

South Downs Songbook



*Performed by The Orchestra of
Sound and Light*

Friday 24th June 2022

Elms Theatre, Bhasvic

South Downs Songbook

performed by The Orchestra of Sound and Light

Voice: Rachel Farago

Flute (doubling piccolo): Helen Whitaker

Clarinet (doubling bass clarinet): Alison Hughes

Electric Guitar: Lee Westwood

Piano (doubling keyboard): Rachel Fryer

Cello: Joe Giddey

Director: Ed Hughes

Producer: Liz Webb

Please switch off phones/electronic devices

Introduction to the project

Film-maker Sam Moore, from Visual Air, and University of Sussex composer Ed Hughes were commissioned in 2020 by the South Downs National Park Authority to create a special five minute film to celebrate its 10th anniversary. The film provides an overview of the national park, which unfolds over 628 square miles, and 87 miles, between Winchester and Eastbourne, in an impressively varied landscape, stretching across chalk hills, sandstone, clay hills, woods and vales. Ideas from this project led to a new concept - realising that art and artists have responded to the South Downs for centuries, could we celebrate the South Downs as a place that inspires world leading arts practices through a special contemporary songbook of newly commissioned songs and compositions by UK composers.

Thanks to Arts Council England's support through the National Lottery, Orchestra of Sound and Light, who gave acclaimed multimedia performances at the Brighton Festival in 2016 and 2018, today launch the South Downs Songbook with four new songs from four UK composers. The Songbook will be hosted online as well as through live touring, and over the next ten days approximately 35 songs and compositions will be added to the collection, in a wide range of musical styles, by GCSE and A level music students from Hastings Academy, BHASVIC and East Sussex Academy of Music.

Today's four composers, Shirley J Thompson, Rowland Sutherland, Evelyn Ficarra and Ed Hughes, were each commissioned to write a new song inspired by walking the South Downs. Each composer has chosen a text, and each text gives a very different perspective on landscape and history. Shirley Thompson has chosen *An Hymn to the Evening* by Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784) an American writer who spent significant periods in England. Rowland Sutherland has set a poem by Charlotte Turner Smith (1749-1806). Ed Hughes has adapted words by an early contributor to the Mass Observation Archive (Marion Robinson, 1937), who lived near Felpham and was inspired by William Blake's response to the skies over the South Downs. Evelyn Ficarra has set a poem by the contemporary Brighton based poet, Valerie Whittington.

Today we also announce a free digital education resource pack for educators to inspire pupils and students to compose in response to the South Downs, devised and curated by education consultant Duncan Mackrill. Working with Create Music, West Sussex Music and South Downs Schools Network, the pack will include interviews with the commissioned composers about their work, tips on how to get started with composing, and a bespoke library of sampled sounds from the South Downs specially prepared by composer Peter Michael Davison for use with digital audio software such as Ableton and Logic.



Order of programme

<i>South Downs A Celebration</i>	<i>(Film, 2021) Visual & Aerial by Sam Moore, Music by Ed Hughes</i>
<i>The Legend of Devil's Dyke</i>	Izzy Al-Shimmeri
<i>Bird Song</i>	Frieda Joyce
<i>The Turning of The Seasons</i>	Eloise Silver
<i>The Stay</i>	Lella Ufer
<i>Through The Downs</i>	Scarlett Mitchell
<i>Kingley Vale</i>	Riya Hamie
<i>Modes for the Downs</i>	Rowland Sutherland
<i>In the Wind</i>	Thea Adams
<i>Wistful</i>	Theo Stanway
<i>Dawning</i>	Luca Davis
<i>Walk Through the South Downs</i>	Daniel Salter
<i>Sounds of the Birds</i>	Michael Parvez
<i>Constance and Albert</i>	Mima Byrne
<i>What Larks</i>	Evelyn Ficarra

-Short Interval-

<i>An Hymn The Evening</i>	Shirley Thompson
<i>Almanack</i>	Aidan Bryson
<i>Aeolian Downs</i>	Molly Cartmell
<i>The Downs</i>	Felix Durrant
<i>The Oppressive Nature of the Frolocking Hills</i>	Emma Schwarz
<i>Waltz of the Wild Woods</i>	Tyzer McAllister
<i>Rolling Hills</i>	Ebi Wright
<i>In The Elements</i>	Billy Smith
<i>Summit</i>	Sonny Rogers
<i>Sky Rhythms</i>	Ed Hughes

