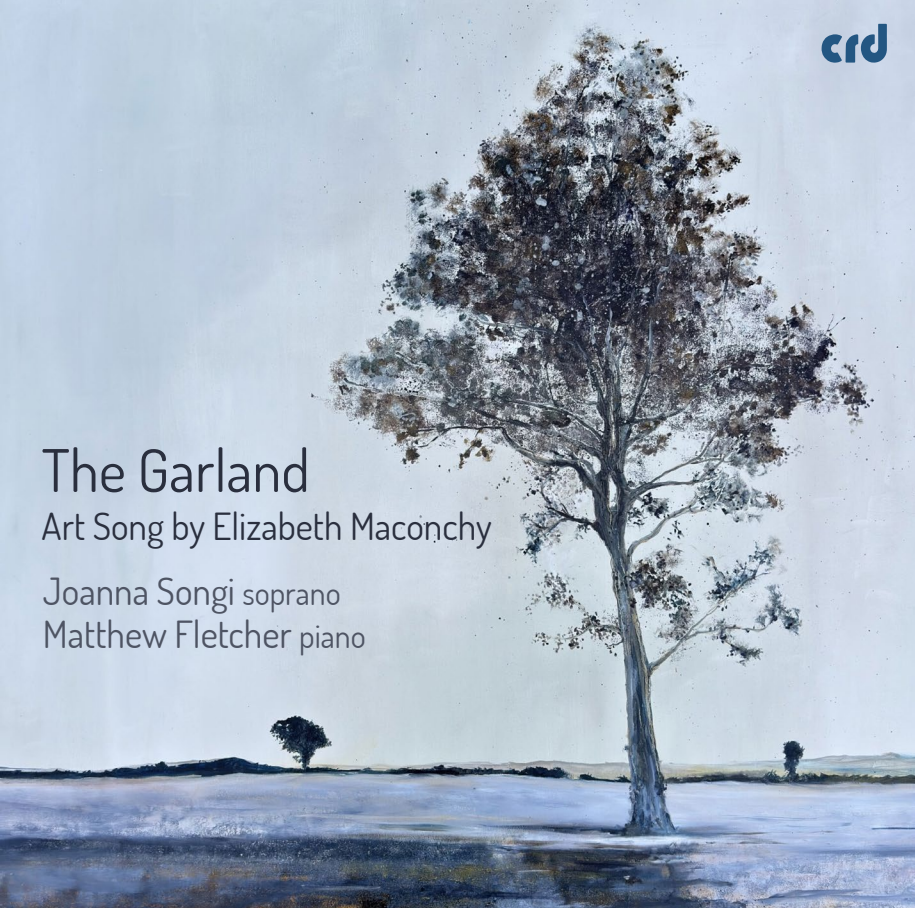


The Garland

Art Song by Elizabeth Maconchy

Joanna Songi soprano

Matthew Fletcher piano



Emma Pouncefort writes...

To be marking 50 years as a label with albums of song from the stars of our generation is quite the privilege. But it is also a stark reminder of the work we, in the classical music industry, need to do to unlock repertoire old and new and champion its relevance for today's listener, especially that which has been for too long overlooked.

It is a constant surprise (and, dare I say, frustration) that, when introducing myself as a classical record label director, including in film circles, I am greeted with two equally unsatisfactory reactions: a falsely knowing nod accompanied by utterances of 'orchestral music', or a question about which period dramas our catalogue has featured in. My speedy retort is that, whilst we do indeed hold orchestral works, CRD advocates for so much more, including stunning song spanning 800 years. I then quickly move on to highlight the timeless themes 'classical song' treats. Just like our colleagues in other genres, we see expressions of concern over social inequalities, musings on the challenges of motherhood, reflections on fickle love, discussion of our very existence... And perhaps I can dare to argue that there is something particularly arresting in how 'classical' song traverses such themes.

I count myself amongst the incredulous Joanna mentions who are astounded that the haunting songs she has selected here are not better known. It is a sadness to me that it has taken quite so long for us get here. But how glad I am to be celebrating the richness of Maconchy's œuvre through the shimmering purity of Joanna's performance, so aptly accompanied by Matthew.

Bradford-on-Avon, UK, 2024
Emma Pouncefort Director
Tom Pouncefort Director



© Chris Boland

Joanna Songi writes...

