

The Orchestral Music of Afghanistan: Looking Forward

World Premiere

Tuesday 5th July 2022 at EarthH

Featured Afghan composers Arson Fahim,
Elaha Soroor, Zalai Pakta, Qambar Nawshad,
Qudrat Wasefi, Mohsen Saifi, Mila Yousufi, Ghafar
Maliknezhad, Meena Karimi

Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra

Cayenna Ponchione-Bailey *conductor*

Saphwat Simab *rubab*

Shahbaz Hussain *tabla*

Yusuf Mahmood *harmonium*

Mehboob Nadeem *sitar*

William Rees Hoffman *dutar*

Violin I Tamás András, Anna-Liisa Bezrodny
Charlotte Scott, Adrian Adlam

Violin II Katerina Nazarova, Alicja Smiteana, Clara Biss

Viola Jon Thorne, Richard Cookson, Mariam Ruetschi

Violoncello Mats Lidstrom, Martin Thomas

Bass Uxia Martinez Botana

Anthony Robb *flute*, Joe Sanders *oboe*,

Tim Lines *clarinet*, Nikolaj Henriques *bassoon*,

Francisco Gomez *horn*, Joe Atkins *trumpet*,

Danny Scott *trombone*, Julian Poole *percussion*

With guest appearances by:

Ustad Asif Mahmood *tabla*

Elaha Soroor *vocals*

Manizha Paiman *narrator*

Singers from King's College London Chapel Choir
and the Imperial College Chamber Choir

Soprano Alys Dally, Lucy Ganss, Sarah
James, Ksenia Reimchen, Katie Walker

Alto Sheena Jibowu, Maria Portela, April
West, Marissa White

Tenor James David, Felix Gideonse, Arun
Ramanathan

Bass Jacob Abel, Nicholas Bacon, Robert
Field, Ricky Tain

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The
University
Of
Sheffield.

The Orchestral Music of Afghanistan: Looking Forward has been co-curated by Cayenna Ponchione-Bailey and Arson Fahim to celebrate Afghanistan's history of orchestral music-making while providing a platform for the flourishing creativity of Afghan composers and musicians who are now in exile or hiding, unable to make music in their own country. Tonight, the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra and our guest master musicians premiere eight newly commissioned works by Afghan composers representing some of the most exciting new compositional talent to come out of Afghanistan in the last decade, including the original compositions and orchestral arrangements of traditional Afghan songs. In addition to these premieres, our guest musicians will perform a small number of traditional pieces without the rest of the orchestra.

The orchestras of Afghanistan are unique in that they usually encompass a fusion of traditional Afghan instruments with those of European heritage—the combination of which define the essentially Afghan timbral and rhythmic qualities of these ensembles. This commissioning project sought to expand the timbral palette available to composers while building on the orchestral instrumentation established at the Afghanistan National Institute of Music over the past decade. For this concert, composers have been given the opportunity to write for an orchestra comprised of flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone, percussion, rubab (often considered the national instrument of Afghanistan), herati dutar, harmonium, sitar, tabla, 7 violins, 3 violas, 2 cellos and a double bass. One of the visions is that other orchestras across the globe will be able to programme these new compositions, engaging the Afghan musicians in their own communities to join the orchestras for their performances.

A word from Arson Fahim – Co-curator, composer, and pianist

“Despite music having an important role in Afghanistan's culture and history, over four decades of war and extremism have had a devastating impact on it. In the late 90's music was completely banned by the Taliban and taking power in August of 2021, they are once again silencing music by breaking instruments and persecuting musicians. This concert is about sharing the beauty of Afghanistan and its music but also raising awareness about the sad realities the country is facing. The concert is a way of keeping the sound of Afghan music loud and alive – a symbol of resistance and a message of hope.”

