

Sarah Watts & Kim Davenport

The Song Also Rises

Friday 20th March, 7:30pm

Firth Hall

**PERFORMANCE
VENUES
CONCERTS**



***Bass Clarinet – Sarah Watts
Piano – Kim Davenport***

6 Sorrow Songs - Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

The Mindlessness of it All - Malcolm J. Solomon

Interval

6 Songs - Florence Price

And Then ... - David Baker

The Song Also Rises - Program Notes by Joshua Thompson

In an era, musical or otherwise, that feels eerily reminiscent of Dickens' paradoxical opening line from *Tale of Two Cities*, *The Song Also Rises*, the premiere studio recording from bass clarinetist and arranger Sarah Watts and pianist Kim Davenport, provides similar juxtaposition of complex themes, musical modes, and historical context meant to compel audiences towards honest acknowledgment of past and present, while setting the tone for what many can only hope to result in auditory reconciliation and freedom from centuries of wilful ignorance, intentional exclusion, and restrictive classification(s) within and outside of the musical genres represented in this album.

The Song Also Rises is as literal an album as it is a play on words, an overdue elevation of forgotten or underperformed (recently discovered) masterworks from composers of the past and present who share lived experiences, social conditions, and an innate ability to integrate musical stylings of their time that continue to provide the foundation for music being written in the classical tradition for the 21st century. Watts and Davenport rise to the musical occasion by performing on the shoulders of luminaries Samuel Coleridge Taylor, Florence Price, David Baker, and Malcolm Solomon. Between the four composers, listeners are privy to the musical and social conversations from people of African descent spanning 150 years.

These musical conversations - reflecting the cyclical nature of society - fuse Negro spirituals, romanticism, and post modernism with poetry in a manner that gives listeners an unseen and perhaps, unheard hope for a future that forges a new song/social cycle. One that reveres the once despised. One that honors the once disdained and elevates the once downtrodden.

David Baker: And Then... (2001)

I. *The Song Also Rises* opens with a sombre and languid bass clarinet solo, appropriately setting the tone for sonic resurrection of themes, tonalities, and jazz phrasings. Davenport joins the bass clarinet with a steady bass line in unison that provides the soloist the freedom to soar over the serious introductory melody to heights of improvisational dissonance, consonance, and musical exploration. The middle section gives listeners a pastoral and chorale like bridge before returning to the dizzying yet concise themes that allows Watts to finish with a pointed flourish, reminding the listener that the bass clarinet and piano are sonically yoked in the cyclical rise and fall of musical conversation and improvisation.

II. *On Wings of Song* begins its ascent on the celestial wings of the piano introduction before the bass clarinet begins its thoughtful and tender journey into flight with a lush statement of Baker's soulful melody. Expertly demonstrating the full range and dexterity of the bass clarinet with arpeggiating melodic lines, trills, flourishes meant to represent the wistful nature of this flight; the piano accompaniment isn't without its own measured yet deliberate use of virtuosity and fluidity. This piece concludes at the peak of flight with the bass clarinet sustaining the final note with the control and ease of any vocalist at the apex of their range.

III. *The Apprentice's Sources* is a mysterious and, at times, ominous exploration of the wellspring of sources the apprentice's disposal as represented by the bass clarinet. The movement is a clear demonstration of the post-modern sonorities not uncommon to many of Baker's previously published art songs of the mid to late 20th century. Rhythmic syncopation from the piano accentuates and provides balance to the chaotic frenzy and flurry of notes from Watts' initial expression of the opening musical statement. The bridge provides another opportunity to relish in Baker's innate ability to score rich and mellow ballad like jazz phrasing into pieces that appear haphazardly notated and without discernible form. This short-lived respite from both piano and

bass clarinet is abruptly interrupted as both feverishly race to the finish of this driving musical collaboration in apprenticeship.

Malcolm Solomon: The Mindlessness of it All (2020)

This recent work by Solomon is anything but mindless with its intentional musical cacophony revealing the deliberately repetitive musical and social structures. The immediate discord is not without its own troubling origin story. “I began to work on this classical piece after the Sandy Hook shootings, but I stopped,” Solomon said. “Then George Floyd happened and Breonna Taylor and I picked it up again... [I] want this music to make people feel anger and sadness around the circumstances that brought the piece to life.”

