

Meridian

Timepieces  
Elysian Singers

Director - Sam Laughton

CDE 84627

Meridian

A Natural Sound Recording

CDE 84627

TT 65'42"



LC 13637



MCPS



Recorded in the church of  
St. Edward the Confessor, London.  
25th - 27th Oct 2013

Recorded by **Richard Hughes**  
Produced by **Susanne Stanzeleit**  
Assistant Engineer **Alex Gettinby**

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## timepieces

Ian Stephens: Timepieces (2011) première recording\*

- |     |               |      |
|-----|---------------|------|
| [1] | Domesday Song | 4:36 |
| [2] | Our bias      | 4:10 |
| [3] | Funeral Blues | 8:28 |

David Lumsdaine: Five Travelling Songs (2012)

- |     |                     |      |
|-----|---------------------|------|
| [4] | Warning to Children | 1:23 |
| [5] | Diamond cut Diamond | 1:55 |
| [6] | I Wot What Not      | 1:05 |
| [7] | Three Young Rats    | 0:49 |
| [8] | Roman Wall Blues    | 2:45 |

Paul Stanhope: Exile Lamentations (2008, rev. 2013)

- |      |                  |      |
|------|------------------|------|
| [9]  | Eykhah           | 7:29 |
| [10] | Deserts of Exile | 9:35 |
| [11] | Lament           | 4:44 |

Philip Glass: Three Songs (1984)

- |      |                                  |      |
|------|----------------------------------|------|
| [12] | There are some men               | 3:36 |
| [13] | Quand les hommes vivront d'amour | 2:35 |
| [14] | Pierre de soleil                 | 3:35 |

Philip Stopford

- |      |                             |      |
|------|-----------------------------|------|
| [15] | Ave, Regina Coelorum (2011) | 4:52 |
|------|-----------------------------|------|

Per Nørgård

- |      |                                        |      |
|------|----------------------------------------|------|
| [16] | Halleluja - vor Gud er forrykt! (1982) | 3:52 |
|------|----------------------------------------|------|

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\*Saxophone - Kenji Fenton

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This recording gathers together six contemporary choral works with which the Elysian Singers have a close connection. Two were commissioned (or co-commissioned) by the choir, two received their first performance, and the other two their UK première. The composers are a diverse group, both geographically and chronologically, ranging from two younger-generation British writers (Ian Stephens and Philip Stopford), through celebrated composers from Denmark (Per Nørgård) and the USA (Philip Glass), to leading composers from two generations of the Australian school (David Lumsdaine and Paul Stanhope). There are some serendipitous relationships between the various works : 'Timepieces' sets poetry by W.H. Auden, as does 'Roman Wall Blues', one of the 'Five Travelling Songs'; the sometimes comic spirit of the latter is echoed in 'Halleluja – vor Gud er forrykt!', itself something of a parody of the sort of sacred text used in 'Ave, Regina Caelorum'; familiar sacred Latin texts are similarly deployed in 'Exile Lamentations', though in a more challenging style; and there is surely some parallel between the Palestinian poetry used here and the admittedly more optimistic view of twentieth-century humanity found in 'Three Songs'. The choir is immensely proud to have played a small part in bringing these wonderful works before the wider public.

**Timepieces** (2011)

Words by W.H. Auden

Music by Ian Stephens (b.1974)

(première recording)

Saxophone - Kenji Fenton

Commissioned by Sam Laughton and the Elysian Singers with the aid of a generous grant from the PRS for Music Foundation. Texts used with the permission of the Estate of W.H. Auden. First performed by the Elysian Singers and Kenji Fenton conducted by Sam Laughton on 1 March 2011 at St Peter's Eaton Square, London.