**Programme in alphabetical order by composer;
performance order will differ.**

Arson Fahim (b. 2000)

Dance of Terror (2022)

for solo rubab and orchestra

Meena Karimi (b. 2006)

Dawn (2020)

for solo cello and orchestra

Ghafar Maliknezhad (b. 1987)

Daa Zemoong Ziba Watan (This Is Our Beautiful Homeland)

original song by Ustad Awalmir

new original arrangement for orchestra

Mohammad Qambar Nawshad (b. 1996)

Hope (2022)

for orchestra

Zalai Pakta (b. 1978)

Heart That Burns (2022)

orchestrated by Milad Yousufi

Mohsen Saifi (b. 1989)

Asta Boro (Pace Slowly)

traditional Afghan wedding song

new original arrangement for orchestra

Elaha Soroor (b. 1989)

Baran (2022)

poem by Mohammad Sharif Saiidi

orchestrated by Matt Holborn for solo voice, solo rubab and orchestra

Qudrat Wasefi (b. 1999)

Nastaran (Wild Rose)

Afghan folk song

new original arrangement-composition for choir, narrator and orchestra

Milad Yousufi (b. 1995)

Nostalgia (2022)

for orchestra

Composer biographies and notes on the compositions

in alphabetical order; the performance order will differ.



ARSON FAHIM: *DANCE OF TERROR* (new original composition)

Featured by the BBC World Service and Lyse Doucet, composer and pianist Arson Fahim's (b. 2000) music is infused with his compassion and a fierce commitment to social justice within his homeland of Afghanistan. Having graduated from the Afghanistan National Institute of Music in 2020, he is now enrolled in a composition degree at Longy School of Music in Boston. Fahim's music has been performed in the USA, UK and Italy, and his original score for the play *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles* was performed at the Wales Millennium Centre in November 2021.

About *Dance of Terror*

Sometimes when pain becomes overwhelming, humour becomes a defense mechanism. When you live in a place where at any moment a bomb or a terrorist attack can kill you or much worse, someone you love, you have to laugh at the face of death to make life bearable - it's the most deeply tragic kind of laughter. No war can ever be just, and no matter how hard I've tried, no reason can make sense of war. Looking back at the 20 years of the US war in Afghanistan, it looks like an episode of Tom and Jerry – the war being a playful game, and the news being entertainment to spectators. As hundreds of thousands died, those in power only continued to gather more power and money, and every country involved in the war only prioritized their personal interests at the cost of the people of Afghanistan. It is seldom those who invoke war who suffer the consequences. To them, earth is merely a playground for their political games, the deaths are just numbers – but those numbers are lives lost. Not just the lives of those who were taken by war, but also the lives of those who lost loved ones and will never be able to live the lives they used to again. No matter what the political reasons behind it, the destruction and devastation that war brings can never be justified.



MEENA KARIMI: *DAWN* (original composition, orch. by Arson Fahim)

Meena Karimi (b. 2006) is a cellist, composer, and women’s rights advocate from Afghanistan. She started her musical studies on cello and *dilruba* and is currently majoring in classical cello performance at Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan, U.S.A. She has been featured in the Financial Times, New York Times magazine, NBC News, BBC World with Lyse Doucet, and recently has been part of VII Foundation’s exhibition “Imagine: Reflections on Peace” at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) in Washington D.C. In addition to her music activities, Meena is a member of many campus groups, loves to read, and enjoys sharing her experiences living in the United States through her newsletters and website.

About *Dawn*

Dawn was my first composition and it represents the story, struggles, strengths, and pain of women and girls in Afghanistan. Afghan women have always had to fight in order to achieve one basic human right such as going to school or participating equally in a country that they are part of. I grew up experiencing this in my everyday life and so *Dawn* is my story as much as it is the story of my mother, sisters, friends, and other Afghan women. *Dawn* ends on an unresolved chord and I did this on purpose. This represents the ongoing struggles of Afghan women and it is my way of inviting the listener to participate in asking: “What will happen to the future freedoms of Afghan women?”. Since the Taliban has taken over, the atrocities that women are facing in Afghanistan are heartbreaking and unjust. As a human and an artist, and as an Afghan woman, I want to do my part in bringing awareness to women’s rights in Afghanistan through music. The reason why I left my song incomplete is that I wanted to tell the truth. The truth is the unfinished struggle of women. I will complete this song when all Afghan women have achieved their dreams and rights. *Dawn* was composed by Meena Karimi in early 2020 and orchestrated by Arson Fahim.