In the first movement, darkness and foreboding is made evident from the outset with the piano and bass clarinet hovering at their lowest registers. There is a continued persistence and determination of both soloists to sojourn through the piece despite unsettling and deepening dissonance and musical conflict. This conflict, in musical form, underscores the angry, gritty, and gnarly social events, conditions, and realities that inspired Solomon to pen the work. Both piano and bass clarinet up the ante in tension, measure after measure as if they themselves are embroiled in verbal conflict. The movement ends with no discernible melodic/thematic resolution—a stunningly accurate representation of the ongoing and cyclical crusade towards social reconciliation. Foreboding continues into the second movement, falling deeper in range and aesthetic with low cluster chords on the piano and guttural cries from the bass clarinet. Both soloists linger and languish in these depths, indifferent to time but hyper-attentive to tone and mood. The repeated triplet figure in the piano gives a much needed sense of consistency and continuity but that consistency isn’t soothing to the soul. In fact, by design, it’s quite the opposite.

Given said interpretation, perhaps we can listen to the bass clarinet as a musical narrator, observer, and witness to repeated cycles of musical and social discontent. However, there are moments of tonal salvation and reconciliation. Intentional echoes of Negro spirituals introduced by the piano provides and capitalized by the bass clarinet, underscores a hint that perhaps we are edging closer to catharsis. Determined chords from the piano harken to generations of field, protest, and anthemic songs from the lived African American experience as the bass clarinet continues to narrate with more authority, clarity, and conviction. While soloist Sarah Watts continues her calculated journey into the complexities of social and musical realities, there is hope. A hope signaled by the piano’s distant bell tones of the hallowed hallelujah chord, both return to the original depths of the mindlessness of it all.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor: Sorrow Songs Op.57 (arr. Sarah Watts)

1. *Oh, what comes over the Sea*
2. *When I am dead, my dearest*
3. *Oh, Roses for the flush of youth*
4. *She sat and sang alway*
5. *Unmindful of the Roses*
6. *Too late for love*

Composed in 1904, the Sorrow Songs Op.57 is a collaboratively inspired set of pieces from English poet and contemporary Christina Rossetti. Using the text from her critically acclaimed collections “Goblin Market and Other Poems” (1862) and “New Poems” (1896), the common thread between these two romanticists is immediately evident through the lyrical and melancholic elegies present in both text and melody. While there are a few commercial recordings of the song cycle in its original form, Watts and Davenport re-set this underperformed masterpiece with instrumentation

that further deepens that sense of lyrical sorrow often found in English folk melodies of the era. There is a clear expressiveness in Watts' articulation of the melody on the bass clarinet that many overlook on the instrument.

The 'vocal' range of the bass clarinet surpasses that of the human voice and in this context, we are all the benefactors of that. The cohesive and consistent scoring of this song cycle is not dissimilar to the scoring of Coleridge-Taylor's "24 Negro Melodies" complete with flourishes, rolling chords, and reliance on the substantiative weight of the piano's lower register, delivered beautifully by Davenport. That nuanced and well measured balance allows Watts to deliver the soaring text with ease, care, and the true essence of lush and dramatic romanticism.

Florence Price - six selected songs (arr. Sarah Watts)

1. *An April Day*; text by Joseph Seamon Cotter Jr.
2. *Dawn's Awakening*; text by James Joseph Burke
3. *Go Down, Moses*; text from Negro Spiritual
4. *Song to the Dark Virgin*; text by Langston Hughes from *The Weary Blues* (1926)
5. *The Glory of the Day was in Her Face*; text by James Weldon Johnson •
6. *The Poet and His Song*; text by Paul Laurence Dunbar

With a catalogue of over 300 works, the recent focus on the compositions of Florence Price presents vocalists and musicians with the tough task of identifying what to program and record. Such is the task for arranger and bass clarinetist Sarah Watts in her arrangements of six art songs by the 20th century luminary. Those familiar with Price's poignant vocal and piano works using poetry and text from Negro Spirituals, Black literary giants such as Paul Lawrence Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson, and Langston Hughes will find themselves right at home with this set transcribed with a new twist - particularly *Go Down, Moses* and *Song to the Dark Virgin*. The additional and perhaps, lesser-known pieces provide a wonderful mix of different characters and styles. Davenport accurately notes, "Price's writing is quite virtuosic at times, which presents a challenge in balancing support for the soloist with the need to execute some very demanding passages on the piano."