Ian Stephens writes: 'I have known Sam Laughton since 1998, when I first started going to Pigotts Music Camp, an inspirational place in the Chiltern Hills. Over the last decade I have been lucky enough to have Sam conduct a number of my pieces at Pigotts. In 2006 he read through my partsong *For Instance* with the Elysian Singers. On the strength of this, in 2009 Sam and the choir commissioned me to write a new work on texts by Auden, to fit into a concert programme devoted to Auden settings. Sam asked me to include a part for a solo instrument of my choice, though not a chordal instrument such as piano, harp or guitar. After some deliberation I decided on the alto saxophone, partly because it's an instrument I adore, partly for its great expressive potential, and partly for its huge dynamic range, from the most delicate, fragile sound to an uncompromising stridency, able to be heard above a whole choir singing at its loudest. I heard Kenji Fenton's fluid and versatile playing in 2009 in a concert I had written for in Liverpool, and his name immediately sprang to mind when I was asked who I would like to play the saxophone part. After a long process of reading and narrowing-down, Sam and I agreed on which poems I would set. I have responded to Auden's wonderful language in the overall mood of each poem, often by reflecting the ebb and flow of emotion, though only rarely on the level of specific words. Though each song is a separate entity, with a distinct character and pace, a number of themes and twists of harmony run throughout the set, drawing them together.'

**1. Domesday Song**

Jumbled in one common box  
Of their dark stupidity,  
Orchid, swan, and Caesar lie;  
Time that tires of everyone  
Has corroded all the locks,  
Thrown away the key for fun.

In its cleft the torrent mocks  
Prophets who in days gone by  
Made a profit on each cry,  
Persona grata now with none;  
And a jackass language shocks  
Poets who can only pun.

Silence settles on the clocks;  
Nursing mothers point a sly  
Index finger at a sky,  
Crimson with the setting sun;  
In the valley of the fox  
Gleams the barrel of a gun.

Once we could have made the docks,  
Now it is too late to fly;  
Once too often you and I  
Did what we should not have done;  
Round the rampant rugged rocks  
Rude and ragged rascals run.

## 2. Our bias

The hour-glass whispers to the lion's roar,  
The clock-towers tell the gardens day and night  
How many errors Time has patience for,  
How wrong they are in being always right.

Yet Time, however loud its chimes or deep,  
However fast its falling torrent flows,  
Has never put one lion off his leap  
Nor shaken the assurance of a rose.

For they, it seems, care only for success:  
While we choose words according to their sound  
And judge a problem by its awkwardness;

And Time with us was always popular.  
When have we not preferred some going round  
To going straight to where we are?

## Five Travelling Songs (2012)

Music by David Lumsdaine (b.1931)  
(première recording)

First performed by the Elysian Singers, conducted by Sam Laughton on 6 October 2012 at Unitarian Chapel, St Saviourgate, York as part of York Late Music.

David Lumsdaine writes: 'These songs originated in 1953, and though the original manuscripts were lost, they have stayed in my ear; so they're 'travelling songs' in the sense that I've carried them round with me in my journey across the years. *Warning to Children* was one of '5 Moral Songs' for tenor, male voice choir and two pianos, composed just after my first arrival in England. This version has been radically reimagined for choir, yet retains the quodlibet style of jostling counterpoint which characterised the original. The other four songs were originally part of a sundry collection which arose, in November 1953, as tunes which could be sung by the friends I lived with and myself, to revive our spirits during my first season of London fogs. (The collection was referred to then as 'undaunted songs'.)

## 3. Funeral blues

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone.  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,  
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead  
Scribbling in the sky the message He is Dead,  
Put crêpe bows round the white necks of the public doves,  
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,  
My working week and my Sunday rest,  
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;  
I thought that love would last forever, I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;  
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;  
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;  
For nothing now can ever come to any good.