GHAFAR MALIKNEZHAD: *DAA ZEMOONG ZIBA WATAN* (new original arrangement)

Pianist, composer, arranger and academic, Ghafar Maliknezhad (b.1978), holds an MA in Art Criticism from Kazakh National Academy of Arts and a BA in music and piano performance from Kabul University. He has taught across numerous subjects including musicology, music criticism, composition, film music and piano. In addition to his compositions for piano and orchestra, Maliknezhad has previously collaborated with Afghan filmmaker Jalal Hussaini, writing the film score for *Amir & Sara* (2014) which was featured at the Locarno International Film Festival in Italy in 2017. In 2009 Maliknezhad received Best Music award at both the Kabul International Documentary Film Festival and the Tolo Television Film Festival for his film score to *The Angels of the Earth*. Since the Taliban took power in Afghanistan in August 2021, he had to leave the country and currently lives in München, Germany.

About *Daa Zemoong Ziba Watan*

The now traditional Afghan song, *Daa Zemoong Ziba Watan* (This Is Our Beautiful Homeland), written and most famously sung by Ustad Awalmir, is one of the most beautiful and influential epic poems of Afghanistan in the last half-century. The song, written in Pashto, has a very high position among Afghan musicians, patriots, and artists. Ustad Awalmir lived a simple life, dying in poverty in 1982 and in all of his poems his love for his homeland is apparent. Many different versions and arrangements of this song have been made and recorded to date.

QAMBAR NAWSHAD: *HOPE* (new original composition)




Qambar Nawshad (b. 1996) is a composer, arranger and percussionist, and conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Afghanistan, now in exile in Portugal where the Afghanistan National Institute of Music is currently being re-established. Nawshad's arrangements and compositions have been performed and recorded regularly by orchestras in Afghanistan with broadcasts of his work and orchestral performances featured on national television.

About *Hope*

The piece that I have composed is called Hope. It is my experience that hope in human life is as valuable as wings are for a bird! Without it, life would be meaningless—imagine a body without soul and movement.

However, hope needs to be created, needs to be given, needs to be spread. I strongly believe that hope is the most important principle of human life. Hope gives us energy, opens the doors that otherwise seem impossible to penetrate, and it gets us ready for the strong and positive actions needed for our futures. As an Afghan artist I believe it is my responsibility to take action in the current turbulent, chaotic and uncertain situation of Afghanistan by writing this piece of music. In this composition I wanted to indicate and reflect how the civil war began in Afghanistan, based on my parents' experience who witnessed the first half of the ruinous imposed war. Afghanistan and the people of this land, went and are still going through many imposed unusual problems and obstacles, in the past forty years, two talented generations of Afghanistan have just vanished between the leaders of greed, but on the contrary, it was the innocent people of an entire nation who paid the price for the evil deals that were made in the past, but they never lost hope and they continue to live. However, while I was reviewing my parents' stories of the past, I then decided to write about hope because I thought music can express my feelings better than words. So now here we have *Hope*. Never lose hope.

ZALAI PAKTA: *BURNING HEART* (original composition, arr. by Milad Yousufi)



Ustad Zalai Pakta (b. 1978) is an award-winning master ney (Persian flute) player, composer and educator. He developed his musical expertise under Ustad Naseer Aziz and worked for 16 years as a musician for Afghanistan's National Radio and Television performing with the country's top musicians and singers. He has performed across the globe including in France, Italy, Turkey, India and the UK, with a performance at the Tricycle Theatre in London (now Kiln Theatre) in 2007. From 2013 until the Taliban take over in 2021, Ustad Zalai was a master teacher at the Aga Khan Music School in Kabul, at the invitation of its director Mirwaiss Sidiqi. Ustad Zalai continues to live in Afghanistan, although he is no longer able to make music in his home country.

About *Heart That Burns*

Heart That Burns is an emotional composition of tragedy. I composed this piece when I was a student; when I had many dreams but could not achieve them yet. Time passes, hopes are diminished, disappointments accrue. All the fantasies and dreams that I had for a new tomorrow burn one by one, and my heart also burns. From this feeling in my heart, I composed this melody. Initially, I wrote this melody on my computer using the Sibelius musical notation program, but unfortunately my computer was torn to pieces by the Taliban, the enemies of science, culture and civilization, and I could not do anything but watch... I recorded the melody again using my mobile phone and sent it to Milad Yousufi who has made this beautiful arrangement for orchestra.