Watts performed from the vocal score, taking the meaning of the words into account as she shaped each phrase and decided where to breathe. She made full use of the range of the bass clarinet - replacing the texts with a variety of timbre and expression possible on an instrument with a range much larger than the human voice. It achieves what can be so great about a transcription: it retains what is special about the composer's original music while adding new life and vitality in a new form. The nuanced balance between piano and bass clarinet throughout the set is what makes this recording different and unique. Both Watts and Davenport have given listeners an opportunity to interpret music at a much deeper level. Paying close attention to the text, its punctuation, and inflections, the duo elevate the phrasing, and overall melodic themes from Price in a manner that compels listeners to read the text in tandem with the sweet and sombre timbre of the bass clarinet.

Kim Davenport is a piano soloist and collaborative artist whose work is driven by a passion for sharing the works of underrepresented composers. Her primary focus over the past several years has been to perform and record solo and chamber works of Black composers. This work has resulted in multiple solo recitals, her 2022 album featuring Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's complete *Twenty-Four Negro Melodies*, Op.59, and her forthcoming 2025 studio albums with British bass clarinetist Sarah Watts and Canadian bass clarinetist Mélanie Bourassa.

In 2024, Kim had the honor of premiering the Piano Concerto, Op.14 by Kevin Oldham, a brilliant pianist/composer whose life was cut tragically short by AIDS in 1993, in a new transcription for piano and concert band with Tacoma Concert Band, led by conductor Gerard Morris.

Sharing a studio space with her mother, artist Laurie Davenport, since 2018 has resulted in several inspiring collaborations, with Laurie creating artwork in response to specific pieces of music.

She was active for nearly 20 years in the critically acclaimed Duo Alea, the bass clarinet/piano duo she formed with her father, Michael Davenport. The Duo's performances and recordings brought local and world premieres of several important works for bass clarinet & piano. The Duo were also active in music publishing, forming the independent firm Alea Publishing & Recording in 1997 to produce their own recordings and establish a growing catalog of sheet music for the bass clarinet. In 2020, following her father's passing, Kim reinvigorated the Alea catalog with a focus on underrepresented composers, and established the Dolphy Prize for new works for bass clarinet by black composers.

Kim holds undergraduate degrees in music and piano performance from the University of Washington, and a Master of Music in piano performance from Northwestern University.

Sarah Watts studied clarinet at the Royal Academy of Music with Angela Malsbury and Victoria Soames Samek (bass clarinet). Sarah then decided to specialise in bass clarinet and continued her studies at the Rotterdam Conservatorium bass clarinet with Henri Bok, funded by the Countess of Munster Musical Trust and a Leverhulme Trust Studentship. Sarah was awarded the Exxon prize for the best classical music student in Rotterdam.

Sarah specialises on the bass clarinet and has gained an international reputation as an artist, teacher and researcher on the instrument. She has performed solo repertoire across the UK, Ireland, Asia, Europe and the Americas and has attracted composers including Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Piers Hellawell and William Sweeney to write works for her.

Sarah is Director Performance at the University of Sheffield, where she also teaches clarinet and bass clarinet. Sarah performs with Hard Rain Soloist Ensemble, rarescale and SCAW. She has completed a PhD in bass clarinet multiphonic analysis at Keele University and has published 'Spectral Immersions; A Comprehensive Guide to the Theory and Practice of Bass Clarinet Multiphonics' via Metropolis publishers.

