
AN EVENING WITH RUSHIL RANJAN CONCERT MODE PROGRAMME

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INTRODUCTION

This is a big moment for me. An admittedly trite opening line, I know, but my journey into the world of writing for orchestra has been, in many ways, an unlikely one. I have not had the privilege of a formal classical education in either Indian or Western traditions, nor did I consciously grow up listening to these forms of music.

To be named the CBSO's first Collaborative Artist, and to have the great privilege of writing for them, is something I value deeply. Every musician on stage tonight is of the highest calibre, and together they reflect the rich and diverse artistry we have in Birmingham and beyond. Under the baton of Melvin Tay, whose insight and sensitivity have shaped this performance, I'm reminded again of how collaborative music making really is.

Given how unlikely this journey has been, my partner Abi and I feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude simply to be here.

To stand in this space, with this orchestra, in this city, and to share music shaped by our lives and our experiences is something we do not take for granted. We are deeply

thankful for every person who has supported us and helped make tonight possible.

Tonight Abi and I present a new piece of music. Structured in four movements, this commission was written around the time our daughter was born. In the few precious hours of sleep she has managed, Abi has sat with me to create something shaped by the wonder, fear, anxiety and ultimately unbridled joy of that journey.

The piece brings together Western and Indian classical elements in a way that I hope reveals what links them. I believe that link is their shared relationship with the divine and the search for it. I am of course not the first composer to bring these musical worlds together. The old saying about standing on the shoulders of giants feels especially true for me.

This evening, in addition to premiering our new commission, I also have the rare opportunity to show you where the work comes from. Tonight's programme traces the building blocks of my musical language and the music that shaped me and made this piece possible.

It is because of the work of those great composers, visionaries who revolutionised sound and built bridges between different musical cultures, that I have the career I do today.

We hope this piece stands as a tribute to the traditions that shaped us and as a reminder that music's power lies not in its category but in its humanity. Thank you for allowing us to share ours with you.

Rushil Ranjan

Composer, Arranger, Piano

BIOGRAPHIES

RUSHIL RANJAN

Composer, Arranger, Piano

Rushil Ranjan is a critically acclaimed, award-winning composer, arranger and producer whose work bridges orchestral, Indian classical and Sufi traditions. Entirely self-taught, his distinctive approach has made him a noted voice in contemporary cross-cultural music. He is Associate Artist

at the Royal Albert Hall, Collaborative Artist with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and Artistic Partner at Manchester Camerata, and is a recipient of PRS Foundation's Composer's Fund. His output spans concert music, award-winning dance productions and BAFTA-nominated film and TV projects. Rushil is the co-creator of the Orchestral Qawwali Project, developed alongside vocalist Abi Sampa. Their reimaging of Qawwali through orchestral soundworlds has earned international acclaim, culminating in a series of sold-out performances, including a landmark 5,500-seat concert at the Royal Albert Hall. Recent highlights include his score for Aakash Odedra's 'Songs of the Bulbul', which premiered at the Edinburgh International Festival and won "Best International Show," as well as a growing body of work for film and television. He was recently announced as co-composer for an upcoming commission alongside A.R. Rahman, marking an exciting new chapter in his collaborative work.

MELVIN TAY

Conductor

Melvin is a conductor recognised for his wide-ranging collaborations with ensembles across diverse musical genres. These include the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Manchester Camerata, London Voices, National Youth Choir of Great Britain, and the Orchestral Qawwali Project. As a passionate advocate for contemporary music, Melvin has conducted numerous acclaimed premieres, such as Rushil Ranjan's score for Aakash Odedra Company's *Songs of the Bulbul* (Edinburgh International Festival), *Shikwa* (Bradford Literature Festival), and Zakiya Leeming's *Dangerous Matter*, a new opera exploring the story of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and the origins of inoculation. He has also recorded new music for BBC Radio 3, *Blue Peter*, and a new musical by Theo Jamieson and Simon Pitts for BBC World

Service. He is the Music Director of the Northern Film Orchestra and has led recording sessions for *A Gentleman in Moscow* (Paramount+), as well as *Angelina Ballerina* and *Miffy* audiobooks for Yoto. He is also a Tutor in Conducting at the Royal Northern College of Music.

