



Friday 23rd February - 1:10pm

**Sophie Benfield** (soprano) & **Alexandra Van Wyk** (piano)

**Suggested donation £5**

### **BIOGRAPHIES**

**Sophie Benfield** is at The Royal Academy of Music on the Master of Arts Course with scholarship. She is under the tutelage of Kate Patterson, John Lattimore and Iain Ledingham. She recently gained her Bachelor of Music from the same institution. Sophie started singing at the age of 9 as a Girl Chorister at Lichfield Cathedral School, where she later became Head Girl Chorister (2015). Sophie has performed in various prestigious locations, including St Martins-in-the-field (2017), and Wigmore Hall, where she performed as part of an ensemble for Brahms' Vier Gesänge op. 17 and performed Lakme's Flower Duet (2018).

Sophie's operatic debuts include Mabel (Pirates of Penzance, 2016); understudy Cunegonde (Candide, 2018); and Antonia (The Tales of Hoffman, 2019); all with Bedfordshire Youth Opera. During her undergraduate degree, Sophie performed chorus in the Royal Academy Opera's Triple Bill in March 2022, as well as the roles of Soeur Blanche (Poulenc's Les dialogues des Carmelites) and Donna Anna (Mozart's Don Giovanni) for the Vocal faculty scenes (2023).

Sophie has also entered many music competitions from a young age and received 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the AESS Catherine Lambert Junior Recital Prize and was awarded the English-speaking prize (2017). She has also the winner of the District and Regional finals and awarded runner up in the Young Rotary Musician competition (2014). She has also been awarded 'Highly Commended' in the Fiona Nelson Prize (2022) and the Isabel Jay Memorial Prize (2023).

Sophie's oratorio work started with Edinburgh Chamber Society performing the soprano solos for Beethoven's No.9 Symphony (2019). She is also the alumnus soprano scholar for Sloane Square Choral Society (2022) Whilst in London, Sophie has been part of the Royal Academy of Music Bach in Leipzig soloist series under the batons of Peter Whelan, John Butt and Iain Ledingham. Sophie's oratorio highlights include performing Fauré's Requiem and Lili Boulanger's Requiem with the University of Greenwich conducted by

Olivia Shotton(2023). As well as her debut with North Herts Choral society singing in the infamous 'Elijah' Soprano solos conducted by Harry Bradford. Also, Sophie has recently returned from Monterosso singing as an operatic and choral soloist with South Bucks Choral Society. Sophie looks forward to performing another 'Elijah' with Truro Choral society in a few weeks.

**Alexandra van Wyk** began her studies at Stellenbosch University in 2016 and completed her BMus degree at the end of 2019, specialising in piano accompaniment. In addition to piano as her principle instrument, Alexandra completed two years of vocal training under mezzo-soprano Jolene Auret-Kappis. In her second year of studies, Alexandra was selected as vocal soloist by the Stellenbosch University Jazz Band, performing in the Endler Concert Series. In 2019, Alexandra became the first collaborative pianist to win the Mabel Quick Instrumental Bursary Competition, in addition to receiving the Betsie Cluver award for the overall best achievement in piano as a principal instrument. Other bursary awards for academic and practical achievements include bursaries from both the National Arts Council (2020 and 2021) and the Myra Chapman Trust (2020). In 2022, the Songmaker's Guild of South Africa - an organisation which celebrates the art song genre - selected Alexandra as one of their 2022 Young Artists. In her capacity as Young Artist, Alexandra was invited to perform in masterclasses and concerts organised by the Songmaker's Guild. Later that year, she graduated with her MMus degree (Piano Accompaniment) cum laude. Her thesis entitled "Viktor Ullmann: an Analysis and Interpretation of Selected Theresienstadt Compositions Featuring Piano," analysed select lieder composed during Viktor Ullmann's detainment in the Theresienstadt ghetto during World War II.

Throughout her Masters studies, Alexandra worked as Assistant Lecturer to the piano department, as well as student accompanist. In December 2022, Alexandra received an entrance scholarship from the Royal Academy of Music, and is currently pursuing a Master of Arts (Piano Accompaniment) degree under Prof Michael Dussek and Prof James Baillieu. In November 2023, Alexandra performed in the RAM's Academy Voices concert series at the Italian Cultural Institute. This year, she will make her debut as a member of the Royal Academy of Music's prestigious Song Circle, in two concerts at the end of January. Outside of her studies, Alexandra works as a piano teacher for Maison Musicale in London.



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