Students' Notes

Izzy Al-Shimmeri - *The Legend of Devil's Dyke*

My composition was inspired by the legend of the Devil's Dyke. The legend says the devil was furious at the conversion of the people of the Weald to Christianity and decided to dig a dyke through the South Downs, so the sea could flow in and drown their villages. Digging secretly at night, he inadvertently wakes an old woman who lights a candle and wakes her cockerel, fooling the devil into thinking it is dawn. Believing that he has failed in his task, he swiftly runs away. The piece takes the form of a rhapsody and shifts between D major and D minor. It begins with an ominous introduction anticipating the devil coming. Towards the end, the flute plays a waltz like melody as calm descends on the Weald.

Frieda Joyce - *Bird Song*

My composition was inspired by the sounds of the birds in the Downs, particularly the dawn chorus. This is seen in the rippling flute and clarinet melodies and how they increase and develop as the morning progresses with the use of ornamentation and quick runs. They eventually subside as the piece comes to an end.

Eloise Silver - *The Turning of The Seasons*

My piece aims to capture the shift of the seasons on the South Downs. It begins with sombre birdsong on flute in the stormy key of C minor, evocative of winter. The lyrical melody was inspired by the birds I heard while on an evening walk on the Downs in February. A decrease in tempo and a shift to the brighter key of E flat major represents the slow shift from winter to spring and a tranquil, sighing clarinet melody with slow rippling triplet accompaniment on the cello represents the rippling stillness of the rolling hills of the Downs. The bright antiphonal responses between flute and bass clarinet evoke the common cheerful birdsong.

Leila Ufer - *The Stay*

My piece was inspired by the chaotic, dark weather of the South Downs. The slightly gothic theme represents an evil protruding storm that begins to roll over the giant hills. The composition begins in Bb minor with broken chords outlining a simple melody to accentuate the rise of the storm. The texture builds from there with cello, clarinet and eventually soprano voice becoming more prevalent. The clarinet plays a brief solo variant of the intro, as the possibility of a brighter day appears. But this is then immediately dismissed as the dissonant soprano joins, introducing an ascending piano line, suggesting that the storm continues.

Scarlett Mitchell - *Through the Downs*

My composition was inspired by the urbanisation of the South Downs. The accented staccato octaves represent the placement of buildings and construction work. The clarinet triplets in a quieter dynamic represent nature being drowned out whilst the rising chromaticism of the melody expresses over-population and the increase in pollution.

Riya Hamie - *Kingley Vale*

My composition was inspired by Kingley Vale on the South Downs - inside there is a forest comprised of some of the oldest yew trees in Britain. The trees are said to come alive and move at night according to folklore, and I wanted to depict this through the low, menacing bass figure and Aeolian harmony.

Thea Adams - *In the Wind*

I wanted to create a piece of music that replicated the sensation of the conditions being so windy that you can't hear the person next to you. The dense and building texture of the piano does this, while the flute represents birdsong which often surprisingly cuts through the wind. The voice represents the perspective of a person in these weather conditions. I was particularly inspired by the trip we took to the South Downs, which was extremely windy, and we could barely hear each other at times.

Theo Stanway - *Wistful*

My composition was inspired by the human emotional response of being on the South Downs. It explores several emotions one may perceive during their time on the South Downs. Changes in tempo, tonality and harmony represent changes in weather, scenery or emotions.

Luca Davis - *Dawning*

My inspiration for this composition was based on my time walking and travelling the Downs. The goal of my piece was to portray the journey of the Downs from daybreak, when the sun's light is barely visible and everything comes to life, to later and later into the day. The harmony of the piece changes from a calm consonance at the start into a more active and dissonant sound as the day progresses. The rhythms were based on folk songs, meshed together to create a feeling of daybreak becoming gradually more dance-like and lively.

Daniel Salter - *Walk Through the South Downs*

My composition is inspired by the changing nature of the South Downs. The simple melody is heard in a variety of different keys, representing the way that the same area of the Downs can be viewed very differently depending on when it is seen (for example different times of day or different seasons). The passage on the piano with separating melody and accompanying lines represents the many branching pathways to walk down.

