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CLASSICS

# THE TRAVELLER EARTH & SKY

Alec Roth • Vikram Seth



Ex Cathedra  
Britten Sinfonía

Jeffrey Skidmore *conductor*

Philippe Honoré *violin*

Mark Padmore *tenor*

Vayu Naidu *speaker*

# THE TRAVELLER · EARTH AND SKY

ALEC ROTH (B. 1948) · VIKRAM SETH (B. 1952)

## The Traveller

1	Part 1. Unborn	[5.36]
2	Part 2. Child	[8.07]
3	Part 3. Youth	[8.30]
4	Part 4. Adult	[8.10]
5	Part 5. Old	[8.53]
6	Part 6. Dead	[10.01]
7	Part 7. Epilogue	[3.10]

## EX CATHEDRA · BRITTEN SINFONIA

JEFFREY SKIDMORE CONDUCTOR · MARK PADMORE TENOR (THE POET)  
PHILIPPE HONORÉ VIOLIN (THE TRAVELLER) · VAYU NAIDU SPEAKER

8	<b>Earth and Sky</b>	[9.56]
	Total timings:	[62.26]

EX CATHEDRA SENIOR ACADEMY OF VOCAL MUSIC & SCHOLARS  
JAMES KEEFE PIANO · PERCUSSIONISTS OF THE BRITTEN SINFONIA  
JEFFREY SKIDMORE CONDUCTOR

## INTRODUCTION

Alec Roth has been Ex Cathedra's *de facto* composer-in-residence for 15 years. He is a friend, a valued colleague and a trusted adviser. There is so much to learn from working so closely with a distinguished composer and it has been a great privilege. He explains how this extraordinary relationship began:

*I dodged into a record shop to escape the rain. Over the speakers came intriguingly beautiful music. I just had to know what it was, and came away with the New World Symphonies CD. Sometime later, considering which choir to use for a commission, I remembered Ex Cathedra. But were they as good live as on disc? I heard them in Durham Cathedral, slipping in to observe the rehearsal. The concert was wonderful, but the rehearsal was the deciding factor. Here was a group whose approach to music-making was so inspiring that I wanted to be part of it.*

Alec Roth wrote this about our performance in November 2005. In July of the following year I similarly had sneaked into a rehearsal in Lichfield Cathedral of his 2006 commission *Songs in Time of War* and had been impressed by the beauty of what I heard, his extraordinary awareness of

subtle colours, textures, patterns, and delicate sonorities. And by his constant attention to detail, even at the third performance! We performed his *Lullaby Carol* at 'Candlelight' in 2006 and gave our first premiere, of *Shared Ground*, in Salisbury in 2007. It was a whirlwind affair! Ex Cathedra's relationship with Alec Roth must surely have been made in heaven.

Not only has Alec absorbed the enormous scope and vision of our work, writing fluently and with apparent ease for our Chamber Choir, Baroque Orchestra, Consort, Community Choir and Academy of Vocal Music, but he also alludes with great awareness to many of our musical influences – Poulenc, Tallis, and Bach. There is also the undeniable strain of Englishness which runs through his music and our performance style, regardless of our declared eclectic influences. Alec writes music which is challenging and accessible, relevant and enjoyable, and is always a moving experience for singers and audiences. Its deceptive simplicity demands our full attention and rewards close study. We also share an interest in languages, whether biblical, Latin, English, contemporary, or Ancient Greek.

There has been huge critical acclaim for his music using words such as 'moving', 'profound',

'stardust', and 'Rolls-Royce'! And it gives me great satisfaction that his work is now being performed and appreciated around the world.

Ex Cathedra has performed Alec's music in over 200 concerts since 2007. There have been large-scale commissions and recordings (*Shared Ground, Earthrise, A Time to Dance, The Traveller, Hymn to Gaia*) and many short 'gems' (*The Flower, Sol justitiae, Sometime I Sing, Love is come again, Night Prayer*). Alec's music is relatively simple, but strong, sturdy and passionate, written from the heart, and the choir loves it! It is of consistently high quality with moments of absolute genius. The relationship continues to flourish.

Jeffrey Skidmore, November 2022

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**THE TRAVELLER** for choir, children's choir, orchestra, tenor, violin and speaker

*The Traveller* was the third in a series of four major works with words by Vikram Seth and music by Alec Roth, commissioned jointly over four years by the Salisbury, Chelsea and Lichfield Festivals (2006-09). Each work featured the violinist Philippe Honoré as soloist, and each took a different geographical/cultural area as its starting point.

*The Traveller* is scored for solo violin, solo tenor, mixed choir, children's choir and an orchestra of strings, harp and percussion. India provides the literary/cultural point of departure. In addition to writing six new poems, Seth translated some 20 classic Indian texts from a rich variety of traditions and languages.