**1. Warning to Children**

Words by Robert Graves

Children, if you dare to think  
Of the greatness, rareness, muchness  
Fewness of this precious only  
Endless world in which you say  
You live, you think of things like this:  
Blocks of slate enclosing dappled  
Red and green, enclosing tawny  
Yellow nets, enclosing white  
And black acres of dominoes,  
Where a neat brown paper parcel  
Tempts you to untie the string.  
In the parcel a small island,  
On the island a large tree,  
On the tree a husky fruit.  
Strip the husk and pare the rind off:  
In the kernel you will see  
Blocks of slate enclosed by dappled  
Red and green, enclosed by tawny

Yellow nets, enclosed by white  
And black acres of dominoes,  
Where the same brown paper parcel -  
Children, leave the string alone!  
For who dares undo the parcel  
Finds himself at once inside it,  
On the island, in the fruit,  
Blocks of slate about his head,  
Finds himself enclosed by dappled  
Green and red, enclosed by yellow  
Tawny nets, enclosed by black  
And white acres of dominoes,  
With the same brown paper parcel  
Still untied upon his knee.  
And, if he then should dare to think  
Of the fewness, muchness, rareness,  
Greatness of this endless only  
Precious world in which he says  
he lives - he then unties the string.

**2. Diamond cut Diamond**

Words by Ewart Milne

Two cats  
One up a tree  
One under the tree  
The cat up a tree is he  
The cat under the tree is she  
The tree is wych elm just incidentally.  
He takes no notice of she, she takes no notice of he.  
He stares at the woolly clouds passing, she stares at the tree.  
There's been a lot written about cats, by Old Possum, Yeats and Company,  
But not Alfred de Musset or Lord Tennyson or Poe or anybody  
Wrote about one cat under, and one cat up, a tree.  
God knows why this should be left to me  
Except I like cats as cats be  
Especially one cat up  
And one cat under  
A wych elm  
Tree.



### 3. I Wot What Not

Words by Ewart Milne

Of all the dates I wis one wert  
of all dates most unkind  
Which wert the date comes up the street  
with the date you leave behind

Of all the dukes to shake I wis  
one wert no shakes to meet  
Which wert I wot not how he stands  
and wis not where his feet

### 4. Three Young Rats

Words: traditional

Three young rats with black felt hats,  
Three young ducks with white straw flats,  
Three young dogs with curling tails,  
Three young cats with demi-veils,  
Went out to walk with three young pigs  
In satin vests and sorrel wigs,  
But suddenly it chanced to rain  
And so they all went home again.

### Exile Lamentations (2008, rev.2013)

Music by Paul Stanhope (b.1969)  
(première recording)

Co-commissioned by the Elysian Singers, Melbourne Symphony Chorus and Sydney Chamber Choir. First performed by the Elysian Singers conducted by Sam Laughton on 15 May 2009 in St Pancras Church, London as part of the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music.

Solos: Helly Seeley, Francesca Trundle, Stephen Cvicic, Dan Rollison

Paul Stanhope writes: *'Exile Lamentations* is a triptych of choral pieces which reflect upon the experience of displacement, homelessness and banishment. The starting point is found in the Lamentations of Jeremiah, which play an important part in both Christian and Jewish traditions. The first piece, 'Eykhah', (literally 'how', but also the Hebrew name for the book of Lamentations) uses fragments of a traditional Hebrew cantillation. Over low bass drones, this opening conjures a mournful tone. The same text is then set in English (as though it were a contemporary poem) in order to dramatise and bring alive the experience of the ancient Israelites, forced from their homeland. In 'Deserts of Exile', Palestinian-born poet Jabra Ibrahim-Jabra provides a powerful personal chronicle of the experience of exile in the wake of the partition of Israel and Palestine after World War II. Although the poem

### 5. Roman Wall Blues

Words by W.H. Auden

Over the heather the wet wind blows,  
I've lice in my tunic and a cold in my nose.  
The rain keeps pattering out of the sky,  
I'm a Wall soldier, I don't know why.  
The mist creeps over the hard grey stone,  
My girl's in Tungria; I sleep alone.  
Aulus goes hanging around her place.  
I don't like his manners. I don't like his face.  
Piso's a Christian, he worships a fish;  
There'd be no kissing if he had his wish.  
She gave me a ring and I dived it away;  
I want my girl and I want my pay.  
When I'm a veteran with only one eye  
I shall do nothing but look at the sky.