Michael Parvez - *Sound of the Birds*

The soothing and relaxing nature of the flute, piano and cello create the feeling that I felt when in the South Downs. The trill on the flute is reminiscent of a bird cheeping and the quaver-like melodies symbolise the flowing movement of the hills.

Mima Byrne - *Constance and Albert*

This piece is inspired by the story of my great-grandparents, Constance and Albert, who spent their lives living and working in and around the South Downs. Albert was a farm laborer's son and Constance was a farmer's daughter, and their relationship was disapproved of by her family due to the difference in class. However, defying her family's wishes, they got married soon after the First World War and went on to have a long happy life together, raising a family of nine. I was inspired by the folk traditions of Sussex, including a wedding song named 'Come Write Me Down', and songs my own grandmother had learnt from my great grandfather, which she, almost a century later, sang snatches of to me as a young child.

Aidan Bryson - *Almanack*

My piece was largely inspired by the work of the painter, designer, illustrator and wood engraver Eric Ravilious, who was well known for his paintings and engravings of the Sussex landscape where he grew up. In particular, the composition relates to Ravilious's illustrations for Stanley Morrison's *Almanack*, 1929. These illustrations bridge the gap between humanity and the landscape, the modern and the ancient, fantasy and reality, and their mystical nature was intriguing to me. My composition has a somewhat folk-like feel to it, with chirpy clarinet passages, gliding piano and guitar accompaniments, and serene song-like melodies played by the whole ensemble.

Molly Cartmell - *Aeolian Downs*

My composition is inspired by the South Downs in the war. I found out that Devil's Dyke was the main training site for the Canadian troops preparing for D-day and so to reflect this, the piano has a passage where the left hand is inspired by a motif taken from the Canadian national anthem. One of the surprising things I noticed was how little Devil's Dyke had changed from before and after the war, so I decided to end the piece in a very similar way to the beginning however with some small differences. The music begins peacefully but gradually becomes more dissonant and agitated before returning again to a peaceful state. To start my composition, I was originally inspired by Café 1930 by Piazzolla which is also in the aeolian mode.

Felix Durrant - *The Downs*

Whilst composing my piece, I envisioned someone walking through the Downs. They turn to this open, wondrous space in the hope to find an answer to an inward struggle. The fluctuating tonality and metre reflects this. The opening motif is repeated at the end; now major which suggests they found their answer.

Emma Schwarz - *The Oppressive Nature of the Frolicking Hills*

I was inspired by the South Downs as a representation of nature. My piece attempts to convey the disruption of nature by the modern industrial world. Having played a lot of folk music myself, I used that influence to help convey the theme of nature.

Tyzer McAllister - *Waltz of the Wild Woods*

My composition is inspired by the way a landscape is affected by light. My piece is in triple time and is a journey through, and sometimes out of, the woods. The main theme recurs in a new, major key to signal the clearing that the journey has just reached. I wanted to write a clear and simple melody that could be later decorated by variations and modulations. The bridge to the major section of the piece features a whole tone melody, creating a sense of suspension before landing in the light of E major. I wanted the melody and arrangement to be folk-like and hope I have captured this. Thanks for listening!

Ebi Wright - *Rolling Hills*

When composing this piece, I was particularly inspired by the slow change of the landscape of the South Downs, which I experienced during long walks through the hills. This led me to my starting point: a modal approach to harmony, which reflects both the gradual swelling of the landscape and the sense of openness and freedom

I experienced. In particular, I focused on transitioning between the modes as seamlessly as possible, to reflect the subtle contrast of the scenery. In early sections of the piece, I used brighter modes, strong melodic lines and increased dynamics, representing the life of the South Downs during the day. This contrasts with the end of the piece, where the use of the Phrygian mode and the gentle tempo and dynamic represents the change in the day; as night falls and the hills become darker and quieter.