Taking as its theme "the Ages of Man", *The Traveller* is divided into six main sections:

1. Unborn
2. Child
3. Youth
4. Adult
5. Old
6. Dead

followed by a short epilogue for the tenor soloist alone.

Each part is introduced in turn by a speaker reciting one of the seven verses of the great "Hymn to Creation" from the Rig Veda.

In this universal tale of Man's journey through life, the role of *The Traveller* is taken by the solo violin, *The Companions* by the choir and *The Poet* by the tenor soloist.

**Vikram Seth writes . . .**

2008 was the 750th anniversary year of the consecration of Salisbury Cathedral. Our work was to have its first performance there. We needed a theme at once grand and intimate – suited to the mood of the cathedral as night fell. Why not all human life?

With this modest thought in mind, I sought a structure for the libretto. I found it in the mysterious hymn to creation in the Rig Veda. The hymn has seven verses. Within these seven pillars I nested six arches: the stages of life and death. At Alec's suggestion, I called the piece *The Traveller*, to reflect our earthly journey.

To the four traditional stages of life in the Hindu scheme of things – childhood, youth, adulthood and old age – I added two more: unborn and dead. I searched for texts in various Indian languages – passages both sacred and secular, that moved me and that suited these stages.

For example, the first Tamil text in the Youth section [No. 10] comes from an epic poem in which the husband of the heroine Kannagi is wrongly accused of stealing the Queen's ankle bracelet and is put to death. Kannagi's angry

lament – the fury and courage of a young woman confronting the power of the state – is followed by the Queen's eerie vision of the fall of the kingdom as a result of this injustice.

I offered a choice of about twenty such passages to Alec in existing English versions and asked him to tell me which he wanted before I set about making my own translations. 'Oh, I want them all,' he said, 'I find them all inspiring.' So, pondering my tactical unwisdom, I got down to more work than I had bargained for.

The Hindi passages of my selection presented no serious linguistic problem, as Hindi was my first language. The medieval Hindi of Kabir and the Brajhasha of Surdas were familiar from literature studies at school as well as from songs. When I began translating the Sanskrit texts, my long-forgotten schoolboy lessons kicked in. There were problems, though, and choices to be made: in Pali, the word *deep* is ambiguous, so in the Old section [No. 21], the Buddha could have been saying to his followers 'be to yourselves a lamp' or 'be to yourselves an island'.

I had studied Urdu in order to understand the cultural world of the Muslim characters in *A Suitable Boy*. When working on the Bengali poem,

I was able to draw on the little Bengali that I had gained by osmosis from my mother. For the texts from Tamil – a Dravidian language utterly different from north Indian languages – I was forced to resort to a crib.

Apart from these translations, for each of the six stages of life I wrote a short poem of my own.

My main reward for writing these libretti has always been the music. From the moment in the darkened cathedral that a small bell led into the first verse of the hymn to creation, I was held by the power of it. 'They say love is the reason why / This soul of ours is bound by bone' could not have been more tenderly set. Nor could Kannagi's demand 'Is there a god?' have resonated with more indignation to the ancient roof and spire.

(Abridged from *The Rivered Earth*, Penguin, 2011, Vikram Seth's collected libretti for the 4-year Salisbury commissions project, including an account of 'the pleasures and pains of working with a composer'.)

**EARTH AND SKY** for children's choir and piano (with optional percussion)

**Alec Roth writes...**

*Earth and Sky* was commissioned by the BBC for the Proms 2000 season. In keeping with the millennial theme, a work presenting a vision of the future was requested. Trying to be helpful, the BBC provided me with a video containing the predictions of various experts, but their ideas seemed dizzyingly contradictory.

Then the simple thought struck me that however varied and complex the answers, the big questions remain the same. We may now have a map of the human genome, but how to use the map? "How shall I know where I should go? How may I see the I that's me?"

So, a song of questions – this was the idea which I took to Vikram Seth, who had agreed to write the words for me. The resulting poem is entirely monosyllabic, enabling a variety of rhythmic treatment. I love its permutations and its imagery of paradox and inversion, and I have amused myself by playing similar games with the musical material. But there is seriousness as well as fun – the text's juxtaposition of the certainty of death

and the search for meaning and purpose in life achieves great poignancy when sung by young voices.

As a musician I am hopeful that, no matter how the world develops, future generations will still come together to "dance and sing and play". The mysterious power of music to bind us socially and inspire us individually seems to be built into our genes.

As I write this, over twenty years after the first performance of *Earth and Sky*, the outlook appears bleak, as the true nature of mankind's despoliation of the planet becomes clear. Yet hope for the future comes from the children and young people increasingly making their voices heard with their urgent questioning. Our children are closer to the earth in both time and space. Mother Earth speaks through them. We should listen.