When Maconchy's scores arrived from the archive of St Hilda's College, Oxford, there was an unmistakable presence on the page. Handwritten, exquisitely crafted, and spanning quite the gamut of styles – I was captivated by these scores as soon as I set eyes upon them. For too long they had remained silent in the archive, despite richly deserving to be known and heard.

Through recording Elizabeth Maconchy's song, my ambition is to showcase the remarkable breadth of her musical language, and to bring a selection of these exceptional works to new audiences.

Elizabeth Maconchy DBE grew up in Ireland, before travelling to London to study at the RCM in 1923 at the age of only 16. There, she was guided, amongst others, by Vaughan Williams, who remained an advocate of her music for the rest of his life. Her works received performances at the Proms and she completed prestigious commissions. However, her successes were hard won; she was left to struggle alongside other women of her time to gain a footing in a man's world. As Dr Anna Beer underlines in *Sounds and Sweet Airs: The Forgotten Women of Classical Music*: 'The lack of a career infrastructure and performance opportunities for all young composers was exacerbated for women by good old-fashioned sexism in the classical music industry.'

Although Maconchy is perhaps better known for her large-scale works and string quartets, her vocal music is a neglected corner of her oeuvre that merits being a regular component of the English Art Song canon. From a singer's perspective, the fluidity of Maconchy's text setting is a gift; her music seems to fully inhabit each poem she sets. As she herself wrote in relation to her choice of poetry:

'In searching for words to set, every composer stumbles upon a magic moment of recognition: this is it, this is what I've been looking for – a sort of 'love at first sight' reaction. It may not in fact be one's first sight of the poem, but suddenly there is an instinctive sense of possession. The poem becomes, as it were, part of oneself. That for me, in any case, is how the writing of song starts, or a choral work or any setting of words. This initial impulse starts the piece going, and the sense of complete identification with the words continues to grow as the work takes shape and persists to the end.'

Draft of a talk on Three Hopkins Settings for Radio 3, Broadcast 3 and 15 March 1977.
The Life and Music of Elizabeth Maconchy, Erica Siegel

My programme for this album starts with the song cycle **The Garland** (1938), which is a setting of a selection of Anacreontic texts, translated by her husband William LeFanu. The knowledge of this collaboration adds to the sense of sheer joy and playfulness inherent in this cycle. The quintuplet figure in the opening song sets up the frivolous 'Love' which is found in the roses. The second song is a robust, rustic dance which dissolves into the glassy serenity of the third piece – the repeated rising third depicting a yearning for a love that cannot be obtained. Then, to conclude, we have a *tour de force* reminiscent of the catalogue aria from *Don Giovanni*, with witty thematic nods to the three preceding pieces.

From here, I look backwards in her career to **There is a Lady Sweet and Kind** which was written during her studies between 1924 and 1925. Even in this early work, Maconchy brings her own grace and wit to this short piece. She frames the 'gesture, motion... smiles' in the description of the lover with a pianissimo staccato variation in the upper register of the piano, before pulling us gradually back down for the final verse where the protagonist admits the flaws of the changing lover – a fall back to earth from the celestial vision.

In **Harp Song of the Dane Women**, which is drawn from 1927, soon after Maconchy completed her studies, we see a completely different side to her writing. Moving deftly between different meters, the text feels speech-like, progressing swiftly from thought to thought. She presents us with a clear dichotomy of musical ideas; a repeated oscillation set against an open fifth, and harp-like rippling chords. Through these, we hear two pulls: of home and of war. Written between two world wars, you can sense the immediacy of 'the shouts and the slaughters' in Maconchy's setting.

