**Sonic Geography**

**BBC Philharmonic with commissions by John Luther Adams, Ailís Ní Ríain and Alissa Firsova**

7 July

**The Bridgewater Hall**

Prophecies of Stone commissioned by Factory International and Residentie Orchestra The Hague. Spell of Creation co-commissioned by BBC Philharmonic and Factory International. The Land Grows Weary of its Own co-commissioned by BBC Philharmonic, Factory International and The National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland. Produced by Factory International for Manchester International Festival and BBC Philharmonic. Cover Photography: Kahli April.

**Running Order**

Prophecies of Stone by John Luther Adams

Soloist – Ralph van Raat

INTERVAL

The Land Grows Weary of its Own by Ailís Ní Ríain

Spell of Creation by Alissa Firsova

Soloist – Jess Dandy

BBC Philharmonic

Vimbayi Kaziboni Conductor

**Prophecies of Stone**

Reflecting on the longevity of the rocks beneath our feet, Prophecies of Stone journeys across the jagged contours of isolated, Arctic and forgotten mountains in four movements – finally arriving at a place where stone monuments bring geology and human memory together.

I. Solitary Peaks

II. Among Red Mountains

III. Cold Mountain

IV. The Stone People Who Live  in the Wind

**The Land Grows Weary of its Own**

Unable to hear birds due to deafness/hearing loss, the composer of this work instead imagines what a bird might sound like as climate change takes hold, in a world increasingly wearied by the actions of its human destructors. The composition’s title is taken and reinterpreted from the lyrics of A Sort of Homecoming by U2.

**Spell of Creation**

A Symphony in Four Songs

Inspired by King Charles III’s book Harmony: A New Way of Looking at Our World, this commission sets four poems featured therein to music in four movements – all of which celebrate the interconnectedness of nature and humanity:

I. The Force – after The force that through the green fuse

drives the flower by Dylan Thomas

II. To the Evening Star – after the poem of the same name by William Blake

III. Rewakening – taken from In Memoriam by Alfred, Lord Tennysson

IV. Spell of Creation – after the poem of the same name by Kathleen Raine

**Nature and culture – though sometimes considered to be diametrically opposed – both carry within them an uncanny potential to take you out of yourself.** To lift you out of the humdrum of everyday life and remind you of your small place in the world at large.

At this year’s Festival, the two are in dialogue through Sonic Geography, a night of three thrilling new compositions. The common thread between these is our relationship to the environment – though naturally each piece interprets this in an entirely different way.

John Luther Adams casts his gaze upwards to Arctic landscapes – ancient mountains that are seemingly fixed but constantly in conversation with their surroundings. Theirs is a quiet magic and resilience interpreted through four movements performed by pianist Ralph van Raat.

Ailís Ní Ríain turns to the skies in an altogether different way. Unable to hear birds due to deafness/hearing loss, the composer considers what birdsong might sound like in a world exhausted by climate change and habitat destruction.

Advocating human harmony with the earth, Alissa Firsova looks to poetry – channelling Dylan Thomas’ humility, William Blake’s prayer for protection, Tennyson’s musings on eternity and Kathleen Raine’s cosmic incantation in four separate movements.

Led by the commanding hand of composer Vimbayi Kaziboni and interpreted by the masterful BBC Philharmonic, Sonic Geography pays homage to the natural world, reminding us of its strength and wonder – and of our collective responsibility for its stewardship.

**John McGrath**

Artistic Director & Chief Executive, Factory International

**Manchester International Festival** is one of the world’s leading arts festivals and the first to be entirely focused on making ambitious new work. Every two years Manchester International Festival brings the most exciting artists on the planet to the city – and invites the people of Greater Manchester to help shape its dynamic programme.

Run by the Factory International team, the magic of Manchester International Festival has captivated crowds since its first edition in 2007. Bringing together a range of artforms – from theatre, dance and visual arts to music, cutting-edge performance and digital events – the Festival has premiered groundbreaking new work by international heavyweights like Marina Abramović, Damon Albarn, Björk, Steve McQueen, Yoko Ono, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, Philip Glass, Skepta and Christine Sun Kim.

