



The
Academy of
St Mary-le-Bow

Barber

Adagio for Strings
Knoxville Summer of 1915

Menotti

Nocturne

Shaw

Entr'acte

Soprano Ella Taylor
Conductor Alex Fryer

15 June 2026 – 7:30pm

St Mary-le-Bow EC2V 6AU

Free admission | www.academyofstmarylebow.com

Welcome

Hello and welcome to our concert celebrating amazing, queer composers. The orchestra has been hoping to perform a concert focused on queer identity for some time now, and the stars aligned perfectly for this project, especially with it being Pride Month. Firstly, I'm so delighted that our soloist, Ella Taylor, accepted our invitation to join us to sing Barber's stunning Knoxville: Summer of 1915. I first heard Ella sing in 2019 when I was playing in the orchestra for the Peter Hulsén Orchestral Song Award where Ella was one of the soloists. I found their voice and performance incredibly moving, and I've been wanting to work with them ever since. Secondly, this year we have a new rector here at our home of St Mary-le-Bow, Simon Cuff, who has really been flying the flag for Pride here - quite literally - the progress flag is flying outside the church right now for the first time.

Tonight's concert is focused on queer American composers, and as I'm sure we all know, it is becoming a lot harder to be a queer person in America under the current administration. Sadly, we are beginning to see similar trends at home in the UK. It seems every day I read about another council that is cutting Pride funding or refusing to fly Pride flags. When people try to reduce queer visibility, it means we have to celebrate Pride even more loudly and spotlight queer voices even more prominently. Regardless of our political landscape, to me, there is a huge amount of joy in showcasing composers specifically for their queer identity. For many queer composers, a celebration of their identity in this way was probably not possible in their lifetime. Many people I've spoken to about this concert didn't know that Barber was gay. Tonight, we can celebrate that by deliberately putting his music alongside that of his partner, Menotti. I remember singing the choral arrangement of Barber's Adagio in my secondary school choir, and the teenage me would have loved to know that it was written by a gay man living with his partner. As a queer person, I think knowing something has been written by someone like you makes you listen to it differently or feel more of an affinity to it. I have certainly found that to be the case in preparing for this concert.

As with all the arts, queer people have always been at the forefront of classical music. There is so much incredible music by queer composers, both living and dead, famous and unknown. Some of these artists lived openly queer lives, but others sadly could not, which makes programming their music in Pride concerts all the more important. In researching this evening's programme, I discovered a treasure trove of queer musical gems, and as we are hoping this Pride concert will become an annual event, I look forward to sharing many of these with you in the future.

Happy Pride!

Alex Fryer

(Academy of St Mary-le-Bow, Principal Conductor and Artistic Director)

Programme

Entr'acte

Caroline Shaw
(b. 1982)

Knoxville: Summer of 1915

Samuel Barber
(1910-1981)

Nocturne

Gian Carlo Menotti
(1911-2007)

Adagio for Strings

Samuel Barber
(1910-1981)

The concert will last approximately one hour; there is no interval. Please do join us for a drink at the ASMLB bar at the back of the church after the concert.

Programme Notes

Shaw

Entr'acte

In 2013, North Carolina native Caroline Shaw became the youngest recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for Music in recognition of her work, *Partita for 8 Voices*. She studied violin at Rice University and Yale, and composition at Princeton. As a vocalist, she is a member of the Grammy Award winning ensemble, Roomful of Teeth. Between 2014-2015, Shaw was the inaugural Early-Career Musician in Residence at Dumbarton Oaks, the historic estate in Washington, D.C. once owned by the diplomat Robert Woods Bliss, and his wife, arts patron Mildred Bliss. The house, which once played host to meetings between international delegates that blossomed into the United Nations, was given to Harvard University and functions as a research and cultural hub.

Shaw writes about *Entr'acte*:

“*Entr'acte* was written in 2011 after hearing the Brentano Quartet play Haydn’s Op. 77 No. 2 — with their spare and soulful shift to the D-flat major trio in the minuet. It is structured like a minuet and trio, riffing on that classical form but taking it a little further. I love the way some music (like the minuets of Op. 77) suddenly takes you to the other side of Alice’s looking glass, in a kind of absurd, subtle, technicolor transition.”