MOHSEN SAIFI: ASTA BORO (new original arrangement)

Born in Kabul, Afghanistan, Mohsen Saifi (b. 1989) is an academic, guitarist, conductor and composer now based in Germany. As a Lecturer at the Kabul University Music Department from 2012 until the abrupt closure of the department by the Taliban in August 2021, he served as the department's programme manager and the conductor of the orchestra. He conducted the University's leading musical ensembles, including in his own compositions and arrangements, for numerous prestigious events in Kabul involving the US embassy, Kabul University, and ministries of the erstwhile government of Afghanistan.

About *Asta Boro* (Pace Slowly)

Asta Boro is one of the most traditional wedding songs in Afghanistan and is performed in almost all ceremonies to signal the ceremonial entrance or exit of the bride and groom. The words of the song suggest that the groom and bride pace (or walk) slowly for the sake of the most memorable moments of their life and should try to create as much love as possible. The poem expresses patience to the bride and groom with the lyrics, "During the journey of life (love) you don't have to hurry and pass from it quickly. Try to pace slowly and enjoy as much as you can. The moments of Love never should be missed." Nowadays, the song works as a presentation song for the families to present their newly married couples to the guests at the wedding ceremony in a beautiful fashion. I chose this song because it has such a unique traditional composition. I believe it is the most beautiful song in 7/8 time to be written, like *Take Five* by Dave Brubeck written in 5/4 time which is the best 5/4 composition in the history of music. To my knowledge, this is the first orchestral arrangement of *Asta Boro*, which I hope will preserve this lovely song for next generations and share it with the rest of the world, especially since there is limited awareness about Afghan culture outside of Afghanistan. The Taliban has been trying to remove the lovely flavours of Afghanistan's cultures and show that the country doesn't know anything other than war. It is upon us to reveal all those lovely pleasures of Afghan culture to the world.



ELAHA SOROOR: *BARAN* (new original composition orchestrated by Matt Holborn, poetry by Mohammad Sharif Saiidi)

Elaha Soroor (b. 1989) is a London-based vocalist and composer originally from Afghanistan. Elaha studied Iranian and Afghan traditional music, Indian classical and opera singing techniques in Iran, Afghanistan and India. One of the first female musicians to perform in public after the fall of the Taliban in 2000, Elaha rose to fame through the TV show *Afghan Star* in 2008. Her national popularity, in a society known for its persecution of female performers combined with outspoken views on women's rights, led to an environment of serious personal danger, and she was eventually forced to flee Afghanistan. Elaha has worked as a composer and performer for theatre, dance and film including, Wales Millennium Centre's *The Boy With Two Hearts* (2021). Her latest release "Songs Of Our Mothers", and is a collection of folk songs by Afghan women that have been passed down from mothers to daughters, is a collaborative album with the award winning collective band Kefaya and a bold protest against patriarchy and a joyous statement of resilience and emancipation.



Matt Holborn is British improvising violinist and composer based in London. Performing in many capacities, Matt has appeared at countless international jazz festivals and venues and has become a leading figure in jazz violin. Matt composes and performs original music and jazz with various ensembles as well as running the Jazz Violin Podcast and teaching string players all over the world how to improvise.

About *Baran*

This piece features the poem *Baran* (where is the rain's home) by Mohammad Sharif Saiidi, a well-known contemporary poet from Afghanistan who strives to represent the voices of the diaspora through his work. The lyrics are about the life of an immigrant who is ripped from their homeland and thrown into the whirlpool of immigration and diaspora. Musical influences for this song were inspired from my work on *The Boy With Two Hearts* theatre play which follows a family in search of a safe haven. I tried to tell the story of this family in the composition of the song. My vision was to create a tapestry through combining elements of folk music and traditions from different geographic locations, such as India, Iran, Kurdistan, Turkey, Afghanistan. The composition represents the journey of refugees that cross many lands and borders, picking up elements of culture and tradition along the way. In that sense, this piece is the culmination of my own personal journey through the world.