Rooted in the city and its boroughs, Manchester International Festival platforms the best in local talent and ideas – introducing audiences to Manchester’s rising stars and co-creating Festival events with communities. Staged all over Greater Manchester, the Festival programme unfolds in all kinds of spaces – from theatres, galleries and concert halls to railway depots, churches and carparks – always pushing the boundaries of performance and mixing up genres. MIF23 is the first Festival to take place at Factory International’s new home and Manchester’s latest cultural landmark, Aviva Studios – while continuing to pop up at locations all over the city.

Known for its international outlook, Manchester International Festival also collaborates with cultural organisations around the world. Its Manchester-made projects have travelled the globe reaching huge audiences of 1.6 million people in more than 30 countries – and counting.

**factoryinternational.org/#MIF23**

**For Manchester International Festival / Factory International**

**Ric Watts** Senior Producer

**Jack Thompson** Associate Technical Director

With thanks to **Cynthia Wilson**, **Cynthia Adams**, **Tracey Low** and **Simon Webb**.

**Bios**

**John Luther Adams**

Composer

For John Luther Adams, music is a lifelong search for home – an invitation to slow down, pay attention, and remember our place within the larger community of life on earth. Living for almost 40 years in northern Alaska, Adams discovered a unique musical world grounded in space, stillness, and elemental forces. In the 1970s and into the 1980s, he worked full time as an environmental activist. But the time came when he felt compelled to dedicate himself entirely to music. He made this choice with the belief that, ultimately, music can do more than politics to change the world. Since that time, he has become one of the most widely admired composers in the world, receiving the Pulitzer Prize, a Grammy Award, and many other honours.

In works such as Become Ocean, In the White Silence, and Canticles of the Holy Wind, Adams brings the sense of wonder that we feel outdoors into the concert hall.

And in outdoor works such as Inuksuit and Sila: The Breath of the World, he employs music as a way to reclaim our connections with place, wherever we may be.

A deep concern for the state of the earth and the future of humanity drives Adams to continue composing. As he puts it: ‘If we can imagine a culture and a society in which we each feel more deeply responsible for our own place in the world, then we just may be able to bring that culture and that society into being.’ Since leaving Alaska, Adams and his wife Cynthia have made their home in the deserts of Mexico, Chile, and the southwestern United States.

**Ralph van Raat**

Soloist

Pianist and musicologist Ralph van Raat has appeared as a recitalist in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the United States. Augmenting traditional repertoire, he has taken a special interest in the performance of contemporary classical music.

He has worked closely with many composers on the interpretation of their piano works, including John Adams, Louis Andriessen, Gavin Bryars, Jonathan Harvey, Tan Dun, György Kurtág, Magnus Lindberg, Arvo Pärt, Frederic Rzewski and Sir John Tavener. Many composers have dedicated their piano compositions and piano concertos to van Raat.

Van Raat performs regularly as a soloist with orchestras including London Sinfonietta, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Shanghai Philharmonic, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, the Frankfurt Radio Symphony, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra and the Dortmunder Philharmoniker. He has worked closely with conductors including Tan Dun, Valery Gergiev, JoAnn Falletta, David Robertson, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Susanna Mälkki, Stefan Asbury, Michel Tabachnik, John Adams, Karina Canellakis and Matthias Pintscher.

He has performed as a soloist at important festivals including the symphonic opening concert of the Gergiev Festival, the BBC Proms, the Festival International de Musique de Besançon, the Holland Festival, the Time of Music festival in Viitasaari, Finland, the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, the Berliner Festspiele, the Hong Kong Arts Festival and the Tanglewood Music Festival in the USA. Furthermore, he has been given his own concert series at both the Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw of Amsterdam and De Doelen in Rotterdam.