The Traveller, 1 May 2022 © Simon Peter King

## TEXTS (and sources)

1

1.1 *Rig Veda* 10.129  
(Sanskrit, before 1000 BC)  
Creation Hymn Verse 1

**There was no being or non-being then,  
No world, no sky, no beyond.  
What covered it? Where? Who sheltered it?  
Was water there, unfathomably deep?**

### PART 1: UNBORN

2. *Dhammapada* 1.1 (part), 11.146  
(Pali, 4th century BC)  
The mind precedes all states of being –  
They are ruled by the mind,  
They are made of the mind.  
What is laughter, what is joy  
When everything is burning?  
Enclosed in darkness  
Do you not seek a lamp?

3. *Six Ages: (1) Unborn*  
(Vikram Seth)  
Child of son, of daughter,  
Tombed and wombed in water,  
Flesh to bind and bound me,

Darkness all around me,  
Neither seen nor seeing,  
Being and not being,  
In my world's cessation  
Lies my re-creation.

4. *Dhammapada* 8.100-102  
(Pali, 4th century BC)  
Better than a thousand meaningless words  
Is a single word that brings peace.  
Better than a thousand meaningless verses  
Is a single verse that brings peace.  
And if one should recite a hundred verses,  
All filled with meaningless words,  
Better is a single word of truth  
That brings peace.

2

1.2 *Rig Veda* Creation Hymn Verse 2  
**There was no death, no immortality,  
No sign of night or day.  
Windless, that One breathed of its own accord.  
Nothing else existed.**

### PART 2: CHILD

5. *Children's Rhyme: Ram Ram Shah*  
(Hindi)  
Ram Ram Shah Ram Ram Shah,

*Alu ka rasa*, [Gravy made from spuds]  
*Mendaki ki chatni* [Chutney made from female frog]  
*Aa gaya nasha!* [Drink it, and you're drunk!]

6. *Six Ages: (2) Child*  
(Vikram Seth)  
All these colours, named and nameless,  
Beings, doings, aimed and aimless,  
All these windows, walls and ceilings,  
Moon and sun and words and feelings –  
All these stars so high above me,  
Bright with tears because they love me.

7. *Krishna Wants the Moon*  
(Surdas, Brajbhasha, 16th century)  
“Mother, give me the moon with which to play  
Or I won't come to your lap,  
but sulk on the ground all day.  
I won't drink our cow Surabhi's milk  
or plait my hair.  
I'll just be Papa's boy, and never yours – so there!”

“Listen, son, come closer to me – let's not tell  
your brother –  
I'll get you a nice new bride!” says Krishna's  
smiling mother.

“Yes, Mother, yes, I swear by you, I'll marry right away.”  
The poet adds: “I'll pose as a guest and sing on  
that wedding-day.”

8. *The Hope of Hope*  
(Ramprasad, Bengali, 18th century)  
To come into this world: a hopeless call,  
The hope of hope, that's all.  
Like a deluded bee  
Trapped on a painted lotus, who cannot struggle  
free,  
So, Mother, am I, and you deluded me.  
You called it sugar, while you fed me neem.  
My sweet tooth, it would seem,  
Has left me with this bitter mouth all day.  
Saying to me, “Let's play,”  
Into this world you lured me, and I came.  
But Mother, in your game  
All happened as you willed  
And nothing of my hope has been fulfilled.  
Ramprasad says: On the world's scene  
What had to be has been.  
The evening now has come.  
Pick up your child; go home.

3

1.3 *Rig Veda* Creation Hymn Verse 3  
**Darkness was covered by darkness in the  
beginning.  
All this was indistinguishable water.  
The germ of life, hidden by the void,  
That One was brooded into being by heat.**

### PART 3: YOUTH

#### 9. *Dhammapada* 18.251

(Pali, 4th century BC)

There is no fire like passion,  
No grip like hate,  
No snare like delusion,  
No river like craving.

#### 10. *Shilappadikaram* 19.51-59; 20.1-7

(Tamil, 7th century AD)

Are there women here, are there women  
Who can bear such injustice to their husbands?  
Are there women here? Are there such women?  
Are there good men here, are there good men  
Who nurture and protect their own children?  
Are there good men here? Are there good men?  
Is there a god here, is there a god  
In this land where the power of the state kills an  
innocent man?  
Is there a god here? Is there a god?

Alas, I saw, I saw in a dream the sceptre and the  
parasol fall,  
The bell by the palace gate toll by itself and resound.  
Alas, I saw, I also saw the eight points of the  
compass waver  
And darkness devour the sun.

Alas, I saw, I also saw a rainbow shine by night,  
A glowing meteor fall by day. Alas!

#### 11. *Tiru-Kural* 73; 1090; 1201

(Tamil 4th century AD)

They say love is the reason why  
This soul of ours is bound with bone.  
When we drink wine, it gives us joy.  
But with love, even the seeing is a joy.  
With love, even the memory is sweet,  
So love is sweeter than wine.