Programme notes by Kathryn J Allwine Bacasmot

Barber

Knoxville: Summer of 1915

When Eleanor Steber asked Barber to write for her a movement for soprano and orchestra, he selected a passage from the poem *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* by James Agee, for his text. In it a small boy, lying in the grass at his home in Knoxville, Tennessee, listens to the sounds around him. He hears the “iron moan” of a passing streetcar, with “the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a small malignant spirit set to dog its tracks.” Looking at the sky, he thinks of the sorrows of life on earth, and says a prayer: “May God bless my people, my uncle, my aunt, my mother, my good father...” With this prayer he is put to bed. Agee’s reminiscence is precisely autobiographical, for in 1915 he was six years old.

Samuel Barber contributed to Agee’s poem in prose a perfect setting. It possesses an immediate sense of childhood memories; the singing line is a natural translation of words into music. The child’s train of thought, with its sudden shifts of emotional concentration, is reflected in the

gentle changes in the character of the music. Diatonic modalities, articulated by mysterious cadences and plagal harmonic inflections, create the needed ambiance of nostalgic recollection. Occasional metaharmonies and the pointed sharpness of the rhythms do not perturb the luminous euphony of the music. There are also touches of illustrative onomatopoeia, as in the unusual effect of pizzicati glissando in the lower strings to represent the electric sparks of the streetcar antenna.

Knoxville was performed for the first time by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Serge Koussevitzky, on April 9, 1948. Eleanor Steber was the soloist.

Programme notes by Nicolas Slonimsky

Menotti

Nocturne

This brief, 5legiac work was written to pay homage to Lincoln Center benefactress Alice Tully, and was premiered there on October 24 1982. The text is Menotti's own, with thoughts of life, aging, death and rebirth. Being a nocturne – a night-piece – it is a modern-day lullaby, the end of day or life and it is faced with a serene, childlike acceptance of the inevitable. This is reflected in smooth tranquil music that never impedes the flowing pace of the work.

Programme note from stepnote.com

Barber

Adagio for Strings

No major American composer of the twentieth century was a more ardent and eloquent champion of a lyrical, accessible, yet modern idiom, than Samuel Barber. His musical style is founded in the romantic traditions of the nineteenth century, whose harmonic language and formal structures were his point of departure. Unlike so many of his peers, he was not powerfully swayed by the modernism emanating from Europe after World War I, but pursued his own path.

Consistently a lyrical composer throughout his career, it is telling that his songs constitute about two-thirds of his compositions in number. His vocal works include two major operas, *Vanessa* (1956), and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1966), the latter composed for the opening of the Metropolitan Opera House in Lincoln Center. But he also composed at least one work for almost every musical genre, and unlike most composers, he was a recognized and published composer from his student days on. At the age of twenty-one his overture to *The School for*

Scandal was an instant success, was forthwith published, and remains in the standard repertoire.

Though his choral music and solo vocal music are concert mainstays, the *Adagio for Strings* is undoubtedly his most well-known work. It is the second movement of his *String Quartet*, arranged for string orchestra. In 1936, when he was twenty-six years old, he and his life's partner, the equally distinguished Italian composer, Gian Carlo Menotti, were living in Europe for the summer, and the quartet was written there. The quartet has only three movements, and apparently, the composer knew from the beginning that the slow middle movement was something special. The quartet received its première in Rome in late 1936, but Barber revised the last movement the next year before its first performance in the U.S. Even before all this, it is apparent that Barber had recognized the gold of the middle movement, and extracted the movement, arranging it for string orchestra right away in 1936. In this full, lush guise the composer sent the full score to Toscanini in early 1938, and soon received it back with no comment. That was a bit irksome, and Barber felt slightly offended, but soon all was put right, as the legendary conductor soon informed Barber that he had memorized the complete score, and sent it back as a courtesy. Toscanini conducted the première of the string orchestra version in November of 1938 in a live radio broadcast (a recording was made) from Rockefeller Center, and the rest is history, so to speak. It went on to take its place as a very special composition in the American psyche, and like the "Nimrod" variation from Elgar's *Enigma Variations* in Great Britain, a performance of the *Adagio for Strings* is almost mandatory for moments of great national reflection and grief.