alludes to a people being forced from their homes and land in a particular historical context, it presents more universal themes of the ruin caused by arbitrary political decisions and the resultant human cost. Juxtaposed against the contemporary text (translated from the original Arabic into English) are further fragments of the Lamentations, sung in Latin. This virtuosic movement weaves a large tapestry of choral sounds including solos, rhythmic chanting and more free-sounding sections. The final reflective 'Lament' is similar in its approach, with a contemporary (and very personal) text by Tariq Sayigh sung in English mostly by a soprano and tenor duet over a chanted Latin text from the rest of the choir. As the piece builds, the choral textures take over, bringing the piece to a brief and dramatic climax before a more introspective end. Although it is impossible to ignore the contemporary politics of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, my idea in this piece has not been to make an overt statement. Rather, I invite the listener to draw their own meanings from the interaction of the various texts. My intention has been to underline the human experience through the music, and leave the listener to draw their own conclusions.'

### 1. Eykhah

(Words from Lamentations I:1-2)

*Eykhah yash'va vadad ha'ir rabatiam hay'tah  
K'almanah, rabati vagoyim, sarati bam'dinot hay'tah  
lmas.*

How deserted lies the city, once so full of people!  
How like a widow she is, who was once great among  
the nations!  
She who was queen among the provinces has now  
become a slave.

*Bakho tivke balay'lah ...*

Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are upon her cheeks.  
Among all her lovers there is none to comfort her.  
All her friends have betrayed her; they have become  
her enemies.

### 2. Deserts of Exile

(Words adapted from 'In the Deserts of Exile' by Jabra-  
Ibrahim Jabra, translated by Mounah A. Khoury and  
Hamid Algar, and from Lamentations I: 3-5)

In the Deserts of Exile  
Spring after spring,  
What are we doing with our love, While our eyes are full  
of dust and rime?

*Migravit ludas propter afflictionem, et multitudinem  
servitutis: habitavit inter gentes, nec invenit  
requiem.*

[Judah has migrated because of affliction and great  
servitude. She has lived among the nations and not  
found rest.]

Our Palestine, green land of ours;  
Its flowers as if embroidered of women's gowns;  
March adorns its hills  
With the jewel-like peony and narcissus;  
April bursts open in its plains  
With flowers and bride-like blossoms;  
May is our rustic song  
Which we sing at noon,  
In the blue shadows,  
Among the olive-trees of our valleys,  
And in the ripeness of the fields  
We wait for the promise of July  
And the joyous dance amidst the harvest.



*Viae Sion lugent eo quod non sint qui veniant ad sollemnitatem omnes portae eius destructae sacerdotes gementes virgines eius squalidae et ipsa oppressa amaritudinē.*

[The ways of Sion mourn, because there are none that come to the solemn feast: all her gates are broken down; her priests sigh; her virgins are in affliction; and she is oppressed with bitterness.]

O land of ours where our childhood passed  
Like dreams in the shade of the orange-grove,  
Among almond-trees in the valleys -  
Remember us now wandering  
Among the thorns of the desert,  
Wandering in rocky mountains;  
Remember us now  
In the tumult of cities beyond deserts and seas;  
Remember us  
With our eyes full of dust  
That never clears in our ceaseless wandering.  
They crushed the flowers on the hills around us,  
Destroyed the houses over our heads,  
Scattered our torn remains,  
Then unfolded the desert before us,  
With valleys writhing in hunger  
And blue shadows shattered into red thorn  
Bent over corpses left as prey for falcon and crow.

*Facti sunt hostes eius in capite inimici illius locupletati sunt. Parvuli eius ducti sunt captivi. Omnes persecutores eius apprehenderunt eam inter angustias.*

[Her adversaries are become her lords; her enemies are enriched; her children are led into captivity. All of her persecutors have apprehended her, amid torments,]  
In the Deserts of Exile,  
Only the dust hisses in our face,  
Spring after spring.  
What then, what are we doing with our love?  
When our eyes are full of dust and rime?