#### 12. A couplet

(Raheem, Hindi, 17th century)

Don't break the thread of love, Raheem has said.  
What breaks won't join; if joined, it knots the  
thread.

#### 13. *Six Ages: (3) Youth*

(Vikram Seth)

Eyes sealed up with salt and heart charred  
through with fire,  
All my charted days subverted by desire,  
Who is this who weeps and who is this who's  
burning?  
Who am I and why – and when am I returning?

4

#### 1.4 *Rig Veda Creation Hymn Verse 4*

**Desire came then in the beginning,**

**The first seed of mind.**

**Poets searching in their heart have found**

**The bond between being and non-being.**

### PART 4: ADULT

#### 14. *Six Ages: (4) Adult*

(Vikram Seth)

What can I build or do? What can I shape or  
form? –

From one and two make four, from cold and cold  
make warm?

What can I give the world? What can the world  
give me?

How can I render sight? How can I learn to see?

#### 15. *Bhagavad Gita* 6.35

(Sanskrit, 2nd century BC to 2nd AD)

Doubtless, O Arjuna,  
The mind is hard to curb and restless;  
But by practice and detachment  
It can be held still.

#### 16. *Bhagavad Gita* 3.8; 18.23

(Sanskrit, 2nd century BC to 2nd AD)

Perform the right action

For action is better than inaction:  
Even the body's journey through life  
Could not succeed without action.  
The right action, performed without attachment,  
Without passion, without hate,  
Without desire for its fruits,  
That action is called pure.

#### 17. *Rise Traveller*

(from the *Hymnbook of Gandhi's Ashram*,  
Hindi, early 20th century)

Rise, traveller, the sky is light.  
Why do you sleep? It is not night.  
The sleeping lose, and sleep in vain.  
The waking rise, and rise to gain.

Open your eyelids, you who nod.  
O heedless one, pay heed to God.  
Is this your way to show your love?  
You sleep below, he wakes above.

What you have done, that you must bear.  
Where is the joy in sin then, where?  
When on your head your sins lie deep,  
Why do you clutch your head and weep?

Tomorrow's task, enact today,  
Today's at once; do not delay.  
When birds have robbed the standing grain  
What use to wring your hands in vain?

1.5 Rig Veda Creation Hymn Verse 5

Their cord extended across.

What was above it? What beneath?

There were those with seed, those with powers –  
Energy beneath, impulse above.

PART 5: OLD

18. Dhammapada 18.235

(Pali, 4th century BC)

You are now like a withered leaf.

The messengers of death are waiting.

You stand at the threshold of departure,

Yet have no provision for the journey.

19. Six Ages: (5) Old

(Vikram Seth)

My eyes look back at me and say

Where were these wrinkles yesterday?

Where are the friends you used to know?

Where are the oats you used to sow?

Who is this stranger – foolish, wise –

Who stares at you with your own eyes?

20. Swollen with Pride

(Kabir, Hindi, 15th century)

Swollen, swollen, swollen with pride, you wander.

On your ten months in the womb, why have you

ceased to ponder?

Bees store honey, you store gold, but for all you  
gain here,

Once you're dead, they'll shout, "Away! Don't let  
his ghost remain here."

Your wife will follow to the door, your friends to  
your last station.

Then your soul's alone once more – no friend and  
no relation.

Burned, your body will turn to ash; buried, you'll  
lie rotten –

An unbaked water-swollen pot, you'll fall apart,  
forgotten.

Into the trap the parrot walks, lost in its own confusion.

Into the well of death falls Man, drunk with the  
world's delusion.

21. Mahaparinibbana Sutta, from D.xvi.2.25 and 2.26

(Pali, 5th century BC)

I have now grown old, Ananda, worn out, full of  
years, approaching dusk. I am eighty years old.

Just as an old cart is kept going by makeshift  
repair, so too is it with my body.

Therefore, now, Ananda, be lamps to yourselves.

Be a refuge to yourselves. Seek no other refuge.

Take the truth as a lamp. Take the truth as a

refuge. Seek no other refuge.

22. From a Ghazal

(Mir Taqi Mir, Urdu, 18th century)

All my arrangements were in vain, no drug could  
cure my malady.

It was an ailment of my heart that made a final  
end of me.

My term of youth I passed in tears, in age I closed  
my eyes at last;

That is: I lay awake long nights till dawn and sleep  
came finally.

1.6 Rig Veda Creation Hymn Verse 6

Who really knows, who can declare  
From where this creation came?

The gods themselves came later,  
So who can tell from where it rose.

PART 6: DEAD

23. Six Ages: (6) Dead

(Vikram Seth)

No breath to give or take,

No love to feel or make,

No thought or speech or deed,

No fear, no grief, no need,

No memory, no view,

No four, no three, no two,

No one, no entity

To be or cease to be.