Sarah is an Henri Selmer Paris artist, a Vandoren UK artist and a Silverstein Ligature artist, and in 2016, she was made an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM), London.

Sorrow Songs. Op. 57
Samuel Coleridge-Taylor
Words by Christina G Rossetti

1/ Oh what comes over
the sea
Oh what comes over the sea,
Shoals and quicksand past;
And what comes home to me,
Sailing slow, Sailing fast?

A wind comes over the sea
With a moan in its blast;
But nothing comes home to me,
Sailing slow, Sailing fast.

Let me be, Let me be,
For my lot is cast,
Land or sea all's one to me,
And sail it slow or fast
Let me be, Let me be, Let me be.

2/ When I am dead, my
Dearest
When I am dead, my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me;
Plant thou no roses at my head,
Nor shady Cypress Tree:

Be the green grass above me
With show'rs and dewdrops wet:
And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget.

I shall not see the shadows,
I shall not feel the rain;
I shall not hear the nightingale sing,
Sing on, as if in pain:

And dreaming through the twilight
That doth not rise or set,
Haply I may remember,
And haply may I forget.

3/ Oh Roses, for the flush of
Youth
Oh Roses,
Oh Roses, for the flush of youth,
And laurel for the perfect prime;
But pluck an ivy branch for me
Grown old before my time.

Oh violets,
Oh violets, for the grave of youth,
And bay for those dead in their prime;
Give me their wither'd leaves I chose
Before in the old time.

4/ She sat and sang away
She sat and sang away
By the green margin of a stream,
Watching the fishes leap and play
Beneath the glad sunbeam.

I sat and wept away
'Neath the moons most shad'wy beam,
Watching the blossoms of May, Weep leaves,
The blossoms weep leaves in the stream.

I wept for the memory;
She sang for hope that is so fair;
My tears were swallowed by the sea,
Her songs died,
Died on the air.

5/ Unmindful of the Roses
Unmindful of the Roses,
Unmindful of the thorn,
A reaper tired reposes
Among his gather'd corn:
So might I, So might I, til the morn.

Cold as the cold Decembers,
Past as the days that set,
While only one remembers
And all the rest forget,
But one remembers yet,
But one remembers yet.

6/ Too late for love
Too late for love, Too late for joy,
Too late, Too late!

You loitered on the way too long,
You tri ed at the gate:
Th'en chanted dove upon her branch
Died without a mate;
Th'en chanted princess in her tower
Slept, Died, behind the grate;
Her heart was starving all the while,
You made it wait, You made it wait.

Ten years ago, Five years ago,
One year ago,
E'en then you had arrived in time,
Though somewhat slow;
Then you had known her living face
Which now you cannot know.
The frozen fountain would have leaped,
The buds gone on to blow,
The warm south wind would have
awaked,
To melt the snow, To melt the snow.

You should have wept her yesterday,
Wasting upon her bed;
But wherefore, but wherefore should you
weep today
That she is dead?

Lo, we who love, weep not today,
But crown her royal head.
Let be these poppies that we strew,
Your roses are too red:
Let be the poppies, not for you
Cut down and spread.
You should have wept her yesterday.

6 Songs by Florence Price

1/ An April Day

On such a day as this I think,
On such a day as this
When earth and sky and nature's
world are clad in April bliss;
And balmy zephyrs gently waft
Upon your cheek a kiss,
Sufficient is it just to live,
On such a day as this.

2/ Dawn's Awakening

I stood on a hill at daybreak and
watched the rising sun.
I saw the night in its passing and the
day that had just begun.
I stood on a hill at morningtide and
watched the break of day.
I saw the stars and the heavens, as
they slowly faded away.

I saw the sun in its splendor rise over
the hazy mists,
I felt the warmth of its shining rays,
as the earth it fondly kissed.
I saw the sheep and the shepherd
rise from a night of repose.
I saw all the beauties of nature and
the dew shine like pearls on the rose.

I saw the fields and the forest, I saw
the river below,
I saw the ships in the harbor, and
wondered whither they go.
I saw in the distance a city where
slumbered the wicked and just.
Close by on the hillside a graveyard
where soon must mingle their dust.