Billy Smith - *In The Elements*

I was inspired by a trip up to the South Downs to watch the Neowise Comet on a night in March 2022. The night was incredibly calm but out at sea was a thunderstorm. The low repeated bass notes in the opening section represent the ever-present nature of thunder during a storm. The frenetic opening melody that passes between the instruments highlights the chaos storms can bring; the later, more legato, clarinet melody focuses on the rolling hills slick with mud and dew. The contrasting middle section describes the day after the storm, with its lighter texture and tone before the eventual return of the volatile storm, as the landscape is once again at the weather's mercy.

Sonny Rogers - *Summit*

My composition is inspired by the serenity and power of being in nature. The majority of the piece is in the dorian mode and the main guitar motif uses folk-style rhythms. There is an ascending ostinato in the piano part, played as a pedal chord, to accompany the woodwinds and guitar. With the main instrumental 'chorus' section, I wanted to create a feeling of accomplishment and excitement, just like reaching the summit of a mountain. This is also in 5/8 time which unsettles the previously 6/8 metre.



Composers' Notes

Rowland Sutherland: *Modes from The Downs* (first performance)

Based on the sonnet: *Composed During a Walk on the Downs* by Charlotte Turner Smith (1749-1806)

SONNET [42] XLII. Composed during a Walk on the Downs, Nov. 1787.

The poet Charlotte Turner Smith grew up in West Sussex, in Bignor, in the South Downs. She eventually left the region when she married, but later on in her life she returned to Sussex, spending time in Brighton, before settling again in West Sussex near Chichester. She gives a romantic, evocative account of her walk through the South Downs in her poem. We are taken through different emotions of melancholy, sorrow, endeavour and optimism. As well as reflecting upon this nocturnal poem, I also embarked on a musical journey through the contrasting moods and modes this poem evokes, and drew upon some of my own early musical ventures - such as exploring late baroque and early classical soundscapes, British folk suites with symphonic wind bands, through to jazz ballads with hip-hop pulsations and the impetus of Latin jazz. My aim was to paint the vivid depictions the poet expresses, through sound and words.

*The dark and pillowy cloud; the fallow trees,
Seem o'er the ruins of the year to mourn;
And cold and hollow, the inconstant breeze
Sobs thro' the falling leaves and wither'd fern.
O'er the tall brow of yonder chalky bourn,
The evening shades their gather'd darkness fling,
While, by the ling'ring light, I scarce discern
The shrieking nightjar, sail on heavy wing.*

*Ah! yet a little — and propitious Spring,
Crown'd with fresh flow'rs, shall wake the woodland strain;
But no gay change revolving seasons bring,
To call forth Pleasure from the soul of Pain,
Bid syren Hope resume her long lost part,
And chase the vulture Care, that feeds upon the heart*



Evelyn Ficarra: What Larks for voice, chamber ensemble and electronics

Music by Evelyn Ficarra. Words from a poem by Valerie Whittington

This piece considers the different experiences to be had of nature and time, and the otherness of non-human species. What is it to be a lark? How do they experience the closeness and immediacy of their nests in the ground, compared with the vast vistas and freedom of soaring above it? How can we enter into their perspective and imagine their point of view? How do the cliffs and the sea hold it all in place? During composition, I read and re-read a suite of poems by my friend and collaborator Valerie Whittington. I was continually struck by resonant phrases, notions of listening and silence, the intense light, 'stark white and blue', the 'hard pressed chalk', the larks 'speaking in tongues' - 'speaking decisively, but not for us'. I was particularly attracted to the opening of one poem:

I have not written this
not yet

I played with this line and it became a refrain for the piece - for all the things we have simultaneously done and not done - written, sung, heard - as our lives play out through imagination and time.

Text for What Larks: words from a poem by Valerie Whittington:

*I have not written this
not yet*

*I have not sung
hard pressed chalk
so bright
it hurts our eyes*

*you have not heard this
the sun is exploding*

Shirley J Thompson: An Hymn to the Evening (first performance A setting of An Hymn to the Evening, poem by Phyllis Wheatley (1753-1784))

With this song for the South Downs Songbook project my intention is to evoke the 'Majestic grandeur!' of the English countryside as asserted in the poem, An Hymn to the Evening, by the writer, Phillis Wheatley. The vocal part is employed dramatically, assuming the protagonist in the poem and suggesting all kinds of mystery bubbling beneath the surface. The instruments perform supporting roles to the lead character, with intrigues of their own, but as accompaniment and as a chorus. I have much enjoyed setting Phillis Wheatley poems previously. Through her words, her witty and subversive personality reveals deep insights to a Georgian lifestyle, reminiscent of the quintessential Georgian writer, Jane Austen. An Hymn to the Evening, a warm and characterful poem, reminds me of walks in the Downs on a beautiful day, enwrapped by the supreme majesty of nature.