24. Bhagavad Gita 2.11-12, 14-17

(Sanskrit, 2nd century BC to 2nd AD)

Though you speak words of wisdom,  
You grieve for those for whom you should not grieve.

The truly wise grieve neither  
For the dead nor for the living.

Never have I not existed,

Nor you, nor these kings,

Nor from this time on

Will we ever not exist.

Cold, heat, joy, sorrow

Come to us through the touch of matter.

What comes and goes is transient.

Arjuna, endure such things.

One whom these do not torment,

Who treats joy and sorrow alike

And is steadfast through all

Is fit for immortality.

What is not does not come to be.

What is does not cease to be.

Those who see the core of things

Know the truth about both these.

That which pervades this universe

Is indestructible.

No one can destroy

What cannot perish.

1.7 Rig Veda Creation Hymn Verse 7

**Whence this whole creation has arisen,  
Whether it was made or was not made,  
He who surveys it from the highest heaven,  
Only he knows; or perhaps he does not know.**

**Part 7: EPILOGUE**

25. *The Meeting has Dispersed*

(Munshi Amir Ahmad Minai, Urdu, 19th century)

The meeting has dispersed; the moths  
Bid farewell to the candle-light.  
Departure's hour is on the sky.  
Only a few stars mark the night.  
What has remained will not remain:  
They too will quickly disappear.  
This is the world's way, although we,  
Lost to the world, lie sleeping here.

All texts (original poems and translations)

© Vikram Seth 2008

**EARTH AND SKY**

How shall I know where I should go?  
How may I see the I that's me?

The earth so high, the sky so low –  
How may I see where I must go?  
The dust so wet, the rain so dry –  
How shall I know the me that's I?

By note and word and thought and fact  
I plan, I shape, I will, I act.  
By touch and kiss and six times three  
I was, and am, and will not be.

So swift this sky of rain and stars!  
So slow this earth of dust and scars!  
When I am dead how shall I see  
Where I must go that I may be?

When six times three is rain times dust,  
That where I go, may I be must?  
And if I dance and sing and play,  
Must I go where, be that I may?  
And if I sing so sharp, so flat,  
Where I must go, may I be that? –  
And dance and sing so low, so high,  
Go where that may, must I be I?

Text © Vikram Seth 2000





## THE TRAVELLER

**Jeffrey Skidmore:** conductor  
**Philippe Honoré:** violin ('The Traveller')  
**Mark Padmore:** tenor ('The Poet')  
**Vayu Naidu:** speaker

### Ex Cathedra

**Soprano:** Isabella Abbot Parker, Penelope Appleyard, Marianne Ayling, Alison Burnett, Sarah Colgan, Caroline Halls, Joy Krishnamoorthy, Rebecca Ledgard, Margaret Lingas, Imogen Russell, Myriam Smith, Sally Spencer, Beth Taylor, Katie Trethewey

**Alto:** Ula Chapman, Gabriella Liandu, Martha McLorinan, Samuel Mitchell, Hope Pugh, Andrew Round, Anna Semple

**Tenor:** Steve Davis, Nick Drew, Daniel Marles, Sidharth Imanol, James Robinson, Iain Sloan, Ashley Turnell

**Bass:** Baz Chapman, Richard Green, Nick Perfect, Bill Robinson, Henry Saywell, David Smith, Jonty Ward, Lawrence White

**Associate Conductor:** George Parris

## Children's Choir

**Ex Cathedra Junior Academy of Vocal Music:** Pauline Baiasu, Alex Bendall, Keeva Dunphy, Lily Dutch, William Everson, Marie-Therese Green, Lexi Quinn, Spike Perry, Anand Toon

**Lordswood Girls' School:** Ella, Freya, Kate, Poppy, Priya, Talia

**Soloists (track 2):** Anand Toon, Lily Dutch

The Children's Choir was prepared by Rebecca Ledgard.

### Britten Sinfonia

**Violin I:** Marcus Barcham Stevens, Cecily Ward, Michael Jones, Ricky Gore

**Violin II:** Miranda Dale, Anna Bradley, Kirsty Lovie

**Viola:** Rachel Byrt, Rose Redgrave

**Cello:** Ben Chappell, David Edmonds

**Double Bass:** Stephen Williams

**Percussion:** Owen Gunnell, Laura Bradford

**Harp:** Sue Blair

## EARTH AND SKY

**Ex Cathedra Senior Academy of Vocal Music & Ex Cathedra Scholars**

**Soprano:** Isabella Abbot Parker, Amelia Blackburn, Natalie Borenstein, Sarah Colgan, Jemimah Davies, Georgina Day, Ellie Dempster, Kirsty Fernie, Tilly Richardson, Imogen Russell, Beth Taylor, Suzzie Vango

**Alto:** Zoe Bendall, Annabel Ledgard, Gabriella Liandu, Hope Pugh, Kamea Nemeth, Carmen Sanchez Diamante, Anna Semple

**Soloists:** Imogen Russell, Anna Semple

**Piano:** James Keefe

**Percussion (Britten Sinfonia):** Owen Gunnell, Laura Bradford, Toby Kearney, Alex Neal

Ex Cathedra Senior Academy Upper Voices prepared by Suzzie Vango.



