

McEwen Bequest Concert 2025

Cairn by Emily Doolittle

University of Glasgow Chapel Choir

Directed by Katy Lavinia Cooper

With Kevin Bowyer and Alan Kitchen (Organ)

Renowned composer, teacher and Glasgow graduate Sir John Blackwood McEwen (1868-1948) bequeathed the residue of his estate to the University to help promote the performance of chamber music by composers of Scottish birth and descent. Other composers resident in Scotland for a substantial period have also benefited from the fund. In fulfilment of the terms of the bequest the University Court commissions annually a piece of chamber music for not more than five players and every three years a work for larger forces.

The McEwen Bequest has provided for the commission of over 50 new pieces by around 40 composers since 1955 - constituting a substantial contribution to the contemporary Scottish music canon. For more information see <https://glasgow.ac.uk/mcewen>.

The Links o' Love

Music: Sir John Blackwood McEwen (1868-1948)

Words: Andrew Wanlass (1825-1898)

We open our concert with two part-songs from markedly different periods of Scottish musical history, both featuring texts that evoke the natural world. The first is by our concert's patron, John Blackwood McEwen. Though chiefly remembered for his chamber music, McEwen also composed for choir, including small-scale works such as this. The text is by Andrew Wanlass, a Scottish poet and bookbinder who emigrated to Toronto in 1851 and later to Detroit. Wanlass's verses reflects the influence of literary figures such as Walter Scott and Robert Burns.

O, the tide rins out and the tide comes in,
And the burnies rin to the sea,
As they wind their way by the bank and
brae,
O they sing to you and me.
How sweet is the bloom of the heather bell
And the gowan on the lea,
The blush o' the flowers in sylvan bowers,
They smile to you and me.

O, the sun shines bright in the lift aboon,
And the birds sing sangs o' glee,
On the grassy howe and the broomy
knowe,
O, they sing to you and me.
They sin their sands, ther bonny sands
Till daylight shuts her e'e,
Then doon in the dell by the crystal well
My true love comes, to me.

O, come to me, my own true love,
My heart is linked to thine;
The stars o' might that shine sae bright
Tell me that you are mine.
O, the tide rins out and the tide comes in,
And the burnies rin to the sea,
As they wind their way by the bank and brae,
O they sing to you and me.

The Flaming Fire

Sources: *Hawthornden MS* (NLS MS 2065), *Robert Edward's Commonplace Book* (GB-En MS.9450).

Music: attrib. Edward Johnson (fl. 1572-1601), words: Anon., edited by Kenneth Elliot (1929-2011)

The words, with or without the music, survive in a few extant manuscripts from seventeenth-century Scotland. In Robert Edward's *Commonplace Book*, they are paired with a tune attributed to Edward Johnson, known in English and Irish sources as *Johnson's Medley* or *Old Medley*. Kenneth Elliott was Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Glasgow from 1956 to 1995.

The flaming fire in furnace hot that fries,
Will breake at length his forced bounds and sparkling spring in skies:
The furious flood when sturdy storms arise,
O'er flows his banks and spreads the grounds that large about him lies.

Right so the hidden harms that burns the bailful breast,
Must needs consume or show what fried doth martyred minds molest.
What then should stay my tongue, to utter out my smart,
That hath no loyal love so long consumed a constant heart?

But fear to offend doth still attend, alas, and drowns in dread my hot desire,
Yet hope doth tell all shall come well to pass, thus faint I twixt flood and fire.

But then again when I through hap behold
Hir heavenly hew that hath my heart controlled
Hir bewty and hir comely grace and hir celestial face,
Hir golden glistening crisped hair like Phebus in his sphere,
Her eyes, the stars that always light, my heavy hart both day and night,
Hir lips lyk buds of roses new, her veins like Indian sapphires blue.

And everything so passing well, that all things doth excell
Then to my selve I tell, I tell, some pity here must dwell.

'Glaciale' & 'Flessible' from *Varia*

Emily Doolittle (b.1972)

Played by Alan Kitchen

Varia is a set of variations, commissioned by Soundstreams for the Keyed Up! festival in Toronto (April 2024) and linked to numbers 16 to 23 of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. Doolittle explains: 'My approach to writing *Varia* was not to vary the opening theme itself, but rather to home in on a feature from each of Bach's variations, whether it's a motif, a rhythm, a timbre, or something more intangible like a feeling or trajectory'. 'Glaciale' maintains the sarabande rhythm of Goldberg no. 19. The link in 'Flessible' (originally written for Nord Stage Keyboard) builds on the stepwise descent of the bass line in Goldberg no. 21..

