**Programme notes**

*Inventions: the harpsichord across time and borders* is a fascinating trans-national project to promote and present unusual music for solo harpsichord, drawing primarily on historical and contemporary music by female composers from Scotland, Ireland and England. Three new commissions are set alongside historical works which inspired them, with further works from the British Isles chosen by the performers, making links between different countries and centuries. Parallel recitals will be given in Scotland, Ireland and England this autumn by three creative and skilled performers of both historical and contemporary keyboard music. Inventions is an offshoot of the ongoing *Theorbo Today* project run by Janet Oates, which commissions, produces and promotes new music for baroque instruments, with a focus on female composers. The *Inventions* project is gratefully supported byCreative Scotland, Sound Scotland, Arts Council England, the Hope Scott Trust, The Marchus Trust and the Francis Routh Trust.

1. **Marjory Kennedy-Fraser** CBE, 1857 (Perth) – 1930 (Edinburgh). Daughter of the singer David Kennedy, known internationally as a singer of Scots songs, whom she often accompanied. Her life work was the collection (and recording onto wax cyclinders), arrangement, and publication of the songs of the Hebrides, of which she gave innumerable recitals. The best-known of the songs became to be known as the *Eriskay Love Lilt*. Writer of an autobiography and of the libretto to Granvile Bantock’s opera *The Seal Woman*; lecturer, singer, and supporter of women’s suffrage, Scottish independence, and pacifism.
   * ***The Mull Fisher’s Love Song*** tells of a man who is haunted by the beauty of the girl he loves, and is unable to find rest. It is a misrepresentation of the original, O Mhairead Òg, which is a lament by a man haunted by guilt and is unable to find rest, having accidentally shot his love to death while shooting ducks.
2. **Lisa Robertson**. Lisa (PhD, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland) is a composer from the West Highlands of Scotland, particularly interested in combining sounds from nature and traditional music; examining relationships between people and the land and highlighting environmental concerns. She was featured in BBC Music Magazine's 'Rising Stars' column. Her music has been performed by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, The Sixteen, EXAUDI, Red Note Ensemble, defunensemble, Psappha Ensemble, Hebrides Ensemble, Lucy Schaufer, and Heather Roche, among others. Her piece, *am fìor-eun,* was performed by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra with Thomas Søndergård in their 22:23 season. Her music has won numerous awards, and has appeared at festivals including Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, where she also performed her own solo violin piece in 2019, Cheltenham Music Festival, Musica Nova Helsinki, West Cork Chamber Music Festival, Sound Festival and on BBC Radio 3, BBC World Service and BBC Radio Scotland.

* The Gaelic song Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, in her *Songs of the Hebrides,* calls The Mull Fisher’s Love Song, otherwise known as Òran an Amadain Bhòidhich (The Song of the Handsome Fool) has a warning message, common to many folk-tale traditions, where a young hunter accidentally shoots his sweetheart, like the tale of Swan Lake. The feelings of longing, tragedy, helplessness, regret, guilt, and the warning against the human tendency to destroy that which is most loved and important, are universal and timeless. Today, as bystanders to multiple wars around the world, with collective responsibility for the climate crisis, the sentiment is apt. But, unlike the hunter in the song, we still have time to counter these feelings with action and hope. Partly inspired by the shared sonic qualities of the wire-strung clàrsach and harpsichord, I arranged fragments of The Mull Fisher’s Love Song, which Kennedy-Fraser arranged for voice and Celtic harp or piano, in this piece. Higher, falling gestures, represent the ‘beloved’. Lower, rising gestures represent the human longing for the beloved. These gestures grow in intensity becoming dominant and then destructive – until finally all is broken. Faint, hopeful flecks of light are all that is left, emerging from the guilt-ridden darkness.  I found this song in an old copy of *Songs of the Hebrides* inscribed by my great-grandmother in 1914. The world has changed vastly in the 110 years since she wrote in the book, on the brink of another period of destructive human tragedy but I love the idea that perhaps she too once played these songs in the face of it. Her name was Hope.

3) ***Ho Hoane*: anon** Irish (16th c.), collected in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. The tune is a lilting lament in compound time - its title is a corruption of the Gaelic ochóin : ‘oh, alas’.