The Traveller, 1 May 2022 © Simon Peter King



The Traveller, 1 May 2022 © Simon Peter King

## ALEC ROTH

Born near Manchester of German/Irish descent, Alec Roth studied music at the University of Durham, and gamelan at the Academy of Indonesian Performing Arts (ASKI) in Surakarta, Central Java. Both his time in Java and his involvement in education work have greatly influenced his approach to composition. His music encompasses a wide range of genres including vocal, choral, instrumental, orchestral, gamelan, and music for children. His many collaborations with the Indian writer Vikram Seth include an opera, oratorio, choral suite, and numerous songs and song-cycles.

Alec Roth's reputation as a choral composer results from a long, fruitful and happy association with Jeffrey Skidmore and Ex Cathedra, which began in 2006 and continues today. In 2011 they recorded a double-album CD of his music including *Earthrise* for unaccompanied choir in 40 parts (commissioned for Ex Cathedra's 40th anniversary in 2009), and in 2016 the cantata *A Time to Dance*. His most recent work for them, the cantata *A Time to be Born and a Time to Die*, was premiered in February 2019.

Roth has also developed particularly fruitful working relationships with tenor Mark Padmore and guitarist Morgan Szymanski, who have recorded two albums of his vocal music (*Songs in Time of War; Sometime I Sing*); and with the Allegri String Quartet, whose recording of his 2nd, 3rd and 4th Quartets was released in 2016.

Other notable performers and commissioners of his music include the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Scottish National Orchestra, Academy of St Martin in the Fields (four commissions including *Departure of the Queen of Sheba*), Scottish Chamber Orchestra, The Sixteen, Voces8, and the Choir of St Paul's Cathedral London. Since his signing by the publisher Edition Peters in 2015, Roth's music is increasingly being performed around the world.

[www.alecroth.com](http://www.alecroth.com)

## VIKRAM SETH

Vikram Seth is a novelist and poet. His books include *The Golden Gate*, a novel in verse set in San Francisco; *A Suitable Boy*, a family saga set in newly independent India; *An Equal Music*, a novel set in a string quartet based in London; *From Heaven Lake*, an account of his hitch-hiking

journey across Tibet when a student in China; and *Two Lives*, a double biography of his Indian great-uncle and German-Jewish great-aunt. He has written several books of poems, including translations from three Tang Dynasty Chinese poets; *Beastly Tales*, a set of animal fables; and various libretti.

## EX CATHEDRA

Hailed as "one of Britain's very best choirs" (New York Times), Ex Cathedra is a world-class vocal ensemble which leads the choral sector in the fields of performance, learning and wellbeing. For more than 50 years the group has produced highly-acclaimed concerts and participatory projects, and nurtured young musicians from its youth training choirs to its student and graduate Scholar schemes. The group takes pride in developing the choral repertoire through researching and reviving little-known gems, commissioning new work, and developing exciting ways of engaging audiences and participants.

Founded by Jeffrey Skidmore in Birmingham in 1969, Ex Cathedra is an Associate Artist at Symphony Hall and Town Hall, has appeared at festivals and concert series across the UK and as far afield as New York and Tel Aviv, and has made a significant number of award-winning recordings.

Alongside its concerts, Ex Cathedra delivers an extensive programme of award-winning schools, wellbeing and community projects, led by its team of expert vocal tutors. The group champions the belief that singing is for everyone, and that singing together transforms individuals into a community, boosts wellbeing, builds confidence, teamwork and empathy.

Ex Cathedra's Academy of Vocal Music choirs offer a wide range of creative, learning and performing activities with a nurturing ethos. The choirs perform alongside Ex Cathedra and independently including, for example, the annual performances of *The Nutcracker* with Birmingham Royal Ballet.

Ex Cathedra has worked in over 1,000 schools across the UK and offers an innovative online programme that can put singing at the heart of your school. Visit [www.singingschools.co.uk](http://www.singingschools.co.uk) to find out more. Alongside this, [www.singingmedicine.co.uk](http://www.singingmedicine.co.uk) is the place to discover Ex Cathedra's work to support health and wellbeing, from bedside sessions at Birmingham Children's Hospital to dementia groups, mental health, Long Covid and stroke recovery.