Lines, loops, bones and stones

Kerry Andrew (b. 1978)

Lines, loops, bones and stones (2015) was commissioned by the Landmark Trust, to mark 50 years of rescuing and restoring buildings of historic interest and architectural merit. This work was first performed simultaneously at twenty-five Landmark sites across Great Britain on Saturday 16 May 2015. It draws inspiration from the architecture and surroundings—often stone—of these historic sites, creating an immediate resonance with Emily's commission.

Andrew's score is notably flexible. She explains: "There are about 50 [musical fragments], and the idea is that each group has a box of materials they can open like a treasure chest, putting their own stamp on the resulting music by combining them in their own way."

In 2016, we were fortunate to participate in a workshop with Kerry as part of the Cottier Chamber Project, which led to the version of the piece we will perform this evening. The work was originally conceived to be performed in the university's cloisters, just across the quadrangle.

Stones tumble and fall, and we rebuild.

Water splits ancient metal.

Come here, and listen to the stories, the lives, the secrets of the stones, the whisper in the walls.

shadowing.

Restless fossils spiral, new born air remembering, mottled land murmurs.

Restless echoes sparkling

Pushing the sky upwards, we make our frame in sun-bright stone.

We leave our shadows, our handprints, our fossils,

O timeworn stones, our echoes.

Otisky V Kameni (Traces in Stone)

Karel Odstrčil (1930-1997)

Played by Kevin Bowyer

Odstrčil was born in Valašské Meziříčí, in the Zlín Region of the Czech Republic. While studying at the University of Mining in Ostrava, he took private lessons in piano, conducting, and composition, later continuing his studies with Klement Slavický (1910-1999). His music

incorporates a range of avant-garde techniques, and he was a co-founder of the first Czech electro-acoustic studio in Plzeň. Toward the end of his life, he served as president of the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music and founded *Musica Nova*, an international competition for electro-acoustic composition. This piece consists of six short movements.

Cairn

Music: Emily Doolittle

Words: Dawn Wood

Cairn is a collection of choral pieces about stones and fossils found in Scotland, based on poetry by Perthshire-based writer and artist Dawn Wood. This is my third collaboration with Dawn: I really enjoy working with her, both because of her vividly evocative poetry and because of a joyful and open creative process. Each of the poems can be understood metaphorically, but also describes an actual encounter Dawn has had with a found stone. Much of my music is based on sounds, processes, or ideas from the natural world, but I typically focus on the ephemeral or transient - a birdsong, wind, rain. For these pieces I really enjoyed tuning into the much longer timescales of stones - their quiet steadiness as ideas, species, and even geographies come and go. (Emily Doolittle)

I. QUARTZ

Inner fire
makes lucid glass
that speaks
of tetrahedrons;
flame's message
and transmission,
direct and fast,
perfectly aligned -
as heart to heart
and mind to mind
and fist to grasp

II. FOSSIL

I dwell in loss,
a shell of what I was,
a bivalve, petrified and pale.
My hinge, the centre of the pebble,
I am a door to the past,
a butterfly, cast
against a flinty sky.
Look back
and turn with me.

III. CHALCEDONY

On the wintry shingle, waxy chalcedony,
with a pocket of absent calcite,
your iron-tight hold on a honey glow;
on the lonely shore you might have stayed,
but your diamond-shape of agate
catches my eye.

IV OLD RED SANDSTONE

Once upon a riverbed,
once upon a delta-stage,
a flood plane grew a skin of rust,
as red as red; before it folded,
scooped and quarried, lost
to palaces and echoes, arches.