4) **Evangelia Rigaki** – ***Keening*** (project commission, 2024)

Evangelia has a diverse compositional portfolio ranging from instrumental works to experimental music theatre, dance, performance art, installation and opera. She is particularly interested in theatre works, including instrumental theatricality. She has written several operas produced by Irish National Opera, and the the opera-installation 'The Pregnant Box' (2014), libretto by W.N. Herbert & Catherine Conlon, written for one audience member at a time in a specially constructed confession box with a wandering choir. Evangelia gained her PhD from Royal Holloway, University of London, followed by Post-doctoral research at Humboldt University in Berlin; she is currently Head of Music Department at Trinity College, University of Dublin.

* ***Keening:*** The word *keening* originates from the Gaelic “caoineadh” meaning crying. The performer should feel and perform this piece as a ritual inspired by keening/lamentation. The piece also demands the use of an e-bow (which creates a drone from the vibrations of the strings) and vocalisation, and requests the performer to choose tempos ‘from excruciatingly slow to frenetically fast’!

5) **Elisabetta de Gambarini**, 1731 (Middlesex) – 1765 (Westminster). Composer, harpsichordist, conductor, painter and singer who performed in many of Handel’s oratorios. She was the first female composer in Britain to publish a collection of keyboard music, *The Six Sets of Lessons for the Harpsichord*, which was published when she was still a teenager, and which was dedicated to Viscountess Howe of the Kingdom of Ireland. She also published songs and small-scale instrumental works.

* *Lover, go and calm thy Sighs* is a simple song in the typical style of the day, such as written by William Jackson (Jackson of Exeter) and, in the generations before them, Daniel Purcell. The tune is light, the accompaniment simple, and the whole is accessible to domestic musicians and audiences wanting light entertainment such as at the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. The song is followed by a gavotte based on the song, and two variations upon that, finishing with a whirling giga (gigue) as a final variation.

6) **Janet Oates** (b.1970, Kent) is a composer, performer and conductor living in London. She has a PhD in composition from Royal Holloway, University of London. She has written prize-winning songs, 2 short operas, an oratorio for baroque forces and a cantata for 6 solo voices and theorbo. She is a singer, conductor and teacher, and is artistic director of the vocal ensemble Philomel, specialising in 17th century works and new commissions, with a focus on female composers. Her current projects are accessible experimental music for choirs, children and instrumental students, with the aim of taking creative contemporary music into mainstream choirs and schools; and writing / commissioning new works for baroque instruments. [www.janetoates.co.uk](http://www.janetoates.co.uk)

* ***Night shall hide thee*** (project commission, 2024) is a dialogue with the song and variations by Gambarini. The song words (the title is the start of the second line) suggest a clandestine meeting, with the singer urging her lover on – Janet’s work evokes the intimacy, waiting, expectation and the emotions elicited by the song and the meeting. There is also a second version of the piece which stands alone from the Gambarini, which therefore may or may not appear in the programme.

7) ***Movements from Suite No. 1 in D minor*** *-* **Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre** – (*1665-1729)* “ The marvel of our Century” (contemporary critic, French journal *Mercure Galant*). De la Guerre was a renowned composer, harpsichordist and organist, the first woman in France to compose an opera.

She made her debut as a singer and harpsichordist at the court of Louis XIV at quite a young age, and at about age 15 she was taken into the court as a musician and placed under the care of the king’s mistress, [Madame de Montespan](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Francoise-Athenais-de-Rochechouart-marquise-de-Montespan). Jacquet left the regular service of the court in 1684 but maintained her royal connections. Her first published collection of works was the Pièces de clavessin (1687; “Harpsichord Pieces”), noteworthy especially because publication of harpsichord music was still rare in France in the 17th century, even for male composers. As well as her opera *Céphale and Procris,* she wrote beautiful, expressive cantatas.

Jacquet de La Guerre’s music is in the popular *style brisé*, an attractive arpeggiated, or broken, style borrowed from lute playing. This can be particularly seen in the unmeasured preludes which open her suites: modelled on the improvisations of lutenists, in her hands they are expressive and dramatic pieces. The preludes are followed by movements based on stylised dance forms and styles.