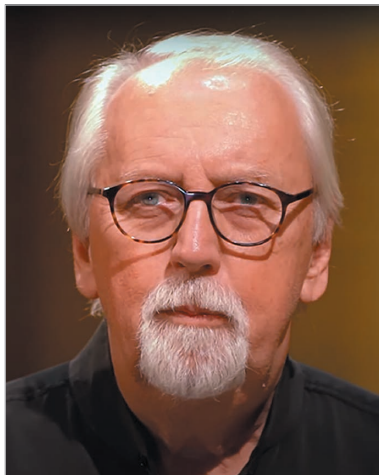
[www.excathedra.co.uk](http://www.excathedra.co.uk)

## JEFFREY SKIDMORE

Jeffrey Skidmore's reputation as one of the UK's leading choral directors and an ardent advocate of the importance of singing in people's lives today is rooted in his work with Ex Cathedra, the ensemble he founded in 1969 in his home city of Birmingham.

Jeffrey's driving passion has been to refresh and reinvigorate the choral repertoire and to make it accessible to as many people as possible. He and Ex Cathedra have long been known for exciting and innovative but always attractive programming, underpinned by research. Under his direction, Ex Cathedra has also shown an enduring commitment to vocal education from its groundbreaking children's singing programme, Singing Playgrounds, to the nurturing of professional singers at the start of their careers.

As director of Ex Cathedra and its associated Consort and Baroque Orchestra, Jeffrey has appeared in concert halls and festivals across the UK and overseas. He has made a number of highly-acclaimed recordings ranging from Renaissance polyphony to Latin American and French Baroque. He has also worked with other ensembles including the City of Birmingham



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Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Aalborg Sinfoniorkester, the Irish Baroque Orchestra and the BBC Singers.

In the field of opera he has worked with Birmingham Opera Company; Welsh National Opera; Marc Minkowski and David McVicker at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées; and has given the first performances in modern times of the French Baroque operas *Zaïde* by Royer and *Isis* by

Lully. Jeffrey is a pioneer in the field of research and performance of choral works of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, both in the old and new worlds. He is also a champion of contemporary choral music and has commissioned more than a dozen new works in recent years.

Jeffrey is a Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham and Artistic Director of the Early Music programme at the Royal Birmingham

Conservatoire. He is a regular contributor to the choral programme at Dartington International Summer School and to a wide range of choral workshops and summer schools at home and abroad. Jeffrey has been recognised with an OBE for services to choral music, and an honorary doctorate from the University of Birmingham. Most recently (2022) he was shortlisted for the prestigious RPS Conductor Award, the first choral conductor.



Earth and Sky, 1 May 2022 © Simon Peter King

## BRITTEN SINFONIA

Britten Sinfonia emerged in 1992 as a bold reimagining of the conventional image of a chamber orchestra. A flexible ensemble comprising the UK's leading soloists came together with a vision: to collapse the boundaries between old and new music; to collaborate with composers, conductors and guest artists across the arts, focussing on the musicians rather than following the vision of a principal conductor; and to create involving, intelligent music events that audiences and performers experience with an unusual intensity. Named after Benjamin Britten, Britten Sinfonia is based in the east of England, where Britten's roots were strong.

Today Britten Sinfonia is heralded as one of the world's leading ensembles and its philosophy of adventure and reinvention has inspired a new movement of chamber groups. Resident Orchestra at Saffron Hall, Associate Ensemble at the Barbican, with residencies in Norwich and Cambridge, Britten Sinfonia also has a series at London's Wigmore Hall and appears at UK festivals including the BBC Proms, Aldeburgh and Norfolk & Norwich Festival. The orchestra regularly tours around the world and has a performed a livestream to a million people worldwide from the Sistine Chapel, has toured to the US, Asia and all over Europe.

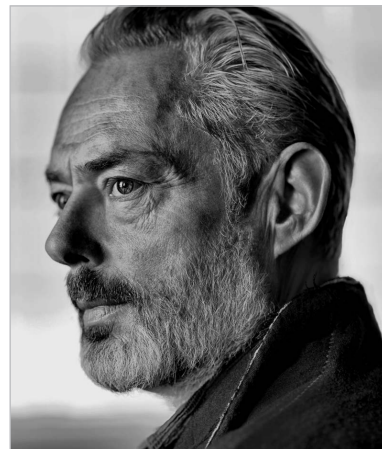
[www.brittensinfonia.com](http://www.brittensinfonia.com)



## MARK PADMORE

Mark Padmore was born in London and studied at King's College, Cambridge. He has established an acclaimed international career in opera, concert and recital. In concert Mark performs with the world's leading orchestras and was Artist in Residence for the 2017/18 season with the Berlin Philharmonic, holding a similar position with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra in 2016/17. His work with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment has involved projects exploring both Bach *St John* and *St Matthew Passion* and has attracted worldwide recognition. Other appearances in the Bach Passions have also gained particular notice, especially his renowned performances as Evangelist in the *St Matthew* and *St John Passions* with the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Sir Simon Rattle and staged by Peter Sellars. He enjoys regular collaborations with some of the world's celebrated pianists including Till Fellner, Mitsuko Uchida, Paul Lewis and Kristian Bezuidenhout, giving recitals worldwide.

