

East London Chorus

Conductor Jessica Norton

Piano George Ireland

Christ Church Wanstead

Saturday 28 June 2025

About Tonight's Programme

Arcadelt – *Ave Maria*

This serene setting of *Ave Maria* is attributed to the Franco-Flemish composer Jacob Arcadelt, who worked in Rome and Paris in the 16th century. Though best known for his madrigals, this sacred motet demonstrates his gift for graceful melody and clarity of texture. The polyphony is gentle and balanced, embodying Renaissance ideals of purity and devotion.

Victoria – *O Quam Gloriosum*

Tomás Luis de Victoria, one of Spain's greatest Renaissance composers, wrote *O Quam Gloriosum* for the Feast of All Saints. A joyful motet celebrating the glory of heaven, it showcases his distinctive style: rich harmonic textures, imitative counterpoint, and an expressive intensity that reflects his deep religious conviction.

Hassler – *Dixit Maria*

Hans Leo Hassler, a German composer influenced by the Italian polyphonic tradition, brings a luminous clarity to this Marian motet. Setting the Annunciation text with elegance and restraint, *Dixit Maria* exemplifies his synthesis of German choral rigour with Italian lyricism.

Rachmaninov – *Bogoroditse Devo*

From his *All-Night Vigil* (1915), Rachmaninov's setting of the Orthodox *Ave Maria* is both intimate and majestic. Using the Russian language and modal harmonies characteristic of Orthodox chant, he crafts a work of spiritual depth and emotional warmth. The choral writing is rich yet transparent, highlighting the reverent simplicity of the prayer.

Palestrina – *Sicut Cervus*

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina's *Sicut Cervus* is a quintessential example of Renaissance sacred music. The motet, a setting of Psalm 42 ("As the deer longs for flowing streams"), flows with calm polyphony and gentle word painting, illustrating the soul's yearning for God with poised and sublime beauty.

Tallis – *If Ye Love Me*

A beloved anthem by Thomas Tallis, *If Ye Love Me* is written in Early Modern English and exemplifies the clarity of text setting favoured in the English Reformation. The imitative polyphony is simple yet poignant, and the restrained style enhances the spiritual earnestness of Christ's words from St John's Gospel.

Haydn

Composed around 1799–1800, Haydn's *Te Deum* in C major was commissioned by Empress Maria Theresa of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A devout Catholic, the Empress was a great admirer of Haydn's music, and this exuberant setting was likely intended for ceremonial court performance. Though Haydn was in his later years, the work is brimming with youthful vitality and confidence.

The *Te Deum* is set as a single continuous movement, divided into three broad sections. Unlike earlier settings that might include vocal solos, Haydn chooses to write entirely for chorus and orchestra, lending the piece an inclusive, public character. The opening "Te Deum laudamus" is majestic and declamatory, marked by strong homophonic writing and regal fanfare figures in the orchestra. A contrasting middle section, "Te per orbem terrarum," introduces a more lyrical mood, with flowing contrapuntal lines and expressive dynamic contrasts. The final section builds in energy and grandeur, culminating in a brilliant fugue on "In te, Domine, speravi" and a triumphant conclusion. The overall effect is one of dignified celebration, suitable both for church and court, blending Haydn's mastery of choral texture with the ceremonial brilliance of his late orchestral style.

Brahms – *Intermezzo in A major, Op. 118 No. 2*

Gjeilo – *Ubi Caritas*

Contemporary Norwegian composer Ola Gjeilo offers a lush, atmospheric setting of the ancient text "Where charity and love are, God is there." With rich, floating harmonies and a meditative pace, the piece evokes a warm, contemplative spirit. Its modern tonal language is infused with a sense of timeless reverence.

***Ar Hyd y Nos* – Arr. Alan Llewelyn Thomas**

This traditional Welsh lullaby, "All Through the Night", is cherished for its gentle melody and soothing character. In this arrangement by Alan Llewelyn Thomas, the tune is treated with affection and warmth, allowing the lyrical beauty of the original to shine through restrained harmonies and tender phrasing.

***Danny Boy* – Arr. Rusbridge**

Set to the Irish tune *Londonderry Air*, this beloved ballad speaks of parting, longing, and enduring love. Rusbridge's arrangement retains the emotive simplicity of the melody while offering subtle harmonic enrichments, allowing the song's heartfelt sentiment to resonate fully with modern audiences.

***Wild Mountain Thyme* – Arr. Norton**

A Scottish folk song imbued with natural imagery and romantic yearning, *Wild Mountain Thyme* has become a staple of Celtic repertoire. Jessica arranged this to be performed at her wedding in 2024, specifically to be easy for a choir to sing without a conductor. This choral arrangement enriches the traditional melody with lush harmonies, highlighting its wistful beauty and connection to the land.

Stanford - *Six Irish Folk Songs*

Though Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924) is best known for his sacred music and contributions to the Anglican choral tradition, his Irish heritage remained a deep source of inspiration throughout his life. Born in Dublin and educated at Cambridge and in Germany, Stanford brought a Brahmsian musical sensibility to his treatment of Irish themes. Nowhere is this more evident than in his *Six Irish Folk Songs*, Op. 78, composed in 1902, five of which we perform tonight.