### 3. Lament

(Words from 'Lament' by Tawfiq Sayigh, and Lamentations 1:7)

*Recordata est Ierusalem dierum afflictionis suae, et praevaricationis omnium desiderabilium suorum, quae habuerat a diebus antiquis, cum caderet populus eius in manu hostili, et non esset auxiliator. Viderunt eam hostes, et deriserunt Sabata eius.*

[Jerusalem has remembered the days of her affliction and the betrayal of all her desirable ones, whom she held from the days of antiquity, when her people fell into the hand of the enemy, and there was no one to be a helper. The adversaries saw her, and did mock at her sabbaths.]

My feet are torn,  
and homelessness has worn me out.  
Park seats have left their marks  
on my ribs.  
Policemen followed me  
with their suspicious looks.  
I dragged myself from place to place,  
destitute except for  
day-long memories of a home  
that yesterday, only yesterday,  
was mine,  
And except for evening dreams  
of my dwelling there again.



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**Three Songs** (1984)


Music by Philip Glass (b.1937)

UK première given by the Elysian Singers, conducted by Matthew Greenall, in 1993.

One of Glass's few unaccompanied choral settings, these miniatures based on the writings of Canadian poets reveal some of the most attractive and characteristic aspects of his minimalist style. The set was commissioned for the 450th anniversary of the first claim by France to Canadian land in 1534.

**1. There are some men**

Words by Leonard Cohen



There are some men  
who should have mountains  
to bear their names through time.  
Grave markers are not high enough  
or green  
and sons go far away  
to lose the fist  
their father's hand will always seem.  
I had a friend:  
he lived and died in mighty silence  
and with dignity,  
left no book son or lover to mourn.  
Nor is this a mourning-song  
but only a naming of this mountain  
on which I walk,  
fragrant, dark and softly white  
under the pale of mist.  
I name this mountain after him.

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## 2. Quand les hommes vivront d'amour

Words by Raymond Lévesque

*Quand les hommes vivront d'amour  
Il n'y aura plus de misère  
Et commenceront les beaux jours  
Mais nous nous serons morts, mon frère  
Quand les hommes vivront d'amour  
Ce sera la paix sur la terre  
Les soldats seront troubadours  
Mais nous nous serons morts mon frère  
Dans la grande chaîne de la vie  
Où il fallait que nous passions  
Où il fallait que nous soyons  
Nous aurons eu la mauvaise partie.  
Quand les hommes vivront ...  
Mais quand les hommes vivront d'amour  
Qui'l n'y aura plus de misère  
Peut-être songeront-ils un jour  
A nous qui serons morts, mon frère  
Nous qui aurons aux mauvais jours  
Dans la haine et puis dans la guerre  
Cherché la paix, cherché l'amour  
Qu'ils connaîtront alors mon frère  
Dans la grande chaîne de la vie  
Pour qu'il y ait un meilleur temps  
Il faut toujours quelque perdants  
De la sagesse ici bas c'est le prix  
Quand les hommes ...*

When men live in brotherly love  
There will be no more misery  
And the good days will begin  
But as for us, we shall be long gone, my brother  
When men live in brotherly love  
There will be peace on earth  
Soldiers will be troubadours  
But as for us, we shall be long gone my brother  
Through the course of this life  
Which we had to experience  
In which we had to play a part  
We were dealt a bad hand.  
When men live ...  
But when men live in brotherly love  
And there is no more misery  
Perhaps they will think one day  
Of us who are no longer, my brother  
We who in bad times  
In hatred and then in war  
Looked for peace, looked for love  
Which they will know my brother  
Through the course of this life  
To have a better time  
There always have to be some losers  
That's the price you pay for wisdom  
When men live ...