His extensive discography includes Beethoven *Missa Solemnis* and Haydn *Die Schöpfung* with Bernard Haitink and Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra on BR Klassik and Lieder by Beethoven, Haydn and Mozart with Kristian Bezuidenhout



for Harmonia Mundi. Other Harmonia Mundi recordings include Schubert cycles with Paul Lewis (*Winterreise* won the 2010 Gramophone magazine Vocal Award); Schumann *Dichterliebe* with Kristian Bezuidenhout (2011 Edison Klassiek Award) and Britten *Serenade*, *Nocturne* and Finzi *Dies Natalis* with the Britten Sinfonia (ECHO/Klassik 2013 award).

Mark was voted 2016 Vocalist of the Year by Musical America and was awarded an Honorary

Doctorate by Kent University in 2014. He was appointed CBE in the 2019 Queens' Birthday Honours List. Mark was Artistic Director of the St. Endellion Summer Music Festival in Cornwall from 2012-2022.

## PHILIPPE HONORÉ

Philippe Honoré divides his time between chamber music, solo work, leading orchestras and teaching.

After receiving top honours from the Paris Conservatoire and the Royal Academy of Music, he was made a laureate of the Yehudi Menuin Foundation of France in 1992 and an Honorary Associate of the Royal Academy in 2001.

As a soloist he has performed a series of works composed for him by Alec Roth throughout the UK and Canada. The performances, recorded and broadcast by the BBC also featured works by Ysaye and Bach. The Times described his account of Roth's solo work as "magically played". His solo recording for Decca – "An Equal Music" is regularly played on radio. The novel of the same name by Vikram Seth was inspired by and dedicated to him.

From 2005 until 2011 he was a Principal Player with the Philharmonia Orchestra and he has



© Julian Hanford

guest led some of Europe's finest orchestras including the London Philharmonic, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonia and the Orchestre de Chambre de Paris. His chamber music work has been focused on the Vellinger Quartet and Mobius Ensemble, which he founded.

Philippe has been a Professor of Violin at the Royal Academy since 2012. A number of his students have succeeded in winning prestigious

international competitions. He has also had the privilege of delivering masterclasses for a number of Universities and Conservatoires throughout Asia (Shanghai Conservatory in China, Yonsei and SNU Universities in Seoul South Korea).

Philippe plays on the Kustendyke Stradivarius on generous loan from the Royal Academy of Music.

## VAYU NAIDU

The epics and performance Storytelling form the spirit and substance of **Vayu Naidu's** work. Her PhD from Leeds researched South Asian theory and practice and her post-doctoral AHRC research was based on migration stories. She founded Vayu Naidu Intercultural Storytelling Theatre independently touring theatre directed by Chris Banfield and storytelling productions while at the University of Kent, Gulbenkian Theatre.

In a distinctive millennial collaboration with BCMG and composer Judith Weir she toured **FUTURE PERFECT** across north, south, east and west of India. Her published novels are *Sita's Ascent* – Penguin: 2013, nominated for the Commonwealth book Award; and *The Sari of Surya Vilas* – Speaking Tiger/India and Affirmpress/Aus-NZ: 2017, selected for ABC Book of the week at Byron Bay Literature Festival.



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Her co-authored work: *Our Mothers Ourselves* is out now while she has completed another novel. She is currently Royal Literary Fund Fellow at the University of Greenwich, and Visiting Fellow at RADA curating a course: Theatre of the OutSpoken.

She is writer on **LIVES OF CLAY**, Tim Supple's new work with Vidya Thirunarayan



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Alec Roth's music is published by Edition Peters.



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Recording Engineer – Mike Hatch

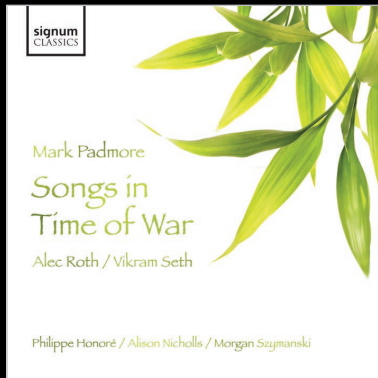
Cover Image – Dark Night of the Soul, 1999 (detail), Sculpture, polychrome wood  
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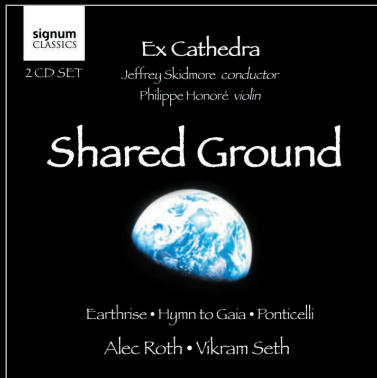
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