Baran

I am from the tribe of rain, I am of the spring generation
Drop by drop, I lend myself to rock and root
From the sky to the earth, I've fallen down to cry
To the thunder and lightning of my voice, the painful tune of my two
strings
From the wind a slap and from the mountain, I've purchased thorns and
stones
On my own shoulders how far I've carried my tombstone
Where is the home of the rain? My two wet eyes or the clouds,
I always carry my nest with me, I've nothing save for these two homes
The distance is great, betwixt weeping and smiling
You laugh through your window as I rain down upon the pavement

– Mohammad Sharif Saiidi



QUDRAT WASEFI: *NASTARAN* (original arrangement-composition)

Raised in AFCECO orphanages in Kabul, trumpet player, composer, and arranger Qudrat Wasefi (b. 1999) is fiercely committed to music as a form of resistance against repression. Since the takeover of Afghanistan, Wasefi has written and produced recordings of a number of compositions including a music video, *The Children of War*, in collaboration with artists across the globe, *A Candle of Hope in the Darkness*, recorded and streamed by professional musicians in Italy, and a string quartet performed in Melbourne, Australia. These compositions were written to keep hope alive for Afghans during this challenging time. Wasefi explains that “art and music are tools of resistance in the fight against injustice and other social matters in society”.

About *Nastaran*

Nastaran is an Afghan folk song. Most musicians believe that the *nagham* (melody) comes from Ustad Mohamad Omar, the most legendary *rubab* player of Afghanistan of all time. *Nastaran* is a very deep piece for me, one which goes inside the valleys of Afghanistan, and twists like wave or wind frequencies surrounding the high mountains and going village to village. The gentle minor and major modal melodies can be seen to depict the up and down aspects of living, which clearly describes the life of Afghan people. I have created an enhanced arrangement of *Nastaran* and included a choir with original lyrics. The most important meaning of this work to me is that in the past several months I have experienced things I never thought possible. Losing my country and being homeless created feelings of panic that will remain with me for the rest of my life. I have created this composition-arrangement of *Nastaran* to reflect what I have felt and experienced in these months. Seeing my people starving, no schools and work for girls and women, and watching the country went back a century...these were all not easy for me to believe and tolerate.

Choir text

Razm kar-e maa
Waqt-e paikar-e maa
Saraasar-e een zamin
Perozi armaan-e maa

Fight for justice
Courage and resistance
Uproot ignorance
Give freedom a fighting chance

We stand together
It's time for battle
Everywhere on the earth
Freedom is our mission

Freedom – Azadi – Freedom – Azadi
Azadi – Freedom – Azadi – Freedom

Razm kar-e maa
Waqt-e paikar-e maa
Saraasar-e een zamin
Perozi armaan-e maa

Jadal bahr-e adaalat
Az istadagi o shuja'at
Baray-e rishakan-e jahaalat
Bar qaraari-e ensaniyat

MILAD YOUSUFI: *NOSTALGIA* (new original composition)

Composer, pianist, poet, and visual artist Milad Yousufi was born in 1995 during the civil war and trained at the Afghanistan National Institute of Music before being awarded a full scholarship at the Mannes School of Music. His compositions have been performed by the Kronos Quartet and the New York Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, and at Lincoln Centre, Boston Symphony Hall, Carnegie Hall and the Barbican Centre. Yousufi's work is deeply inspired by his country and culture.

About *Nostalgia*

Nostalgia is inspired by the current events happening all around the world in 2022 and one of my recent paintings, *Whirling*. *Nostalgia* has spiritual taste or colour to it utilising both Eastern and Western elements to build a cultural and musical bridge between the East and West. The opening of the piece starts with tabla and the most well-known tabla *tail* (rhythm) called *teen taal* which is originally 16 beats per cycle. This is accompanied by a drone-like pattern played by the viola, inspired by my Sufi's dhikr (a chant in remembrance of God), that carries throughout the piece mostly in the string section. The opening of the piece starts with a nostalgic melody. The harmonic changes to major modes in the piece portrays the light in the painting which represents hope and the bright side. The piece ends in a sense of sorrow, grief and hope which portrays the future of my homeland and a thousand wonderful memories that are gone forever. This piece is also inspired by one of my poems titled, *Poem for my Mother*. – Milad Yousufi, June 2022

Poem For My Mother

O westerly winds, I beg you do me a favor,
Go to my village, pass my greetings to the graves of my
beloved ones,
A little farther is an old house, my heart, my mother lives
there,
I beg you to touch her feet, tell her I will come home one day,
Tell her I will come home one
day...

