



new:dots

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## Guest Post: Sixteen Love Songs

by William Howard

Earlier this month I launched a project to commission sixteen love songs for solo piano by different composers and gave the premiere of the first of the collection, composed by David Matthews. I will also launch a competition at the beginning of June, set up with the help of Judith Weir and Piers Hellawell, in which composers in two age categories (over 25 and under 25) are invited to submit piano love songs of three to five minutes' duration.



Why love songs? The story starts with an idea I had many years ago to put together and record a collection of exceptionally beautiful, and unashamedly romantic piano pieces, written mostly in the nineteenth century. They all reflect different aspects of love and many of them have had interesting afterlives in film or TV scores, or reincarnated as pop songs. They are, effectively, about as close as classical piano pieces get to popular music, and yet are at the same time beautifully imagined and constructed examples of 'art music'.

Orchid Classics Release: Sixteen Love Songs by William ...  



Having commissioned and performed contemporary music throughout my career, I was not far into this project before I started wondering whether it would be possible to create contemporary equivalents to these romantic works. Love songs can be found, of course, in music across the world and across the centuries, but the idea of songs without words for piano conjures up an image of something belonging far more to the nineteenth century than to the twenty-first. To commission a piano love song from a living composer, therefore, might seem eccentric, or, in the case of a composer who writes abstract music, a meaningless or impossible challenge. My initial conversations with composers, however, have so far produced nothing but enthusiasm for the idea, and many are optimistic that there will be a keen response to the competition.

Just to be clear, I am not asking composers to write romantic pieces, or songs without words in a traditional sense. On the contrary, I am asking for piano pieces that are written in a contemporary spirit, have something new and original to say, but can also be unequivocally described as love songs. As it happens, the first piece to be written, *A Love Song* by David Matthews, is both melodic and romantic in spirit, but this is how David's musical language has naturally evolved throughout his composing life. He has produced a beautiful and deeply personal piece which is inimitably his own. As far as other composers are concerned, the brief is very open, given that the term 'love song' is more universally human than specifically musical. It will be fascinating to see what kind of pieces the project throws up over the coming year.

For my sixteen commissions I am choosing composers who can provide a real mix of compositional styles. As a performer I take great pleasure in drawing people into less familiar music, whether new or from the past, and so I am hoping that this collection will enable me to introduce audiences to a cross section of some of the extraordinarily varied musical languages of our most talented composers, at the same time providing interesting ideas for discussion and debate. Since the competition is open to all, my prediction is that it will also provide some fascinating and illuminating material. Given that it is difficult to police the boundaries of what is or is not a love song, I am keen that composers contributing to the project should be able to explain to their listeners (and to me) how their piece fits the brief, if it is not immediately obvious. I look forward to some interesting responses!

In the end, I hope that composers will engage, like David Matthews, with the notion of writing something memorable, and connect in their own individual manner with a genre that has spanned temporal and geographical boundaries and has a universal appeal. Just as the romantic pieces have travelled far beyond the confines of the usual classical music audience, likewise, I hope, these pieces by living composers will appeal to listeners beyond the regular audience of contemporary music enthusiasts.

William Howard's album 'Sixteen Love Songs' (Orchid Classics ORC100056) is available in shops and online from June 2016.

William will perform 'A Love Song' by David Matthews and give the world premiere of Cheryl Frances-Hoad's contribution to the collection at the Forge, Camden Town at 7.00pm on Monday 6th June. Tickets available [HERE](https://uk.patronbase.com/Forge/Productions/10G/Performances) ([https://uk.patronbase.com/ Forge/Productions/10G/Performances](https://uk.patronbase.com/Forge/Productions/10G/Performances))

Details of the piano love song competition will be available from June 1st on William Howard's [website](http://www.williamhoward.co.uk) (<http://www.williamhoward.co.uk>)

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**Katy Hamilton**

@klhamilton

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23 May



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New music | New photography

Workers Union Ensemble perform 'Place' on 16th April at the Warehouse in Waterloo. More [info \(/events.aspx\)](#)

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