It is a relatively simple work, like much great art, but concomitantly is also the stunning application of genius and inspiration in its creation. A straightforward melody enters after a unison low B^b in the violins and a rich response from the low strings. Composed of a searching three-note figure and a descending scale and return, this idea is passed around the orchestra in a dialogue of string voices. Beneath it all, a rich bed of ever-shifting harmonies sustains. Barber makes much of the homogeneous timbre of the string section—like great, unaccompanied vocal choruses—to "sneak" remarkable dissonance and its resolution into the texture. And of course, it is this very commonplace of music technique that produces much of what has always been perceived as beauty, in this case, wrenching beauty. Expressive upward leaps in the melodic line, resolving to ever-shifting harmonies, mostly complete the picture, as the instruments—and the tension—climb higher and higher. An ever-changing pulse contributes to the unease, as the soaring climax is reached. A few dramatic chords, a pause, and Barber returns to a brief restatement of the beginning. As it ends, impossibly softly, there is no traditional harmonic resolution, but concludes with a "hanging" chord, with no real sense of finality. It could not better mirror the irresolution of existence, grief, and human lives.

Texts

Agee

Knoxville: Summer of 1915

(The following text was selected by Barber from James Agee's poem, *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, it uses around a third of the original poem. Agee published his poem in *The Partisan Review*, but it was later included as a prologue to his novel *A Death in the Family*).

...It has become the time of evening when people sit on their porches, rocking gently and talking gently and watching the street and the standing up into their sphere of possession of the trees, of birds' hung havens, hangers. People go by; things go by. A horse, drawing a buggy, breaking his hollow iron music on the asphalt; a loud auto; a quiet auto; people in pairs, not in a hurry, scuffling, switching their weight of aestival body, talking casually, the taste hovering over them of vanilla, strawberry, pasteboard and starched milk, the image upon them of lovers and horsemen, squared with clowns in hueless amber. A streetcar raising its iron moan; stopping; belling and starting; stertorous; rousing and raising again its iron increasing moan and swimming its gold windows and straw seats on past and past and past, the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a small malignant spirit set to dog its tracks; the iron whine rises on rising speed; still risen, faints; halts; the faint stinging bell; rises again, still fainter, fainter, lifting, lifts, faints forgone: forgotten. Now is the night one blue dew.

Now is the night one blue dew, my father has drained, now he has coiled the hose.
Low on the length of lawns, a frailing of fire who breathes...

Parents on porches: rock and rock. From damp strings morning glories hang their ancient faces.

The dry and exalted noise of the locusts from all the air at once enchants my eardrums.

On the rough wet grass of the backyard my father and mother have spread quilts. We all lie there, my mother, my father, my uncle, my aunt, and I too am lying there.... They are not talking much, and the talk is quiet, of nothing in particular, of nothing at all in particular, of nothing at all. The stars are wide and alive, they seem each like a smile of great sweetness, and they seem very near. All my people are larger bodies than mine,... with voices gentle and meaningless like the voice of sleeping birds. One is an artist, he is living at home. One is a musician, she is living at home. One is my mother who is good to me. One is my father who is good to me. By some chance, here they are, all on this earth; and who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth, lying, on quilts, on the grass, in a summer evening, among the sounds of the night. May God bless my people, my uncle, my aunt, my mother, my good father, oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble; and in the hour of their taking away.

After a little I am taken in and put to bed. Sleep, soft smiling, draws me unto her: and those receive me, who quietly treat me, as one familiar and well-beloved in that home: but will not, no, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever tell me who I am.

Menotti

Nocturne

At last I found the night again.
Again I trace my hopes upon a starry sky,
And search the darkness for my fears.
In my stormy youth I lost my night
In hotel rooms and bars.
In drawing rooms and theaters too,
I had lost my night.

Not your kisses nor your lies
Could ever quench the pitiless light
Or could your protecting palm
Shield my staring eyes.
The brittle narrow light of day
Now glides into a smooth infinity,
That melts the loud noise of life
Into singing silence.

Now free at last,
As childhood returns
It brings me back
The dear old phantoms I had slain.

Once more the counseling moon,
Rises unhurriedly
To tame the rebellious sea,
With its golden scarf.

Ella Taylor

Soprano

Described in the Guardian as having ‘a voice of tempered steel, wrapped in a warm velvet cloak’ Ella Taylor is a soprano with a passion for performing contemporary music and works by women and gender non-conforming artists. Winner of the Second Prize at the Kathleen Ferrier awards, they are a graduate of the Royal Academy of Music and the National Opera Studio.