I saw the church in the valley where
worshipped the old and the young.
And I heard the bells in the tow'r as a
heav'nly anthem they sang.
I listened again for the voices that rang
in praise of our Lord.
The hilltops echoed the music with
hosanas in sweetest accord.

3/ Go Down, Moses

Go Down, Moses,
'way down in Egypt land,
Tell ole Pharaoh to let my people go.

When Israel was in Egypt land,
"Let my people go"
Oppressed so hard they could not stand

"Let my people go"
"Thus spoke the Lord" bold Moses said
"Let my people go"
If not I'll smite your firstborn dead.
"Let my people go"

Go Down, Moses,
'way down in Egypt land,
Tell ole Pharaoh to let my people go.
When Israel was in Egypt land,
"Let my people go"

4/ Song to the Dark Virgin

Would that I were a jewel,
A shattered Jewel,
That all my shining brilliance might fall at my
feet,
Thou dark one.

Would that I were a garment,
A shimmering silken garment,
That all my folds might wrap about thy body,
Absorb thy body,
Hold and hide thy body
Thou dark one.

Would that I were a flame,
But one sharp, leaping flame,
To annihilate thy body,
Thou dark one.

5/ The Glory of the Day was in Her Face

The glory of the day was in her face.
The beauty of the night was in her eyes
And over all her loveliness the grace
Of morning blushing in the early skies.

And in her voice the calling of the dove
Like music of a sweet melodious part
And in her smile the breaking light of love;
And all the gentle virtues of the heart
And now the glorious day, the beauteous night,
The birds that signal to their mates at dawn
To my dull ears, to my tear blinded sight
Are one with all the dead since she is gone.

6/ The Poet and His Song

A song is just a little thing
And yet what joy it is to sing!
In hours of toil it gives me zest
And when at last I long for rest
When cows come home along the bars
And in the fold I hear the bell!!
At night, the shepherd herds his stars, I sing my
song
And all is well.

My days are never filled with ease.
I till my ground and prune my trees.
When ripened gold is all the grain
I labour hard and toil
And sweat
While others dream within the dell
But even while my brow is wet I sing my song
And all is well.

Sometimes the sun unkindly hot,
My garden makes a desert spot;
Sometimes a blight upon the tree
Take all my fruit away from me
And then with throes of bitter pain
Rebellious passions rise and swell
But life is more than fruit or grain,
And so I sing,
And all is well.

Coming Soon:

We've got loads of great events coming up, you can visit our website for full details - www.performancevenues.group.shef.ac.uk

Neil Cowley Trio: Built on Bach

Wednesday 22nd April - 7:30pm

£16-£20

Firth Hall

Built on Bach is a new live show from the Neil Cowley Trio, exploring the subtle but powerful influence of Johann Sebastian Bach on Cowley's original music. Rather than reworking or reinterpreting Bach's compositions or Inventions, the trio use them as a creative jumping-off point—improvising, extemporising, and freely exploring wherever the music leads—revealing Bach's presence within their own distinctive, unmistakable sound.

Renowned for his dry humour and engaging presence, Cowley peppers the show with stories and anecdotes on his relationship with Bach revealing the composer's impact on both his music and his life. Built on Bach sees the Neil Cowley Trio replace their trademark bombast and thrilling crescendos for a lighter touch and more reverential tone. Still, the performance remains dynamic and heartfelt brimming with energy and emotional depth, true to their signature style.

Free Concerts on campus

Throughout term time we run free informal recitals and events in Firth Hall, including visiting guests and the performances from the talented students from the Department of Music.

These events are free to attend and are performed at lunch time and rush hour, which we believe make the events accessible for everyone to enjoy. To find out more about these events and to reserve your ticket, head to our website.

Monday 23rd March	Lunchtime Concert - Julian Payne Prize Recital	Firth Hall	13:10
Thursday 23rd April	Rush Hour Concert - MA Ensembles	Upper Chapel	17:45
Monday 27th April	Lunchtime Concert - Student Performances	Firth Hall	13:10