next Year's Festival

The 2027 Little Missenden Festival will run from Friday 8th to Sunday 17th October.

Festival Website little-missenden.org

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- Email: tickets@little-missenden.org
- Phone: 01494 958148 between 11am and 8pm

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- Email: contact@little-missenden.org

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Chair: Dick Ware

Committee: Angela Bishop, Polly Buston, Martin Cunningham, John Glasson, Beth Neill, Mark Stanton, Liz Wager, Dick Wells, Rachel Wilcox

Programme Notes

'STILL I THINK ALIVE'



8pm, Friday October 2nd, 2026
Little Missenden Church

66th Little Missenden Festival

The artists

Jennifer France *soprano* **Lana Bode** *piano*

Winner of the 2018 Critics’ Circle Emerging Talent Award, **Jennifer France** was described in *WhatsOnStage* as the “living jewel in opera’s crown.” Highlights of her 2026/27 season include two major international debuts, with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Berliner Philharmoniker.

Hailed by *Gramophone* for her “thrillingly expressive voice of diamantine beauty”, Jennifer also returns to the Opéra Comique in George Benjamin’s *Into the Little Hill* and to Covent Garden for Brett Dean’s *Good Sometimes Queen*. She’s also appearing in Donizetti’s *L’elisir d’amore* at Grange Park Opera and in Britten’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in Florence.

askonasholt.com/artist/jennifer-france

Lana Bode is an American-British pianist and artistic director, whose performances have been hailed as ‘expertly calibrated’ (*BBC Music Magazine*) and ‘deeply examined’ (*Gramophone*). She’s shared the stage with singers and instrumentalists of the highest calibre, including Robert Cohen, Ellie Consta, Marta Fontanals-Simmons, Alessandro Fisher, and Mark Padmore. As a recitalist, Lana has performed at the Aldeburgh Festival, Barber Institute of Fine Arts, Barbican Hall, Kings Place, Opera Holland Park, Purcell Room and Wigmore Hall.

Lana is co-founder and Artistic Director of the *Virginia Woolf & Music* concert project, and a member of faculty at Eltham College and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama.

lanabode.com

Emma-Ruth Richards “...is a composer at the top of her game...possessing exceptional refinement and subtlety with a gift for writing lucid, impassioned and compelling music” (*Musical Opinion*). Her deeply expressive and highly charged music has been championed by many ensembles and soloists in the UK and internationally and she’s widely recognised for her understanding of both instrumental and vocal writing .

Emma-Ruth read music at Cardiff University; completed her PhD at the Royal Northern College of Music; and has been mentored by such composers as Alexander Goehr, Oliver Knussen, Judith Weir, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, and Colin Matthews.

emmaruthrichards.com