

Songs Of Hope

A song cycle audio walk: a sonic discovery of songs and soundscape responses to the Emily Dickinson poem “Hope” is the thing with feathers.

Audio walk by Laura Reid 2023 with text by:

Oge Nwosu
Teresa Howard
Katie Colombus
Ahed Al Hamwi



Soprano: Gweneth Ann Rand
Piano: Allyson Devenish
Producer / Composer / Cello: Laura Reid
Images by Amy Reid and Heidi Steller <http://www.heidisteller.co.uk/>

An audio sound walk of songs composed in response to the poem “Hope” is the thing with Feathers by Emily Dickinson. The composer Laura Reid has commissioned an array of writers, from award winning librettists to best-selling online authors, to respond to the message of Hope explored in Emily’s poem. Each has a unique perspective on the theme, and Laura’s music sets their words for soprano, piano, electronic cello, and strings. Opening Tuesday 29 August - until 13th September at the Cockpit Theatre, London.



Using the app echoes.xyz listeners will be able to access the QR code on site and download the walk, accessed by personal mobile phone and headphones. Free to access for the duration of the festival.

20 - 24th September, Wild Woodbury, Bere Regis, Dorset Inside Out Festival

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Laura Reid is a composer of contemporary music, ranging from Royal Opera House commissions (Lost and Found/Wilderness Festival) to composing a soundtrack for the Dorset Moon with silent Disco Headsets. Her variation on Fenella Humphrey’s BBC Music award winning album “Caprices” (Rubicon Classics 2022) was performed live on BBC Radio 3. Her work has been synched to BBC TV, broadcast internationally on radio networks, and performed at international festivals. She was awarded the PRS Composer’s Fund to compose new vocal work for Soprano Gweneth Ann Rand, resulting in this new work: Songs of Hope. Laura was drawn to the Dickinson poem whilst in the aftermath of grief, and wanted to fuse the healing power of walking, talking and listening.

Oge Kpalukwuozu Nwosu is a UK based librettist and former barrister. An alumna of Cambridge University and Guildhall, her MA chamber opera, produced in association with ROH, was



recommissioned by the V&A Museum. She has been a Visiting Scholar at Oxford Centre for Life Writing, and an Invited Artist at the Women Opera Makers Workshop of the Academie du Festival d'Aix-en-Provence.

SUSTENANCE: Programme Note, July 2023.

Recently I wrote a micro-opera with Laura, titled *Detritus*. Commissioned by ROH Jette Parker programme and Casco Phil as a site specific piece, performed at St Pancras Station on International Women's Day, its protagonist was St Anthony of Padua, Patron Saint of Lost Things, involuntarily transplanted into life as a Cleaner at the station. He was essentially a Displaced Person - one who had never set foot on a national or international train - struggling to make sense of his purpose in that place and time. That theme - movement compelled under unfathomable circumstances - set a precedent for the work I have subsequently created with Laura.

While the real and fictional global micro-stories contained in *Sustenance* should sit 'naturally' in the context of the London walk, my primary impulse was to bring *The World* to the rural setting of the original project. Because, as Laura has perspicaciously observed, *The World* has passed through Dorset across history; animate and inanimate entities, transported by ship and air and foot, travel and trade and learning and aid, colouring fields and coasts and conversations.

So, movement of all kinds. This lyric - if it can be called that - gives voice to headlines rather than people, and exists as much in its footnotes as in the sparsely sketched stories. The people represent a multiplicity of footnotes in recent history, each one at a liminal point between grief and hope, survival and erasure. No comment is made on the events and no specific emotion is demanded of the listener. The separate lines of text are united by one repeated phrase; *Nka bu örom*. The choice of Ikwerre as the language of this phrase is both as random and as specific as each of the stories it follows. Two facts make it relevant to me as the writer of the piece; Ikwerre is the language of the part of Rivers State, Nigeria, in which my father was born; and this phrase was the first he taught me. It means *This is my house*. I used to enjoy saying it when we welcomed guests into the unfamiliar houses we moved into. Here, in this lyric, it extends to mean something like *the Earth is home to all of us*. Beyond that, there is no direct connection between the language and the acts outlined here, just as there is no direct link between a human being's innate essence and the random bolts of fortune that might unexpectedly assail them. I use it to capture a spirit of welcome, or stoicism, a brief reflection on radical acts that embody or sustain hope.

The deliberately un-poetic text begins with the journey of a foetus from its dying mother into a hostile, fractured world. This was an *imagined* story, written months before the most recent instance of real life appearing to intersect with fiction. The succeeding lines all reference singular personal events, huge in the lives of those living through them, all or some of which you will be aware of from news sources. Links to these lives are included in the footnotes to the lyric.

Oge Kpalukwuozu Nwosu July 2023.

SUSTENANCE¹

Theffania quickening, in the carriage - crushed.²

Nka bu örom.

Pia steering, a small boy's body frozen on the boat.³

Nka bu örom.

Aamira, at the station, with a ticket and her textbooks.⁴

Nka bu örom.

Ines embroiders 'Assamaka' on the shoes she leaves behind.⁵

Nka bu örom.

Nasruddin, defiant, wades the water for the women.⁶

Nka bu örom.

Anakaren cries before a camera, for a prize.⁷

Nka bu örom.

Johannes, aged, with the bruises of the blows of the hammer to his head.⁸

Nka bu örom.

This woman, nameless, grasps a knife, inscribes - ⁹

Nka bu örom.