Highlights in 2026 include their Glyndebourne debut, creating the role of **Blaze** in Lucy Armstrong and Olivia Bell’s *Spark*, as well as a return to the Dutch National Opera performing **Lidian** in Shostkovich’s satirical operetta *Cherry Town*. Concert work includes several exciting debuts including Mahler *Symphony No. 8* as **Sop 1/Magna Peccatrix** with the Bournemouth Symphony Chorus, Verdi’s *Requiem* at the Cheltenham Festival, and **First Wood Nymph** in *Rusalka* with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra.

Recent engagements have include **Komponist** in *Ariadne auf Naxos* at the Staatsoper Hamburg and **Fiordiligi** in *Così fan tutte* for Nevill Holt Festival/Opera North. As a regular collaborator with Joe Hisaishi, they have performed *Music from the Studio Ghibli Films* of Hayao Miyazaki in arenas in Europe and Japan, as well as making their Tokyo debut in 2024 performing Hisaishi’s

The End of the World with Future Orchestra Classics at Suntory Hall. They have performed both Mahler *Symphony No. 2* and *Symphony No. 4* with the Philharmonia Orchestra (Bold Tendencies Festival) and Sheffield Philharmonic Orchestra respectively. For the Bold Tendencies Festival, they have also performed Górecki's *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*.

Ella has releases on *Deutsche Grammophon* and *Platoon*, as well as recording vocals as both a soloist for Netflix's *The Twits* (2025) and choir member for the film *The Zone of Interest*. Future releases include a CD with *The Façade Ensemble* on Odradek Records.

Ella Taylor is a keen collaborator and recitalist, making a dedicated effort to work with and perform works by people underrepresented in classical music, as well as working with composers and librettists in the creation of new, LGBT+ focused work. They have given talks about navigating a career as a trans opera singer for various companies and magazines including the Royal Opera House Engender Festival, Place and Space: a TECHNE student-led conference, and Opera Now. A film with Trans Voices Choir (part of London Contemporary Voices) has been released on Guardian Films, which Ella is a founding member of. They were also a soloist at the inaugural *Classical Pride* at the Barbican.

Maren Bosma

Guest Leader

Dutch-American violinist Maren Bosma (1996) received her Bachelor's degree in June 2017 from the Conservatory of Amsterdam, with a minor in Theory of Music. She continued her studies at the Royal College of Music under the tutelage of Daniel Rowland and Gabrielle Lester and received her Master of Music in Performance degree with Distinction in 2019.

Maren is the Concertmaster and Associate Artistic Director of Chromatica Orchestra. A demanded orchestral and chamber musician, she has spent several summers at both the Aspen Music Festival and School (Colorado, USA) and the Pienza Music Festival in Italy, and has been a repeated guest artist at renowned international music festivals such as the Stift International Music Festival, Schiermonnikoog Festival and Thy Chamber Music Festival (Denmark).

She has additionally performed as concertmaster in various Dutch orchestras, including the Netherlands Student Chamber Orchestra (Nesko) and the Netherlands Symphony Project, where she was lauded for her leading role in Mahler's 4th symphony and Strauss' *Morgen*. Maren has held concertmaster and principal positions in the Royal College of Music Symphony Orchestra and the RCM Opera Orchestra, performing under the baton of renowned conductors including Bernard Haitink, John Wilson, and Andrew Gourlay. She was the leader of the London-based Maconchy Quartet from 2017 to 2020 and is a co-founder and director of the London-based ensemble Cat's Cradle Collective.

Alex Fryer

Conductor

Alex is a versatile musician enjoying a varied freelance career as a conductor, oboist, singer and educator. Alex studied at the Royal College of Music, where he graduated with a Master's in oboe performance with distinction, having previously been awarded a First-Class degree in Music from the University of Southampton. In 2019, he joined Sinfonia Smith Square (formerly Southbank Sinfonia) as an oboist for a year-long orchestral fellowship, which included performances at the BBC Proms and broadcasts on BBC Radio 3.

As a conductor, Alex is the Principal Conductor and Artistic Director of the Academy of St Mary-le-Bow, as well as a regular guest conductor with the Hertfordshire Chamber Orchestra. He has worked with many other ensembles, including Southbank Sinfonia, Southern Sinfonia, the Cantus Ensemble and Cambridge Youth Opera, the New Cambridge Symphony Orchestra, as well as both the University Symphony and Chamber Orchestras at Southampton.