NITIN SAWHNEY CBE

Composer, Piano

Dr Nitin Sawhney CBE is a globally renowned musician, composer and cultural advocate. He has scored more than 70 films and television series, released 13 acclaimed solo albums, and received the 2017 Ivor Novello Lifetime Achievement Award, a CBE and nine honorary doctorates. His Mercury-nominated 1999 album *Beyond Skin* won a South Bank Show Award, whilst *Prophecy* (2001) and *Philtre* (2005) earned MOBO and BBC Radio 3 Awards. Film credits include *The Namesake*, *Midnight's Children* and *Mowgli: Legend of the Jungle*. His 2025

BAFTA-nominated score for Disney's Tiger follows the BAFTA-winning Human Planet, multiple other natural-history works, Olivier Award-winning theatre, choreography and BFI restorations. Sawhney has collaborated with Paul McCartney, Jorja Smith, Pink Floyd, Anoushka Shankar, Sting and Jeff Beck; performed at the Royal Albert Hall and Glastonbury; conducted international orchestras; and DJed at London's Fabric. Patron of the PRS Foundation and several other charities, he nurtures new talent. A 2024 Booker Prize judge and 2025 Asians Power 100 honouree, Sawhney fuses musical innovation with lasting cultural influence.

ABI SAMPA

Vocalist

Abi Sampa is a multi-instrumentalist, qawwal and veena virtuoso whose genre-blending approach has made her a defining voice in contemporary Sufi and fusion music. Born in North-West London

to Sri Lankan Tamil parents, her multicultural upbringing shaped a musical identity rooted in both Western and Indian classical traditions, forming the foundation of her distinctive vocal and instrumental style. An Associate Artist of the Royal Albert Hall, Abi is also the co-founder and lead vocalist of the Orchestral Qawwali Project, becoming one of the few women to front a qawwali ensemble. Her powerful and expressive performances - paired with her ability to lead large classical ensembles - have captivated sold-out audiences around the world. A highly sought-after performer, Abi has collaborated with artists including Nitin Sawhney, A.R. Rahman and Rushil Ranjan. She frequently appears with orchestras such as the CBSO, RPO and Manchester Camerata. A pioneer in the UK fusion scene, her work fuses Qawwali, Carnatic and Hindustani classical music with contemporary influences, inspiring a new generation of British-Asian artists and helping redefine global interpretations of South Asian music.

AAKASH ODEDRA

Dancer

Aakash Odedra is an internationally acclaimed dancer and choreographer celebrated for his distinctive movement language that merges Indian classical dance forms with contemporary expression. His work acts as a bridge between cultures and traditions of the East and West, blending virtuosic movement and storytelling to explore themes of transformation and humanity. Aakash is deeply committed to using dance as a language for social connection and transformation, leading projects that engage marginalized communities and young artists worldwide. An Associate Artist of Sadlers' Wells, and recipient of multiple honours including the Bessie Award and Dora Award, Aakash continues to redefine the vocabulary of contemporary South Asian dance, positioning it at the forefront of global performance practice. His work is a testament to the power of

movement as a bridge between worlds, identities, and imaginations.

PRAVEEN PRATHAPAN

Bansuri

Praveen Prathapan is a British Indian/Sri Lankan Carnatic musician who has worked with a diverse range of artists from Anoushka Shankar to Emeli Sandé. A disciple of Sri Chittoor T. Raghavaraman, Praveen has devoted the last decade to bringing the Carnatic flute to audiences across the globe, from California to Kazakhstan, at prestigious venues including Times Square and Buckingham Palace. He remains a lifelong student and continues to deepen his understanding of the Carnatic flute while exploring new approaches to this ancient musical tradition.

JANAN SATHIENDRAN

Tabla

Janan Sathiendran is a London-born percussionist whose musical identity is shaped by the city's rich cultural diversity. Trained since childhood in both the Hindustani and Carnatic classical traditions and raised in a home surrounded by a wide range of musical influences, he developed a deep and adaptable artistic instinct from an early age. Consequently, he is a versatile performer and collaborator, capable of working fluently in a number of roles across genres — from Indian classical music and dance to Qawwali, Western classical, contemporary and urban sounds — a breadth that has taken him across the world, performing with artists such as Rahat Fateh Ali Khan and A.R. Rahman. Janan is a core member of the Orchestral Qawwali Project, contributing a refined rhythmic voice to major orchestral and cross-cultural productions. Alongside his performing career, he works as a doctor in the NHS,

drawing on the discipline and empathy of both fields to inform his practice.

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