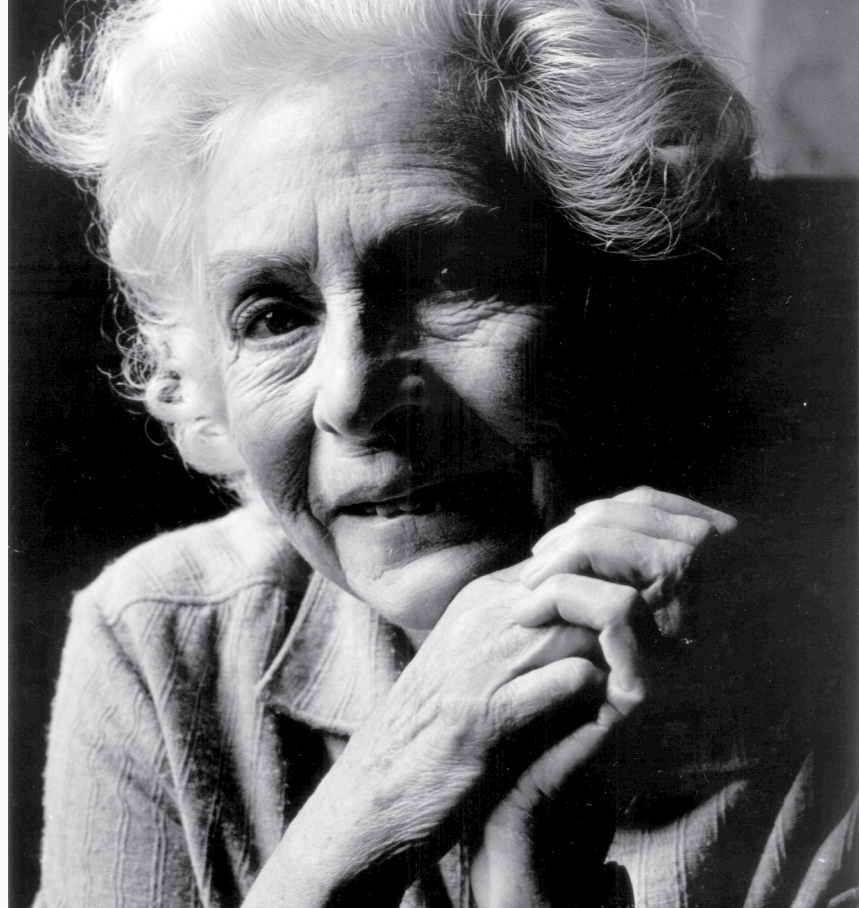
Yet, this period was evidently not only a time to use music to explore cultural memory. Also from 1927 is **All the flowers** where we are treated to Maconchy's exploration of enduring friendship which is likened to golden autumnal leaves. As she takes us into the early days of autumn, the shape of the melodic gesture in the right-hand has the feeling of wind endlessly ebbing and flowing, with the left-hand chords arriving at irregular intervals, giving impetus to the melody which refuses to land.

From one timeless theme to another, we move to a setting of a traditional lullaby and the latest work on this album. **Sho-heen Sho** was written in 1954 at the request of fellow composer Elizabeth Poston for a programme of folk songs to be broadcast on the Home Service. The text is drawn from the Petrie collection – a collection of traditional Irish music – and again, translated by her husband William LeFanu. Maconchy clearly felt a weight of responsibility in setting *Sho-heen Sho*, as she said on the use of folk song:

'I feel the only justification for using a folksong is to be so deeply and inwardly moved by it that for the time being it becomes part of one's musical thought... Adopting a folk-tune is like adopting a child – to be successful you must cherish it and treat it as your own.'

Extract from a draft of talk for Radio Éireann broadcast, *The Life and Music of Elizabeth Maconchy*, Erica Siegel

Elizabeth Maconchy © Suzie E Maeder, provided by Wise



Her setting starts as a warm, comforting lullaby, but is disrupted by more disturbing thoughts and, with it, striking harmonic shifts. The second verse thinks of the inequality of the 'tinker's children' who do not get the 'golden cradle'. The following refrain seems to be an apology to the child for the unequal society the mother is powerless to fix. Continuing in this vein, the final stanza pulls at the unspoken fear of the fragility of any newborn – imploring the child to 'Free thy sight from bitter nightmare, leave not childless thy mother who sings to thee'. Through Maconchy's clear harmonic colouring we are presented with a highly credible character, who encompasses a full plurality of thoughts and feelings.

Another work in which Maconchy depicts the harms of social inequality is **The Winkle Woman**, which was commissioned by the Workers' Music Association in 1940. Here, Maconchy sets Sigerson Clifford's poem and its visceral account of poverty. It is a bleak story. To the accompanying waves of this sea shanty, the protagonist reveals that their hardship means their child Maggie will 'never see the spring'. The ocean's relentless waves continue to roll in the piano part after this revelation giving a feeling of hopeless resignation.

This musical rocking motion is transformed in **The Cloths of Heaven** (1929) which holds a thread of constant suspension and resolution woven throughout the piano part as it sets Yeats' narrator's musing on what is and what could be. The voice and piano feel almost independent harmonically for much of this piece, which gives an intimate quality to the places where they seem to move back together. Following this is a contrasting piece which was written in the same year, **Have You Seen But a Bright Lily Grow**. It has a folk-like simplicity with open fifths in the accompaniment which allow the shape of the main theme to suggest the harmony, moving swiftly between major and minor, with a modal feel.