Alex enjoys devising interesting and original programmes and finding new ways of presenting traditional repertoire. Recent projects have included: Stravinsky's *Firebird* and Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* with newly devised narration, music from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* interspersed with excerpts from notable productions/films, a concert inspired by the ocean presented by a marine biologist from the Natural History Museum and a version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for actor, orchestra and voices using Mendelssohn's incidental music.

As a Music Leader/Presenter and educator, Alex has worked on projects alongside the Royal Opera House, Sinfonia Smith Square and The Bridge at Waterloo. Alex trained in education and participation work on the Pathway Scheme with Wigmore Hall Learning and on the Trainee Music Leader Scheme with Spitalfields Music. Alex currently coaches young musicians with the Music in Secondary Schools Trust and is a Creative Learning Specialist working in primary schools with the Artis Foundation.

The Academy of St Mary-le-Bow

The Academy of St Mary-le-Bow is a unique ensemble of outstanding musicians. Brought together by their love of high-quality orchestral music-making, members of the orchestra have studied at leading conservatoires or universities, been part of prestigious organisations such as the National Youth Orchestra, or previously worked as professional orchestral players, but now

professionally pursue careers outside music. The ensemble provides these players with the opportunity to keep making orchestral music to the highest standard with like-minded players.

The orchestra ensemble performs around six major concerts a year across the city and holds a residency at the historic church of St Mary-le-Bow in the City of London. The ensemble is flexible in number, enjoying a huge variety of repertoire from well-known symphonic masterworks to more intimate concerts of Baroque and Classical repertoire and chamber music. Though the ensemble is regularly directed by its Artistic Director, Alex Fryer, it also frequently engages guest conductors and guest leaders for un-conducted performances. Recent highlights have included Vaughan Williams' A Sea Symphony with a chorus of 150 singers at Smith Square Hall, performances of Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra and Miraculous Mandarin, Beethoven's 6th Symphony directed from the violin by Britten Sinfonia's Alexandra Caldon and Stravinsky's Firebird and Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker performed with newly devised narration.

The Orchestra

Violin I

Maren Bosma*
Daniel Rainey
Ellen Dunn
Wendi Wang
Ermos Chrysochos
Tory Sawyer
Cathy Yoon

Violin II

Chloe Rush
Hattie Hunter
Charlotte Strivens
Sergei Batishchev
Sophia Goode
Camilla Fletcher

Viola

Jay Boyd
Ed Daley
Annabel Bainbridge
Claire Everson

'Cello

Morgan Jones
Natasha Wilcockson
Natalie Bevan
George Delfas

Double Bass

James Kiln
Eleanor Roberts

Flute

Rebecca Pozzuto

Oboe

Kaija Lappi

Clarinet

Alexander Card

Bassoon

Grace Harvey

Horn

Myrddin Rees Davies
Tom Allard

Trumpet

Tom Kearsey

Harp

Chris Clarke

* Denotes guest

Become a Friend

Joining the Academy of St Mary-le-Bow Friends Scheme costs just £50 a year. All funds go towards the running of the orchestra which allows us to put on an exciting and varied programme of events. In return, Friends receive a number of benefits including:

- Entrance into a prize draw to win free concert tickets
- 2 discounted tickets per concert (if you don't win the draw)
- A free drink per concert
- A special acknowledgement in our programme
- Reserved seating (upon request)

If you're interested in becoming a friend, please visit our website or email friends@academyofstmarylebow.com.

Many thanks to our current friends: Martine and Paul Allard, Julia Caddick, Charles Durose, Stephen and Jackie Fryer, Anne Harvey, Janet High, Steve and Nandita Nelson, Tom Walford, Geraldine Evans, Matthew and Anna Jones, Barbara Lynch, Victoria Moore-Gillon, Jonathan Matheson, Margaret Burt, and Dewi Rees.

Upcoming Concerts

Per amore dell'Italia

2 July 2026

St Jude's NW11 7AH | Conductor: Alex Fryer | Viola: Timothy Ridout

Rossini – The Barber of Seville: Overture

Respighi (arr. Fryer) – Fountains of Rome P 106

Hummel – Potpourri op. 94 (HN 838)

Mendelssohn – Symphony No. 4 in A major, Op. 90 “Italian”