Since December 2006, Ralph has had an exclusive contract with Naxos. His first recording for Naxos of the complete piano works by John Adams received top ratings in several magazines. Van Raat’s recording with Arvo Pärt’s piano music received a five star rating in BBC Music Magazine. Naxos honoured him in 2009 with an Artist’s Box and in 2017 with an Artist’s Profile.

Van Raat teaches contemporary piano music interpretation at the Conservatorium van Amsterdam. He regularly gives masterclasses, lectures and workshops at the conservatories of Tirana, Nizhny Novgorod, Kiev, the Ligeti Academy of the Asko|Schönberg ensemble as well as for many foundations and universities. In 2021, he was appointed to the faculty of Accademia di Musica Pinerolo (Turin). He is a member of the Jury of the Orleáns Concours International and the Nederlandse Muziekprijs. Ralph van Raat is a Steinway Artist.

**Ailís Ní Ríain**

Composer

Ailís Ní Ríain is an Irish composer and writer based in rural Lancashire. Her work has been performed across Europe, in Israel, Brazil, the USA and Japan, and broadcast on BBC and RTÉ. Her artistic interests are diverse; she has worked broadly in the areas of concert music, installation and music theatre, and has collaborated with writers, dancers, visual artists, filmmakers and theatre artists. In 2016 she a recipient of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation Awards for Artists. Ailís has hearing impairments and has made work referencing deafness, disability and mental health since 2006, working with DaDaFest, Unlimited, Arts and Disability Ireland, Shape Arts, Drake Music and Outside In.

She has been awarded international fellowships, associate artist positions and residences in the USA including Yaddo, Atlantic Center for the Arts, Ragdale Foundation and Art Omi, as well as Centre Culturel Irlandais in Paris and Bogliasco Foundation in Italy. Site-specific music installations include a lighthouse in Cumbria, a K6 telephone box in Manchester, a disused former cotton mill in Lancashire, the Brontë Parsonage Museum in West Yorkshire, a Clitheroe Castle keep and a railway station accumulator tower at Edge Hill, Merseyside.

Current and recent commissions include new work for the RTÉ Concert Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Evelyn Glennie and the New London Chamber Ensemble, ConTempo String Quartet, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Unlimited and the Royal Academy of Music. As a writer of words for stage, Ailís’ work is published by Nick Hern and Bloomsbury and has been translated into French, German and Swedish and produced in Ireland, UK, New York, Germany and Sweden.

Her work in French is represented by L’Arche.Ailís Ni Ríain’s debut album The Last Time I Died was released by NMC Recordings in May 2023. It’s available to buy as a CD in The Bridgewater Hall’s foyer after this performance. To download the album with an exclusive 15% discount, please visit the Official Store and enter the code MIF15 at the checkout via nmcrec.lnk.to/TLTID

**Alissa Firsova**

Composer

Since winning the BBC Proms Young Composer competition in 2001, Alissa Firsova has received three world premieres at the Proms: her Bach Allegro was played by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra under Andrew Litton in 2010, her Bergen’s Bonfire Op. 31 featured in the Bergen Philharmonic’s 250th Anniversary Prom under Litton in 2015 and her own Red Fox Op. 43 was performed by the National Youth Choir of Great Britain and Southbank Sinfonia under Jessica Cottis in 2019.

Her music has also been performed by Imogen Cooper, the Dante Quartet, Netherlands Blazers Ensemble, NTO Mannheim Orchestra, Seattle Chamber Players, Camerata RCO (members of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra) and the Britten Sinfonia, among others. Alissa was recently invited to Verbier, Asiago, Canisy and Conques Festivals as pianist/composer-in-residence. Her music was recorded by Henning Kraggerud on the Simax label in his Munch Suite disc and The Sixteen recorded her Stabat Mater Op. 30 for the Coro label, which was featured in Gramophone’s Top 10 contemporary works by women composers.