Finally, we reach a work written just one year earlier and which, again, has its own distinctive musical atmosphere: **In Fountain Court** (1928). The voicing of the chords gives

the work a feeling of expansiveness. The sustained pedal note hanging in the middle of the piano texture throughout, which is continually obscured and not fully resolved until the final bass note, perfectly conveys the feeling of suspension in the poetry which sees the narrator await a final resolution.

And so, we are presented with a vast range of different styles, shades and colours, as Maconchy fully embodies each poem and story within her remarkable music.

Maconchy said of writing music:

'...for me a musical argument must always be an impassioned one: music cannot be written by the cold light of reason alone. I do not believe it is possible to write good music without a high degree of what I shall call 'intellectual passion' – where the mind is in a state of great intellectual and emotional excitement, and is yet at the same time intensely concentrated & controlled.

This impassioned argument, this sensitive and moving musical logic, is for me true music.'

Extract from a talk to the Dublin Music Society on modern music, *The Life and Music of Elizabeth Maconchy*, Erica Siegel

In sharing these works with live audiences, I have frequently been met with incredulity that these pieces are not more regularly performed. Maconchy's songs, which contain such remarkable intellectual passion and impassioned argument, are long overdue in reaching a wider audience. It is my immense joy and privilege to share them here with you.

Joanna Songi, Lewes, UK, 2025

Texts and Translations

The Garland

Anon., Anacreontea, trans. William LeFanu (1904-1995)

1. The Garland

When I was weaving a garland once
I found Love in the roses.
And taking him by the wings
I dipped him into the wine and drank it.
And now he tickles me inside with his wings.

2. Old and Young

I like an old man merry
I like a young man to dance
But when an old man dances
He's old in the hair,
He's young in the head.

3. I would I were a mirror

I would I were a mirror that you should gaze on me;
I would I were a garment that you should wear me;
I'd turn me into water to wash your skin.
Girl, I'd be your oil and should anoint you.

The ribbon at your breast, the pearl at your throat;
I would be your sandal and you tread only me.

4. No end to Love

If you know how to tell all the leaves of the trees
If you know how to tell the waves of all the sea,
I will ask you alone to count my loves.

First put twenty loves from Athens, and fifteen more,
Then a string of loves from Corinth, Achaean girls are fair
Then count me out of Lesbos, Ionia, Caria, Rhodes – two thousand loves.

What do you say? No end to loves?
I have not told the Syrians yet,
I have not told Canopus' loves,
or all the loves of Crete and love is worshipped there.

What? Shall I number you those from beyond the straits,
From Parthia, from India? Loves of my soul.

Have You Seen But a Bright Lily Grow

Ben Jonson (1572-1637)

Have you seen but a bright lily grow
Before rude hands have touch'd it?
Have you mark'd but the fall of the snow
Before the soil hath smucht it.
Have you felt the wool of beaver,
Or swansdown ever?
Or have smelt o' the bud o' the briar
Or the nard in the fire?
Or have tasted the bag of the bee?
O so white, O so soft, O so sweet,
So sweet is she!

The Cloths of Heaven

William B. Yeats (1865-1939)

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half-light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

There is a Lady Sweet and Kind

Anon.

There is a lady sweet and kind
Was never a face so pleased my mind
I did but see her passing by
And yet I love her till I die.

Her gesture, motion, and her smiles,
Her wit, her grace, my heart beguiles;
Beguiles my heart, I know not why,
And yet I love her till I die.

Cupid is winged and doth range
Her country, so my love doth change;
But change she earth, or change she sky
Yet will I love her till I die.

Sho-heen Sho

Air from the Petrie Collection, trans. William LeFanu (1904-1995)

I see my own dear treasure sleeping
Mid two winters in fine warm season,
Fair built room and rocking cradle,
Soft airs blowing boughs of the greenwood
Sho-heen sho, hoo lo lo,
Sho-heen sho my own little treasure.

I see my own dear treasure sleeping,
Soft airs blowing on golden cradle,
Fortune fairer than tinker's children,
Coarsely rolled in a shawl so poorly.