V. HOW A STONE REACHED HEAVEN

I dropped it in the night
and heard: no need to hold so tight
everything you need is yours,
set already with the stars

Poetry © Dawn Wood, 2025

Biographies

Emily Doolittle’s music has been described as “masterful” (Musical Toronto), “eloquent and effective,” and “the piece that grabbed me by the heart” (The WholeNote). She has an ongoing interest in zoomusicology—the relationship between animal songs and music—which she explores in both her composition and through interdisciplinary collaboration with biologists. Recent activities include the premiere of *Reedbird*, commissioned and performed by the Vancouver Symphony, the premiere of *(re)cycling I: metals* for found and recycled percussion objects by Architek Percussion at the Rainy Days Festival in Luxembourg, and writing the music for a 2023 Audible audiobook adaptation of *Anne of Green Gables*. She is currently working on a set of pieces about turtles for Canadian pianist Rachel Iwaasa (commissioned by the Canada Council for the Arts) and an algorithmic composition based on data about Arctic plankton, in collaboration with Ashkan Tabatie, for pianist Anna Showalter. Emily is an Athenaeum Research Fellow and Lecturer in Composition at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Dawn Wood was born in Omagh, County Tyrone and studied at Queen’s University, Belfast. She moved to Dundee in 1986 and now lives in Perth and Kinross. Her background is science-related, gradually becoming interdisciplinary. Her doctorate, *Making a Third Place: the Science and the Poetry of Husbandry*, was part-based at the Centre for Natural Design at Dundee Contemporary Arts. As a result of this research, I published my debut poetry collection, *Quarry*, which was shortlisted for the Aldeburgh First collection Prize in 2008. I

have since published four poetry collections, the most recent in 2018. I currently work in educational science as a part-time tutor in Postgraduate Medical Education, University of Dundee and I am also a trained hypnotherapist. Writing poetry is something that I am driven to do, to make sense of my experience of being in the world and to push the edges of what I think I know.

Kevin Bowyer an Essex boy born in 1961, has been organist to the University of Glasgow for twenty years. Well known as a recording artist, he has more than a hundred solo CDs to his name and has played in many parts of the world. Awarded HonRCO (the Royal College of Organists' highest honour) and the 'Lifetime Award of German Record Critics', he appeared in October 2024 as a jury member at the Canadian International Organ Competition. He lives in a remote hillside cottage in south Kintyre, overlooking fields and the sea, and is the author of seven novels including *The House on Boulby Cliff* (2020), judged by one Yorkshire bookseller, 'the most popular book in Loftus in 2021'. Kevin completed his doctoral thesis, on the organ works of Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji in 2016.

Katy Lavinia Cooper is Director of Chapel Music at the University of Glasgow, where she works with the university choirs and is co-lead of the Arts Lab 'Spheres of Singing' which seeks to bring together scholars and practitioners working on all aspects of song. Conducting external to the university includes Glasgow Madrigals (nominated for the RPS Inspiration award in 2024), Scottish Opera's Community Choir and a children's choir for the Glad Foundation. Katy's arrangements and compositions have been published by Choral Music Publishing, Sing for Pleasure and Canasg. Recent commissions have included a twelve-movement work for choir and orchestra (*Twelve Trees*, 2024). Katy has also written music for feature film, documentary soundtracks and radio. Katy completed her doctoral thesis on seventeenth-century Scottish vocal music in 2016.

Alan Kitchen originally from Coatbridge, studied music at Glasgow University, gaining a BMus (Hons) degree in 1980. In his final year he studied organ with Professor George McPhee, subsequently holding several local organist posts, and in 2005 becoming Organist and Director of Music at Wellington Church. He deputises from time to time in other churches, including Glasgow

Cathedral, and is in demand as an accompanist for choral services and concerts. Alan gives regular organ recitals, specifically on the fine Lewis organs both in Kelvingrove Art Gallery, and at Ayr Town Hall. He is a trustee of the Glasgow Society of Organists. As a full-time freelance musician, much of his work has been in the field of light music and entertainment, covering a wide variety of musical styles. However, organ playing, liturgical or otherwise, remains a large part of his work. Leisure pursuits include fair-weather cycling.

The **University of Glasgow Chapel Choir** provides music for services and events in the chapel and elsewhere, as well as giving concerts and recitals throughout the academic year, such as the weekly 'Choral Contemplations' series (September-March). It also records and tours nationally and internationally, has recorded several CDs and regularly features on Radio 4 Sunday Worship. There are thirty-two regular members (a mixture of volunteers and choral scholars, funded by the Lanfine Bequest) plus around ten associate singers who join us for concerts and some other events. The choir is directed by

Katy Lavinia Cooper (Director of Chapel Music) and accompanied by Kevin Bowyer (University Organist) and Jonathan Smith (Lanfine Organ Scholar).

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