¹ A multiplicity of contemporary voices, real and fictional, each at a liminal point between grief and hope, all united through a single phrase; "Nka bu örom." (Ikwerre.) Translation: "This is my house". (And, by extension, here, "The Earth is home to us all.") It is used here in a spirit of stoicism, or welcome - radical activity that sustains hope.

² 'Quickening' as in feeling the foetus move inside her.

³ Captain Pia Klemp, TedxBerlin, 2019. https://youtu.be/-7V1zNNfc_Q

⁴ https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/may/10/home-office-backs-down-over-travel-costs-for-eritrean-refugee-sitting-gcses?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

⁵ <https://niger.iom.int/stories/sewing-centre-support-womens-resilience-assamaka>

⁶ https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/26/indonesian-villagers-defy-covid-19-warnings-to-rescue-rohingya-refugees?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/03/world/americas/mexico-day-of-the-dead.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share%20https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/03/world/americas/mexico-day-of-the-dead.html?referringSource=articleShare>

⁸ <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/pensioner-79-told-shouldnt-country-23039708>

⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-53436335>

Katie Columbus is the author of *How to Listen* and *Pathways* (Hachette) and has an extensive background in arts and wellbeing journalism. She creates interdisciplinary work with dancers and musicians and recently graduated with distinction from the MA in Writing Poetry at The Poetry School, London. She has had poems published in The Frogmore Press, ROSA Magazine, Dance Art Journal and Glyn Maxwell's Dark Canadee, and was longlisted for the Fish Prize for Poetry. She was commissioned by the Royal Opera House to create libretto for a micro-opera festival for International Women's Day.

"I remember when Julie first told us she was ill and that at some point in the near future she wouldn't be here anymore, and it felt like it was going to be so hard. But she took control and made it the best possible ending of her time here, and that helped all the family in so many ways. She often talked about "the next adventure on the other side of the universe"; we went shopping for the brightest, most colourful dress we could find to wear at her funeral; she wrote letters and boxed up gifts for the future, and it all somehow softened the journey. Before she died we went travelling - we saw whales and dolphins, swam in the sea, hiked hills, walked in forests, and we all appreciated every moment, acutely aware of how precious that time was. It was in Kaikoura, New Zealand, that I had this dream about Julie being able to communicate with the whales in a secret language. It is my hope that this work will keep beautiful memories of a very special person alive."

In the Forest Next the Sea

Birdsong unravels in cloud,
hills and myths move with time,
slowly around edifice of softening ground.

Evening curves in and out
of dappled light, warm winds drape
over the hard grey leaves of trembling poplar trees,

owls dark on perches, still in shadow patches,
one crying twit, the other replying twoo –
I never knew that the call meant there were two.

Sweet magnolia hangs heavy, falls soft
to forest floor, leaving leaves like silken skirts
that whirl at my ankles as I walk.

Black pupils of night close in
on an island dream where whales sing
in language understood by only you.

Teresa Howard is a writer, librettist, lyricist. Her most recent work is GHOSTWOOD, an Immersive VR Project for the Mayor of London's Liberty Festival (Albany Theatre) working with Immersive Technologist Carl Guyenette (War of the Worlds, Somnai) as Concept Writer, Lyricist and Creative Producer; MINI-BREAK libretto for a One Act Opera composed by Victoria Bernath (Royal Opera House and Casco Phil – St Pancras International); Libretti for composer Sun Keting include: UNSUNG a Song Cycle commissioned by Conrad Sclar, One Act Operas ONE CUP OF MILK (RAM) & NEW GENUS (Tête à Tête Festival '22). She is also the book and lyric writer of THE WIND SINGER musical, based on the 'Young Adult' novel by William Nicholson composed by Sarah Llewellyn (RSC Residency/Performance) and book and lyrics of I CAPTURE THE CASTLE composed by Steven Edis (UK tour).

Emily Dickinson's poem inspired me to write about Crinoids, one of the most ancient forms of sea life from the Echinodermata family, it looks like a bunch of feathers floating gracefully in the deep. Its presence in the sea, having outlived extinctions of other creatures like the dinosaurs, makes it a symbol of survival and hope. The poem is a prayer in homage to the ancient line of the Crinoid.

SACRED THREADS

Phy-lum Echin-o-der-mata Phy-lum Sacrum
Genitori, genitoque
Ad Phylum Crinoidea

Five hundred million years of life. Five hundred million years.
We heard the dying moan of beast from ice and fire, and air and sea.

You thought we were the lilies
of ancient shallow waters,
but animal adaptable
we learned to move, evolve, survive.

We have nothing that a human needs.
We take nothing that a human wants.
We were here before
and will watch you leave, unless you hold the door,
amid your blast and roar!

Hear my secret scripture
Hear me call beneath the wave
Hope is floating feather lilies
Hope learns to weather any change.

Phy-lum Echin-o-der-mata Phy-lum Sacrum
Genitori, genitoque
Ad Phylum Crinoidea.

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Translation:

Phy-lum Echin-o-der-mata (Latin name for the genus they belong to, including starfish etc.)
Phy-lum Sacrum (sacred thread)
Genitori, genitoque (begotten and begotten)
Ad Phylum Crinoidea (the thread of crinoids)

Mrs Ahed Al Hamwi is a writer and translator.

Her response to the Dickinson poem is a personification of Hope.

You are The Hope

You are the light in the dark
That enables me to see
The beautiful flowers in the park
The green colour of a tree
You are the Hope

To me you are the best friend
That straightens the way on the bend
You knit from the sun's thread
My way to reach Everest head
You are the Hope

Let's run with the Streams
Me and you hand in hand
To fulfil the unreal dreams
Of Alice in Wonder Land
You are the Hope

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