O westerly winds, I beg you do me a favor,
Go to my village, pass my greetings to the graves of my
beloved ones,
My heart is burning like a flame, and broken into pieces far
from my home,
I will go home, where my beloved cared for me
I will go home one day, I will go home....
- Milad Yousufi

About the Performers



SAPHWAT SIMAB, AFGHAN RUBAB

An official disciple of the world's foremost Rubab master, Ustad Homayoun Sakhi of Afghanistan, Saphwat Simab is a British-born artist who has been learning and playing the Rubab since the age of ten. Saphwat's tone and melodious playing has captured the hearts of audiences at every performance, his on-stage confidence and command on the instrument as well as his command on the rhythmic cycles whilst improvising in any composition with the tabla accompaniment is mesmerising. Saphwat has been accompanied on stage by some of the world's most renowned Tabla masters, such as Ustad Sukhvinder Singh "Pinky", Pandit Sanju Sahai and Ustad Shahbaz Hussain. He has performed at many prestigious venues including the Purcell Room at Queen Elizabeth Hall, the National Court Theatre, and the Nehru Centre, as well as across the UK, Germany, Switzerland and Canada.



SHAHBAZ HUSSAIN, TABLA

Shahbaz began his training in the art of tabla at age five with his father, the late Ustad Mumtaz Hussain – a prominent vocalist. He later went on to study with tabla legends Ustad Faiyaz Khan from the Delhi Gharana (school), the late Ustad Shaukat Hussain Khan from the Punjab Gharana and finally the late Ustad Allah Rakha Khan. Shahbaz regularly travels across the world to present performances, including throughout Europe, North America & the Asian subcontinent. He has performed in many prestigious venues, including the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C., Lincoln Center in New York and London's Royal Albert & Queen Elizabeth Halls. His band, Indus, has received critical acclaim for their debut album Firefly and they continue to tour the UK & internationally.



YUSUF MAHMOUD, HARMONIUM

Yusuf Mahmoud was born in Kabul, and is the son of Ustad Asif Mahmoud, from the most famous family of tabla players in Afghanistan. The family boasts a lineage of tabla players dating all the way back to the 18th century. Yousuf has studied with master musicians such as his father Ustad Asif Mahmoud, Ustad Bandu Khan, and the great Ustad Alla Rakha.

MEHBOOB NADEEM, SITAR



Born into a highly illustrious family of traditional musicians of the Agra Gharana, Mehboob is the grandson of the legendary Ustad Vilayat Hussain Khan (Pranpiya) and Gayan Samrat Ustad Azmat Hussain Khan (Dilrang). Endowed with a rich melodious and sonorous voice, Mehboob was initiated in the art of music at a very young age by his father Ustad Yakub Hussain. He then began his sitar training under the guidance of his uncle Shri Rafat Khan. He is now under the guidance of world-renowned sitar maestro Pandit Arvind Parikh. Under the devoted teaching of his Guru and mentor Pandit Arvind Parikh he has excelled in perfecting the techniques and style of the legendary sitar maestro Ustad Vilayat Khan. He is a widely respected sitar player who is acknowledged as one of the most accomplished of the present generation of the Vilayatkhani Gharana and is known to be one of the best sitar players in the UK. He is regularly called to perform throughout India, Africa, Europe and the UK.