As a pianist, she gave her Wigmore Hall and Proms debuts in 2009 and released her debut CD, Russian Émigrés, for the Vivat label in 2015. She has enjoyed collaborations with distinguished artists such as Stephen Kovacevich, Mark Padmore, Roman Simovic, Tim Hugh, Andrew Marriner and Daniel Rowland. Alissa gave her ‘triple debut’ with the English Chamber Orchestra as director, composer and conductor at the Cadogan Hall in 2013. She also conducted the Camerata RCO in her Le Soleil de Conques Op. 33 in Conques Festival in 2015 and for the Unione Musicale series in Turin in 2016.

Alissa’s composer portrait CD Firsova Fantasy, which includes her string quartet Tennyson Fantasy Op. 36, recorded by the Tippett Quartet, was awarded Gramophone’s CD of the Month in September 2018. She received a UK premiere of her Die Windsbraut Op. 38 by the BBC Philharmonic under Leo McFall in September 2018 and subsequently received its Scottish premiere in March 2020 with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra under Mark Wigglesworth. She was also invited to give a solo piano recital for the Amsterdam Piano Series at the Concertgebouw in October 2018, which included her transcription of Mahler’s Adagietto and was released on vinyl by Gutman Records in February 2021.

The 2018/19 season included a US tour with the Camerata RCO and concerts in Paris, Geneva, Munich, Prague, Bratislava, the Luberon and London. In July 2019 she became the Artistic Director of the Lincolnshire International Chamber Music Festival (LICMF). The 2020 iteration opened with an all-Beethoven programme conducted and played by Alissa with the Cheltenham Chamber Orchestra, a concert with Camerata RCO in Amsterdam’s Muziekgebouw, including her Lieder der Welt Op. 44, and a Schubert and Britten song recital together with tenor Mark Padmore in Lincoln.

In 2021, Alissa gave two Schumann/Britten/Brahms recitals together with Mark Padmore at the LICMF Festival and enjoyed a residency at the Stift Festival in Holland in August, where she conducted the world premiere of her mother Elena Firsova’s violin concerto as well as Gubaidulina’s Sieben Worte and performed the world premiere of her own Lilacs Op. 47. In September, she received the Finnish premiere of her Die Windsbraut by the Oulu Sinfonia under Leo McFall and in October she performed Brahms’ Clarinet Trio together with a world premiere of her own Reunion Op. 49 with the Camerata RCO at the CityProms Festival in Holland.

2022 opened with a recording release of Alissa’s Songs of the World by the Psappha ensemble with soprano Daisy Brown. In March, her Stabat Mater was performed in Oxford, Denmark, Sweden and New York and in April, and the Britten Sinfonia and Matilda Lloyd gave a world premiere UK tour of her Stages for trumpet and strings. The BBC Philharmonic Orchestra performed Die Windsbraut at The Bridgewater Hall in May, conducted by Gemma New, and in June To Spring saw its world premiere by the Oxford Bach Choir and Philharmonia Orchestra in Oxford’s Town Hall, in celebration of the choir’s 125th anniversary, conducted by Benjamin Nicholas. Gemma New then took Die Windsbraut to Houston Symphony for its US premiere in November.

In 2023 Stages receives its Finnish premiere under Leo McFall and the Kuopio Symphony Orchestra, and The Sixteen perform her Stabat Mater in St Martin-in-the-Fields as part of Holy Week. Alissa will be performing Brahms’ 1st Piano Concerto with the Bruno Walter Symphony Orchestra in Bratislava, following another residency at Brahms Haus (Baden-Baden), and she will be giving chamber music concerts in Munich, Vienna and the Algarve.