Sleep my child and slumber safely,
Soon from sleeping awaken lively,
Free thy sight from bitter nightmare,
Leave not childless thy mother who sings to thee.

All the Flowers

Text unidentified

All the flowers and the showers blow away,
Gladness and sadness are but of a day
Every lovely thing takes wing
Alas! Grows old.
Even the leaves and the sheaves turn gold.
But friend
If in the end thy heart grow old
With the leaves
And the sheaves
T will be all of gold.

The Winkle Woman

© Sigerson Clifford (1913-1985)

In Fountain Court

Arthur Symons (1865-1945)

The fountain murmuring of sleep,
A drowsy tune;
The flickering green of leaves that keep
The light of June;
Peace, through a slumbering afternoon,
The peace of June

A waiting ghost in the blue sky,
The white curved moon;
June, hushed and breathless, waits, and I
Wait, too, with June.
Come, through the lingering afternoon,
Soon, love, come soon.

Harp Song of the Dane women

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936)

What is a woman that you forsake her,
And the hearth-fire and the home-acre,
To go with the old grey Widow-maker?

She has no house to lay a guest in –
But one chill bed for all to rest in,
That the pale suns and the stray bergs nest in.



© Rosie Wooldridge

She has no strong white arms to fold you,
But the ten-times-fingering weed to hold you –
Bound to the rocks where the tide has rolled you.

Yet, when the signs of summer thicken,
And the ice breaks, and the birch-buds quicken,
Yearly you turn from our side, and sicken –

Sicken again for the shouts and the slaughters.
You steal away to the lapping waters,
And look at your ship in her winter-quarters.

You forget our mirth, and talk at the tables,
The kine in the shed and the horse in the stables –
To pitch her sides and go over her cables.

Then you drive out where the storm-clouds swallow,
And the sound of your oar-blades, falling hollow,
Is all we have left through the months to follow.

Ah, what is Woman that you forsake her,
And the hearth-fire and the home-acre,
To go with the old grey Widow-maker?



Described as 'an impressive young talent' by *Opera Journal*, and praised for having 'both vocal beauty and bite' by the *Observer*, **Joanna Songi's** performing career has encompassed opera, oratorio, theatre and recital. She performed in Shakespeare's *Henry V* at the Donmar Warehouse (2022) broadcast on NT Live. She regularly performs and records with the Dunedin Consort and The English Concert at venues including The Wigmore Hall, King's Place and The Usher Hall.

She was awarded first place in the Dean & Chadlington Singing Competition (2019) and the Brooks-Van der Pump English Song Competition (2013). She has performed song cycles with the Chroma Ensemble and the United Strings of Europe, and has performed with companies including Glyndebourne, Garsington, West Green and Opera de Tenerife.

Joanna studied music at Cambridge University and completed a postgraduate course at the Royal College of Music. She was a Britten-Pears Young Artist, a Making Music Philip & Dorothy Green Young Concert Artist, and an Opera Prelude Young Artist.

A member of Glyndebourne Opera Festival's music staff since 2012, and winner of the Das Lied and Kathleen Ferrier accompanist prizes, **Matthew Fletcher** is a sought-after pianist and répétiteur. His performances have taken him to major concert halls, festivals and opera houses across the UK and Europe. He has played with the London Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, BBC Philharmonic Orchestras, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe.

Matthew read music at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he was organ scholar. He then studied piano accompaniment with Michael Dussek and Pascal Nemirovsky at the Royal Academy of Music. He was made an associate of the Royal Academy of Music in 2016 and was on their teaching staff as a vocal coach between 2015 and 2022. Matthew is also a keen jazz pianist and composer.

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The Fallen Tree of Norlington
Courtesy of Contemporary landscape painter
| John Hainsworth | Artist | England



The Garland

1. The Garland	1:01
2. Old and Young	0:39
3. I Would I Were a Mirror	2:01
4. No End to Love	1:45
Have You Seen But a Bright Lily Grow	1:45
The Cloths of Heaven	1:47
There is a Lady Sweet and Kind	1:50
Sho-heen Sho (Irish Lullaby)	3:48
All the Flowers	1:18
The Winkle Woman	3:26
In Fountain Court	2:29
Harp Song of the Dane Women	3:36

Executive Producers Emma Pouncefort, Tom Pouncefort

Recording date Monday, 11 September 2023

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Piano Steinway Model D

Producer & Sound Engineer Myles Eastwood

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