*Soon as the sun forsook the eastern main
The pealing thunder shook the heav'nly plain;
Majestic grandeur! From the zephyr's wing,
Exhales the incense of the blooming spring.
Soft purl the streams, the birds renew their notes,
And through the air their mingles music floats.
Through all the heav'ns what beauteous dies are spread!*

*But the west glories in the deepest red: ...
At morn to wake more heav'nly, more refin'd;
So shall the labours of the day begin
More pure, more guarded from the snares of sin.
Night's leaden sceptre seals my drowsy eyes,
Then cease, my son, til fair Aurora rise.*

Ed Hughes: Sky Rhythms (first performance)

For this song, I selected words written by Marion Robinson for the Mass Observation Archive, on one of the first 'Day Surveys' (12 July 1937). Marion Robinson was a resident near Felpham, West Sussex, in the 1930s. Marion writes about everyday life, her political views and the way in which proximity to the South Downs raises her spirits. She also mentions the fact that William Blake lived in Felpham (in 1800-1803) and speculates that certain visual rhythms in his work from that period were influenced by the unique and beautiful effects of light and cloud over the Downs.

Text for Sky Rhythms (adapted from the Mass Observation Archive day survey of Marion Robinson, 12 July 1937):

*I live in a seaside bungalow town, in a furnished bungalow.
Very small and draughty,
but fortunately,
looking out across open fields and country
to the South Downs*

*The town is inhabited by get-rich-quick bourgeoisie
who all let their bungalows in summer
to come-and-go visitors.
These come for a fortnight at a time,
and wander about in various kinds
of holiday dress
shorts, beach slacks, sunbathing garments and bathing suits.
They rush into the sun and mostly burn bright pink
through trying to tan too fast.*

*To the news' agents
Daily Herald Placard
Stalin might do something to make our bread dearer
Further depressed by news in paper
which hopes that England will not let France down*

*but I am quite sure she will
Husband points out that
things must get worse before they can get better
I know this with my mind
but the immediate prospect weighs upon me.
Also I have an uncomfortable fear
that if things come to a fight
I may not have the guts to do all I should*

*I live in a seaside bungalow town, in a furnished bungalow.
Very small and draughty,
but fortunately
looking out across open fields and country
to the South Downs
The air is splendid,
we get whatever sunshine is going,
and witness superb skylscapes.
Felpham, where Blake lived, is near,
and one can often see in cloud arrangement
his probable inspiration for the rhythms of the lines his pictures take -
different from sky effects noticed elsewhere...*

*Away to Sweet Felpham for Heaven is there
The Ladder of Angels descends thro the air
On the Turret its spiral does softly descend
Thro' the village then winds at My Cot i[t] does end*

Words adapted from Marion Robinson Mass Observation Day Survey 12 July 1937
William Blake excerpt from poem, 14 Sept. 1800



Acknowledgements and thanks

ACCA, Laura McDermott (director), Beth O'Leary, Izzy Segal, & Seb Falcone
Mass Observation Archive, Fiona Courage

Partner schools and colleges: John Sims, ESAM. Jo Hatton, Ben ~~Albu~~, Dan
McIlvenny, Thom Jenkins, BHASVIC. Kym East, Hastings Academy.
University of Sussex School of Media, Arts and Humanities (Research Committee)
Create Music and West Sussex Music
South Downs National Park Authority
Produced by Liz Webb Management
Project funding Arts Council England through National Lottery Funding
Special thanks to Liz Webb and Duncan Mackrill

Cover and image below by illustrator and engraver Eric Ravilious, 1929

We're on Twitter. Performed by @OrchestraSI and directed by @EdHughes16
thanks to #ACEsupported #NationalLotteryFunding #SouthDownsSongbook

The performance is being recorded for inclusion in the South Downs Songbook
(<https://www.orchsoundlight.org/southdownssongbook>)