**Jess Dandy**

Soloist

Cumbrian born Jess Dandy is the foremost British contralto of her generation and has been praised for her instrument of velvety plangent timbre, and her artistic remarkable immediacy. This 2022/23 season, highlights have included performances of the Messiah with the Welsh National Opera and Academy of Ancient Music, Bach’s Weihnachtsoratorium with Kulturvereinigung Salzburg, Bach’s St Matthew Passion with Concertgebouw Amsterdam and Dunedin Consort and the premiere of a new opera All Seas by Josephine Stephenson at Opéra Grand Avignon. Other performance highlights yet to come this season will include Handel’s Samson at the BBC Proms with the Academy of Ancient Music, CPE Bach’s Heilig with the Dunedin Consort at the BBC Proms, Elgar’s The Music Makers with the English Symphony Orchestra and a new commission with the BBC Philharmonic.

Jess has appeared on the concert platform with the BBC Philharmonic, The English Concert, Academy of Ancient Music, Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique, Minnesota Orchestra, Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony, BBC National Orchestra and Chorus of Wales, Welsh National Opera, BBC Symphony Orchestra, The Dunedin Consort, Les Arts Florissant, Opera Settecento, The Hallé, Britten Sinfonia and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic; collaborating with conductors including Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Harry Bicket, Laurence Cummings, Osmo Vänskä, Trevor Pinnock, Gemma New, John Butt, William Christie, Kristian Bezuidenhout and Stephen Layton.

In 2021, Jess was shortlisted for a Royal Philharmonic Society Award in the category of Young Artist. She is a multi-faceted artist with a keen interest in ecology, body psychology and spirituality. She is the co-founder of SongPath, a mental health initiative creating musical walking trails in nature for better mental health. With composer Alex Mills, she developed the Music and Being Collective, an open laboratory space exploring music and our sense of self through interdisciplinary dialogue.

**Vimbayi Kaziboni**

Conductor

Widely sought-after for his depth of approach, interpretive imagination and expressivity, Zimbabwean-born conductor Vimbayi Kaziboni has led many critically lauded performances with orchestras across the globe, performing at some of the most prestigious concert halls in the world, including Carnegie Hall, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Royal Concertgebouw, Berlin Philharmonie, Elbphilharmonie, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, Philharmonie de Paris, Southbank Centre and Lincoln Center, among others.

Recent collaborators have included the Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, BBC Philharmonic, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Junge Deutsche Philharmonie, Warsaw National Philharmonic Orchestra, L’Orchestre de chambre de Genève, Ensemble Contrechamps (Geneva), Klangforum Wien and Martha Graham Dance Company, among many others. Upcoming debuts include performances with the SWR Symphonieorchester, New World Symphony, American Composers Orchestra, the City of Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and Musikkollegium Winterthur. An ardent interpreter of new music, Kaziboni has had a long association with leading contemporary music groups Ensemble Modern (Frankfurt) and Ensemble Intercontemporain (Paris) where he served as Assistant Conductor at the beginning of his career and now prolifically collaborates with as a Guest Conductor and Curator.

A former Fulbright fellow, Kaziboni holds degrees from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts in Germany. He is a professor of Orchestral Studies and Contemporary Music at Boston Conservatory, Artistic Advisor of the Boston Lyric Opera, Music Director of the Composers Conference, and artist-in-residence with International Contemporary Ensemble (New York).

**BBC Philharmonic**

The BBC Philharmonic is reimagining the orchestral experience for a new generation – challenging perceptions, championing innovation, and taking a rich variety of music to the widest range of audiences. Along with around 35 free concerts a year at its MediaCityUK studio in Salford and a series of concerts at Manchester’s Bridgewater Hall, the orchestra broadcasts concerts from venues across the North of England and annually at the BBC Proms. Its performances are broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and available on BBC Sounds.

Championing new music, the BBC Philharmonic has recently given world premieres of works by Tom Coult, David Matthews, Emily Howard, Outi Tarkiainen, Anna Þorvaldsdóttir, Erland Cooper, Anna Apple by and Robert Laidlow, with the scope of the orchestra’s output extending far beyond standard repertoire. The BBC Philharmonic’s Chief Conductor is John Storgårds, with whom the orchestra has held a long and successful association.

