

PRESS RELEASE  
20 April 2018



## Composer Roxanna Panufnik celebrates her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday with two major commissions and an album release

- Release of *Celestial Bird* on Signum Records on 7 September with new works commissioned by Ex Cathedra
- *Songs of Darkness, Dreams of Light* receives its world premiere at the Last Night of the Proms on 8 September with the BBC Singers, BBC Symphony Chorus, and BBC Symphony Orchestra, commissioned by the BBC Proms
- World premiere of *Faithful Journey – A Mass for Poland* on 9 November in Poland with the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra; and its UK premiere on 21 November in Birmingham, performed by the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. A co-commission with the NOSPR and the CBSO to celebrate 100 years of Poland regaining independence

**Roxanna Panufnik**, one of the UK's most popular and loved composers, celebrates her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday on 24 April and marks it with an album release and two major commissions in the autumn of 2018. Panufnik has written a wide range of works including opera, ballet, music theatre, choral work, chamber compositions and music for film and television which are regularly performed all over the world.

On **Friday 7 September** *Celestial Bird* is released on Signum Records, an album with a variety of genres which reflects Panufnik as a composer and includes repertoire previously not recorded. The title track is a folk setting of Jessica Powers' very passionate poem set alongside two new works commissioned by Ex Cathedra: *Since We Parted* and *Child of Heaven*. Powers' work is a very romantic piece about two lovers separated by World War One, accompanied by piano, cello, two trumpets and harp. *Child of Heaven* is one of two Indian inspired pieces on the album which is a short setting of lines from *Hymns to Dawn* from the Rigveda: the oldest of the sacred books of Hinduism. *Unending Love*, commissioned and premiered by the **National Youth Choirs of Great Britain** in 2017 is a setting of Tagore's famous poem of that same name. It is accompanied by two Indian violins, 'cello, sitar and Indian percussion: the musicians have been provided by **Milapfest**, the UK's leading Indian Arts Development Trust. There are also several sacred choral works namely *St Aidan's Prayer* with Panufnik's chorister son singing the solo, as well as *Deus est Caritus*. Other works include a lullaby-style carol *A Cradle Song* and *Salve Regina* which are both very lyrical and accompanied by piano rather than organ.

The world premiere of *Songs of Darkness, Dreams of Light* takes place at the **Last Night of the Proms** on **Saturday 8 September** at the **Royal Albert Hall**, commissioned by the **BBC Proms**. It is scored for double choir, the **BBC Singers** and **BBC Symphony Chorus**, who converse with each other using the texts of two poems which, although written 13 years apart, appear to connect together. Isaac Rosenberg's 1913 work *In The Underworld* describes living with a broken heart but spookily anticipates the trench conditions of World War One. Lines from Kahlil Gibran's 1923 poem *The Prophet* are used by Panufnik to answer and soothe the fears in the Rosenberg. It follows her long-standing interest in world music of different cultures, countries and faiths: Rosenberg was English, and his parents had Lithuanian Ashkenazy Jewish roots whilst Gibran was a Lebanese-American and

a Maronite Christian but also had a curiosity for Sufi mysticism thus the musical elements of the piece also represent the three Abrahamic faiths.

2018 is the centenary year of Poland regaining independence and Panufnik's second oratorio, *Faithful Journey – A Mass for Poland\**, receives its world premiere on **Friday 9 November** in Katowice, Poland, performed by the **Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra**. The UK premiere takes place in Birmingham on **Wednesday 21 November** with the **City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra** and soprano **Mary Bevan** as the soloist on both occasions. It is a co-commission between the NOSPR and the CBSO and also celebrates Panufnik's new status as holding dual Anglo-Polish nationality. Deeply inspired by this historic event, the work is framed around the traditional Latin mass movement and is based on 11 poems representing an event or atmosphere of a decade of Polish history, with the choirs singing in both Polish and English.

Looking ahead to the 2018/19 season, Panufnik has been commissioned to write a new work for the **Baltimore Symphony Orchestra**, conducted by **Marin Alsop** and **Valentina Peleggi**: it receives its world premiere on **Thursday 14 March 2019** at The Music Centre, Strathmore and has two further performances at the Joseph Meyerhoff Symphony Hall on **Friday 15** and **Saturday 16 March 2019**.

Specially commissioned 50<sup>th</sup> birthday images by Benjamin Ealovega available on request.

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**Notes to Editors**

**Roxanna Panufnik** studied composition at the Royal Academy of Music and, since then, has written a wide range of pieces – opera, ballet, music theatre, choral works, orchestral and chamber compositions, and music for film and television – which are performed all over the world. She has a great love of world music – this has culminated in her “Four World Seasons” for violinist Tasmin Little, the world premiere of which was picked by BBC Radio 3 to launch its Music Nations weekend, celebrating the London Olympics; her multi-faith Warner Classics CD “Love Abide” ([www.loveabide.com](http://www.loveabide.com)) and “Dance of Life: Tallinn Mass” for Tallinn Philharmonic ([www.tallinnmass.com](http://www.tallinnmass.com)), commissioned to celebrate Tallinn's reign as European Capital of Culture. Panufnik is especially interested in building musical bridges between faiths and her first project in this field was the violin concerto “Abraham”, commissioned for Daniel Hope, incorporating Christian, Islamic and Jewish chant to create a musical analogy for the fact that these three faiths believe in the same one God. This work was subsequently converted into an overture for the World Orchestra for Peace and premiered in Jerusalem and London under the baton of Valery Gergiev, in 2008 and at the 2014 BBC Proms. Her 2017 opera “Silver Birch”, commissioned by Garsington Opera, was met with great audience and critical acclaim. 2018/9 holds some exciting projects, including two major choral-orchestral works for Roxanna's 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday year, in 2018 and a new commission from Marin Alsop, for the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra in 2019. Roxanna's compositions are published by Peter's Edition Ltd and recorded on many labels including Warner Classics, Signum, Chandos, and EMI Classics.

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