This set marries Stanford's command of Romantic harmony and choral texture with Irish traditional melodies and poetry, many drawn from *Moore's Irish Melodies* — a widely known collection of patriotic and sentimental verse by Thomas Moore (1779–1852), set to traditional Irish airs. Unlike more rustic or populist folk arrangements, these songs are refined and expressive miniatures, with rich harmonic language and sensitive word-setting.

Breathe No More is a gentle, elegiac opening to the set. This song meditates on lost love and the pain of remembrance. The restrained choral writing and tender piano part reflect a mood of quiet resignation, drawing on the subtle expressiveness of the original air.

One of Moore's most lyrical texts, *At the Mid Hour of Night* conjures a mood of twilight reflection. Stanford's setting highlights the poem's delicate imagery and shifts between light and shadow, with fluid harmonies and gracefully flowing lines.

The Sword of Erin brings a striking change of tone. It is a bold and patriotic anthem celebrating Irish heroism. Rhythmic vigour and martial accents in both choir and piano evoke the passion and pride of the poem, while Stanford's dramatic contrasts underline the call to national memory.

It is Not the Tear is one of the most emotionally complex songs of the set — a meditation on sorrow and remembrance, where Stanford uses expressive dissonances and suspensions to heighten the poignancy of Moore's verse. The choral textures are supple and finely balanced, bringing depth to the melancholy.

The set concludes with a vivid and rhythmically lively celebration of Irish pageantry, with *Oh, The Sight Entrancing*. The music matches the brilliance of the imagery — flashing swords, streaming banners — with buoyant energy, culminating in a rousing finish.

Jessica Norton - Conductor



Jessica Norton is a dynamic choral practitioner, vocal coach, and Vocal Health First Aider, dedicated to inspiring and developing singers of all levels. She is the Musical Director of East London Chorus and Polymnia Chamber Choir, as well as Music Leader of the Blackheath Halls Youth Choir. She also serves as Vocal Coach for the CBSO Youth and Children's Choruses and Section Coach for the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain. Her extensive choral experience includes work with Henley Youth Choir, London Concord Singers, London Orpheus Choir, Pegasus Choir, London Symphony Chorus, and Milton Keynes Chorale.

A classically trained soprano with a Diploma in Singing Performance from ABRSM, Jessica has performed as a soloist with ensembles such as the London Symphony Chorus, Ealing Common Choir, and Harwich and Dovercourt Choral Society. She has been a featured soprano in Wanstead's annual opera gala, *Glamour on the Green*, and has appeared in multiple BBC Proms, including *The Dream of Gerontius* under Sir Simon Rattle. Her vocal versatility has also led to performances at PHAB's Christmas Fundraising Events, ITV's *The Halcyon*, and a viral YouTube collaboration with Brendan Kavanagh, which has amassed over 8.3 million views.

As a sought-after vocal coach, Jessica teaches privately and for institutions such as Music in Offices. She leads vocal workshops for schools, choirs, and corporate events, working with organisations like Haygarth Marketing Agency and the Nous Group. Passionate about vocal health and choral excellence, she regularly runs Come and Sing Days and Vocal Training Days for choirs throughout the year, helping singers refine their technique and build confidence.

George Ireland – Piano



Noted for "spectacular, sensitive and vivid accompaniment" (*The Latest*) and a "superbly voiced instrumental partnership of his singer" (*Sussex Express*), George Ireland enjoys a thriving career, equally in demand in recital, opera and choral music. He has recently worked with the youth companies of the Royal Opera House and Glyndebourne, as well as Grange Park Opera, Waterperry Opera Festival and West Green House Opera.

He is the winner of the 2024 New Voices Competition at the Northern Aldeburgh Festival with Mezzo-Soprano Judith Lebreuilly, adjudicated by Sir John Tomlinson, Edward Gardner and Sholto Kynoch, and with Mezzo-Soprano Rebecca Leggett won the 2022 London Song Festival Masterclass and British Art Song Competition with Sir Thomas Allen. He accompanied Soprano Oksana Lepaska's winning recitals at the 2022 National Mozart Competition in London, and the Kathleen Ferrier Award-winning recitals of Countertenor Hugh Cutting and Soprano Jessica Cale in 2021 and 2020.

East London Chorus

Soprano

Sandra Andrews, Eleanor Blackman, Jenny Brown, Alison Chubb, Jennifer Griffiths, Viv Lennadd, Abi Perryman, Aleksandra Povazhnaia, Jen Walker

Alto

Sue Davis, Judith Jackson, Lesley Jones, Rosemary Leeke, Rosemary Lucas, Sarah Norton, Stephanie Shaw

Tenor

Ruth Clifford, William Dewar, Kwaku Owusu-Akyem, Andy Swordy, Jez Tennant

Bass

Jim Cohen, James Dodd, John Penty

List of singers correct at time of going to press

Hear Us

Poulenc and Mendelssohn

Saturday 22 November 2025, 6.30pm

St Mary's Parish Church Woodford E18 2PA

Family Christmas Concert

Saturday 13 December 2025, 4.00 pm

Christ Church Wanstead E11 2SW

Join Us

We rehearse at Chobham Academy, Stratford E20 1BD on Tuesday evenings. We hold open rehearsals at the start of each term so that you can try us out before joining us. If you would like to attend an open rehearsal, please contact our membership secretary, Rosemary Lucas, at membership@eastlondonchorus.org.uk to make arrangements.

After that, if you'd like to join us, recruitment is by a simple audition with our Musical Director, Jessica Norton.