In 2020 the BBC Philharmonic entered the UK Top 40 charts with Four Notes: Paul’s Tune and, in 2022 it released The Musical Story of the Gingerbread Man – a unique musical re-telling of the classic children’s tale narrated by BBC Radio 5 Live’s Nihal Arthanayake. In May 2023 it performed at the Eurovision song contest, both in the fan park with previous Ukrainian winner Jamala, and in the final itself, with Italian artist Mahmood for a soulful rendition of John Lennon’s Imagine during the Liverpool Songbook medley.

It also records regularly for Chandos Records and since its first release, in 1991, has produced a catalogue of more than 300 discs and digital downloads. It enjoys working with a range of artists, conductors, and composers – a growing family that includes both familiar faces and exciting new talent.

Through all its activities, the BBC Philharmonic is bringing life-changing music experiences to audiences across Greater Manchester, the North of England, the UK and around the world.

www.bbc.co.uk/philharmonic

**BBC Philharmonic Player List**

**Violin 1**

Yuri Torchinsky – Leader

Midori Sugiyama – Assistant Leader

Thomas Bangbala – Sub Leader

Alison Fletcher – Principal

Kevin Flynn – Sub Principal

Austeja Juskaite-Igl

Anna Banaszkiewicz-Maher

Martin Clark

Karen Mainwaring

Catherine Mandelbaum

Anya Muston

Robert Wild

Toby Tramaseur

Sarah White

**Violin 2**

Lisa Obert – Principal

Glen Perry – Assistant Principal

Helen Evans

Lucy Flynn

Christina Knox

Rebecca Mathews

Alyson Zuntz

Matthew Watson

Zhivko Georgiev

Alexandra Schifflers

Sian Goodwin

Dylan Edge

Elizabeth Lister

**Viola**

Daisy Spiers – Guest Principal

Sarah Greene

Bernadette Anguige

Matthew Compton

Ruth Montgomery

Rachel Janes

Fiona Dunkley

Cheryl Law

Amy Hark

Rosalyn Cabot

Rosamund Hawkins

Carolyn Tregaskis

**Cello**

Joely Koos – Guest Principal

Maria Zachariadou – Assistant Principal

Steven Callow – Sub Principal

Jessica Schaefer

Rebecca Aldersea

Melissa Edwards

Elinor Gow

Miriam Skinner

Elise Wild

**Double Bass**

Damián González – Guest Principal

James Goode

Andrew Vickers

Daniel Vassallo

Martin Ludenbach

Ben du Toit

**Flute**

Alex Jakeman – Principal

Victoria Daniel – Sub Principal

**Piccolo**

Jennifer Hutchinson

**Oboe**

James Hulme – Guest Principal

Kenny Sturgeon

**Cor Anglais**

Gillian Callow

**Clarinet**

John Bradbury – Principal

Fraser Langton

**Bass Clarinet**

Elliot Gresty

**Bassoon**

Roberto Giaccaglia – Principal

Angharad Thomas

**Contrabassoon**

Bill Anderson

**Horn**

Ben Hulme – Principal

Rebecca Levis – Associate Principal

Phillip Stoker

Tom Kane

Jonathan Barrett

**Trumpet**

Sam Kinrade – Guest Principal

Gary Farr – Sub Principal

Katie Bannister

**Trombone**

Richard Brown - Principal

Gary MacPhee

**Bass Trombone**

Russell Taylor

**Tuba**

Christopher Evans

**Timpani**

Paul Turner - Principal

**Percussion**

Paul Patrick – Principal

Geraint Daniel

Oliver Patrick

Tim Williams

James Goodwin

Michael Harper

Charles Ashby

Mark Concar

**Harp**

Clifford Lantaff – Principal

**Celeste**

Benjamin Powell

This list of musicians was correct at the time of going to print.

Image credits: John Luther Adams by Molly Sheridan; Ailís Ní Ríain by Emile Holba for BBC; Alissa Firsova by London Aiga Photography; Jess Dandy by Clare Park.