WILLIAM REES HOFFMAN, HERATI DUTAR



William Rees Hoffman is a multi-instrumentalist specialising in both the Indian Sarod and the Afghan Rubab. Representing the musical lineages of the Maihar Gharana as well as that of Ustad Nabi Gol of Kabul, he has been studying sarod for the past thirteen years under the tutelage of Satyam Rai in Gujarat, India, and has been a student of the eminent rubab player and ethnomusicologist Dr John Baily since 2013. Hofmann earned a BA in Hindustani Vocal Music from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda in Gujarat, India, and also holds an MMus degree from SOAS in Sarod and Rubab Performance. William has performed internationally both solo and with Jāmi Ensemble, including at the Jaipur Literature Festival, Patiala Punjab, Muzaffar Ali's Jahān-e-Khusrau, and the Edinburgh Fringe, among others, as well as run workshops on the classical music of Kabul. In 2021 he received a Divergence Commission from the ZeroClassikal Project to compose and perform a full-length work for sarod and viola. William has also recently been granted a Senior Performing Arts Fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies to turn his doctoral research on early Sufi song text collections into a performance and lecture/demonstration along with an Indo-Persian musical ensemble.



USTAD ASIF MAHMOUD, TABLA

Ustad Asif Mahmood, originally from Afghanistan, is from a long and prestigious lineage of Tabla players dating back to the eighteenth century. His initial education was with his father, and his eldest brother, the late Ustad Hashim. He later became the disciple of the great Ustad Allah Raka Khan, to complete his musical education and become qualified as a master (*ustad*). Ustad Asif has performed widely across the country and internationally alongside the most prominent musicians of Afghanistan. He was also a master advisor to the Aga Khan Music Initiative in Kabul from 2006 to 2009.

OXFORD PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA



The Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra (OPO) is one of the leading orchestras in the UK. Praised as 'remarkable' by *The Spectator*, the Orchestra's reputation is based on the uncompromising artistic standards of its Founder and Music Director, Marios Papadopoulos, and maintained by some of the finest musicians. Established in 1998, the Orchestra occupies a unique position within the UK orchestral landscape, attracting some of the world's greatest artists to appear in its series including Maxim Vengerov, Angela Gheorghiu, Valery Gergiev, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Martha Argerich, Sir András Schiff, Lang Lang, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Evgeny Kissin and Sir Bryn Terfel. In addition to its annual concert season in Oxford, touring performances across the UK, family concerts, annual Oxford Piano Festival, and Chamber Music Series, the Orchestra is proud to present a growing list of international engagements including its debut at the Tivoli Festival in Copenhagen in June 2019, US debut at Carnegie Hall in June 2022, Munich with pianist Martha Argerich in April 2023, and joined by the Choir of Merton College, Oxford for Haydn's *Creation* in September 2023, at St Thomas Church Fifth Avenue in New York.

The OPO has been firmly committed to outreach work from its earliest days. Its various projects focus on taking music to areas of social and economic disadvantage, including work in special schools and hospitals. In 2002, the OPO was appointed as the first ever Orchestra in Residence at the University of Oxford, and frequently collaborates with the Faculty of Music in educational programmes.



CAYENNA PONCHIONE-BAILEY, CONDUCTOR

Orchestral conductor Cayenna Ponchione-Bailey is emblematic of the 21st century's newest vanguard of orchestral leadership. Working to advance social justice and environmental sustainability within music both on and off the podium, her bold orchestral initiatives fuse the local with the global, amplify leading environmental research, and engage with the pressing issues of our time. In 2019, Cayenna brought the Afghan Women's Orchestra to Oxford for a ten-day residency in collaboration with the Orchestra of St John's, Somerville College, University of Oxford, and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. She has since been awarded a prestigious Leverhulme post-doctoral research fellowship to research the orchestral practices of Afghanistan at the University of Sheffield. Cayenna serves as the Conducting Fellow of the Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra and Coordinator for the orchestra's Side-by-Side scheme, Director of Performance at St Catherine's College (University of Oxford), and Director of Research for the Oxford Conducting Institute. Prior to her engagement as Conducting Fellow, Cayenna was the Associate Conductor of the Orchestra of St John's from 2017-2021. Originally from Fairbanks, Alaska, Cayenna holds masters' degrees in orchestral conducting, percussion performance, and musicology, and a DPhil in the social psychology of orchestral performance from the University of Oxford. Conducting tutors and masterclass mentors have included Neil Thompson, Marios Papadopoulos, Valery Gergiev and Marin Alsop. She is featured in a new documentary by Swedish filmmaker Christina Olofson, *Call Me Madame Maestro*, alongside JoAnn Falletta and Victoria Bond, on the current climate for women conductors.