### 3. Pierre de soleil

Words by Octavio Paz

- *la vie, quand fut-elle vraiment nôtre?  
quand sommes-nous vraiment ce que nous sommes?  
En vérité, seuls, nous ne sommes pas,  
nous ne sommes jamais sinon vertige et vide,  
jamais la vie n'est nôtre, elle est aux autres,  
la vie n'est à personne, nous sommes tous  
la vie - pain de soleil pour les autres,  
tous les autres que nous sommes -,  
sortir de moi, me chercher parmi les autres,  
les autres qui ne sont pas si je n'existe pas,  
les autres qui me donnent existence,  
il n'y a pas de moi, toujours nous sommes nous autres,  
la vie est autre, toujours là-bas, plus loin,  
hors de toi, de moi, toujours horizon.*

when was life really ours?  
when are we really what we are?  
in truth as individuals we do not exist,  
we never exist except as dizziness and emptiness,  
life is never ours, it belongs to others,  
life doesn't belong to any one individual, we are all  
life - we nurture one another,  
all the others whom we are -,  
let me come out of myself, look for me amongst the others,  
the others who are not if I don't exist,  
the others who give me existence,  
there is no me, it is always us  
life is others, always over there, further away,  
beyond you, beyond me, always on the horizon.



### **Ave, regina caelorum** (2011)

Words: anonymous

Music by Philip Stopford (b.1977)

Composed for the Elysian Singers, and first performed by them under the composer's direction on 4 September 2011 in Salisbury Cathedral.

This is a quietly ecstatic setting of one of the four Marian antiphons dating back to at least the 12th century.

*Ave, Regina coelorum,  
Ave, Domina Angelorum,  
Salve, radix, salve, porta,  
Ex qua mundo lux est orta:*

Hail, O Queen of Heaven,  
Hail, O Lady of Angels,  
Hail! thou root, hail! thou gate,  
From whom unto the world, a light has arisen.

*Gaude, Virgo gloriosa,  
Super omnes speciosa:  
Vale, O valde decora,  
Et pro nobis, Christum exora.*

Rejoice, O glorious Virgin,  
Lovely beyond all others,  
Farewell, most beautiful maiden,  
And pray for us to Christ.

**Halleluja – vor Gud er forrykt!** (1982)

Words by Adolf Wölfli (translated by Poul Borum)

Melody by Adolf Wölfli

Arranged by Per Nørgård (b.1932)

UK première given by the Elysian Singers, conducted by Sam Laughton, on 8 July 2000 in Hoxton Hall, London, as part of the Hoxton New Music Days.

This is an arrangement of the tragicomic closing number of Nørgård's opera 'The Divine Circus', based on the life and work of Adolf Wölfli, a poet-artist who spent most of his adult life in a mental hospital in Switzerland in the early years of the twentieth century.

*Halleluja, vor Gud er forrykt!*

*Svansende piger er krummet stygt!*

*Jeg gi'r ikke hånd til Den Onde Mand!*

*Gud vogte og signe Vort Fædrene Land!*

*Og når din tid her på Jord er forbi,*

*man ingen sorg vil dig vie'.*

*Så lyder i højen sky mit skrig:*

*At jeg har elsket dig usigelig!*

Hallelujah, our Lord has gone mad!

Hip-swaying girls, they're so bold and bad!

I'll certainly not give the Devil my hand!

God bless and guard our dear Fatherland!

And when your life on this earth's at an end,

There's no one here who will scorn you.

My cry, loud and clear, then the heavens will rend:

That I unspeakably did love you!



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## THE ELYSIAN SINGERS

### SOPRANOS

Alice Ruffie  
Anne Taylor  
Harriet Gritton  
Helen Dickinson  
Helly Seeley  
Jo Reynolds  
Lois Gallagher  
Sally de Frates  
Sarah Hale

### ALTOS

Anne Webster  
Charlotte Lary  
Francesca Trundle  
Heather Devine  
Jo Dew-Jones

### TENORS

Antoine Sazio  
Ben Finn  
Richard Warren  
Stephen Cvic

### BASSES

Christopher Whitehouse  
Dan Rollison  
Mike Chambers  
Paul Kiang



### SAM LAUGHTON

A former organ scholar at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, where he read music, Sam Laughton now juggles dual careers as a musician and a barrister. He is Musical Director of the Elysian Singers, with whom he has made frequent appearances on BBC radio and television, and made a number of acclaimed commercial recordings. He is also the Musical Director of the Craswall Players, the Chiltern Camerata, the Trinity Camerata and the Speen Festival. Sam is in demand as a guest conductor, working with such orchestras as the Oxford Sinfonia, Kensington Chamber Orchestra, Kew Sinfonia, Orchestra of the City, and Crendon Chamber Orchestra. And as a keyboard player he has also worked with groups as varied as Oxford Philomusica, the Joyful Company of Singers, English National Opera and Garsington Opera.

### KENJI FENTON

Kenji Fenton grew up in Stevenage, and studied the clarinet from the age of seven, later taking up the saxophone. From a young age he took an active part in County Music activities where he picked up numerous awards including the Bob Gibbons Jazz Award and the 1999 North Herts Young Musician of the Year. Kenji received tuition at the RNCM and became the only person ever to win the college's Jazz Improvisation Prize twice, in 2002 (Brown Shipley) and in 2004 (Bruntwood). He works extensively as a freelance musician, and plays in his Jazz sextet 6PAC, whilst also playing with pianists, funk bands, big bands and even DJs around the UK. He graduated from the RNCM in 2004 with an individual PPRNCM diploma as well as his degree.

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The Elysian Singers of London, under musical director Sam Laughton, is one of the UK's leading chamber choirs. Known for its adventurous programming and imaginative repertoire, the choir gives concerts both in and outside London, and has recorded widely acclaimed CDs. The Elysians pride themselves on maintaining consistently high performance standards, but a friendly and relaxed atmosphere is also regarded as essential for attracting and keeping good singers. Founded in 1986 by Matthew Greenall, the group quickly developed a special interest in contemporary music, giving the world premières of works by John Woolrich, Howard Skempton, John Habron, Paul Stanhope, David Lumsdaine and Sir John Tavener who, from 2002 until his death in 2013, was the choir's Patron. Matthew was succeeded as music director by Sam Laughton in 2000. London premières in recent years include works by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, James MacMillan, James Whitbourn and Henryk Górecki. The choir regularly performs Baroque and Romantic masterpieces at venues such as St. Martin-in-the-Fields and St. John's Smith Square, and sings with guest conductors, most notably Jeremy Summerly. It has also participated in numerous festivals around the country, including the Spitalfields Festival, the Corsham Festival, the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music, the Malcolm Arnold Festival, the York Late Music concert series and the English Music Festival. In 2008 it took part in a performance of Elizabeth Maconchy's rarely-heard masterpiece 'Héloïse and Abelard' at LSO St. Luke's. In 2004 the Elysians released a CD of music by James MacMillan – 'Cantos Sagrados' – which received a 5-star rating from BBC Music Magazine. Reviewing 'Songs of the Isles', the choir's 2009 Bantock release, the same publication spoke of the Elysians' 'young, fresh-toned voices, brightly attentive to text without becoming over-punctilious'. There have been numerous radio and television broadcasts, including the first broadcast performances of Henryk Górecki's 'Miserere' and 'Three Lullabies' on BBC Radio 3, the finals of the Sainsbury's Choir of the Year competition at the Albert Hall, and BBC2's Lesley Garrett Easter Special. Twice in 2011, the choir performed live on Radio 3's 'In Tune', first introducing the première of its latest commission, 'Timepieces' by Ian Stephens, and later the choir's new CD, 'The Spirit of Christmas Present', released on Meridian. In January 2012 the choir was invited to present a lunchtime concert in the Royal Festival Hall foyer as part of the Southbank's Festival of Death. And in March 2014 it took part in the Gala Concert at the Royal Festival Hall (broadcast live on BBC Radio 3) celebrating the restoration of the organ, performing a specially commissioned work by the late Sir John Tavener, 'Monument for Beethoven'.



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