

## **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra Windrush, The Journey programme notes**

Pegasus Opera, in partnership with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, present *Windrush, The Journey*.

For more than 30 years, Pegasus Opera Company has fearlessly paved the way for diverse talent in opera. Today, we're paying tribute to Windrush, showcasing a rich tapestry of music and storytelling, and celebrating Black classical composers: past, present and future.

Through the outstanding music of Chevalier de Saint-Georges, Richard Thompson and Des Oliver – three composers who represent different eras of Black history – we'll honour the legacy of the Windrush generation with an exciting fusion of classical music, steel pan, jazz and blues.

In the foyer of The Tung Auditorium, a fascinating immersive exhibition showcasing the work of Black British composers through music, photographs and anecdotes will accompany this concert.

### **Jeri Lynne Johnson**

Award-winning American conductor [Jeri Lynne Johnson](#) is a versatile artist who is comfortable with a variety of repertoire and has developed a reputation for offering masterful and compelling performances of contemporary work.

Lauded as “a stunning, rhythmically vital conductor”, Johnson studied piano from the age of four and went on to gain a bachelor's degree in music and religion at Wellesley College and a master's in music history and theory from the University of Chicago. In 1998 she won the Jorge Mester Conducting Scholarship to attend the Aspen Music Festival, and her conducting mentors have included Liverpool's Sir Simon Rattle, Marin Alsop and Daniel Barenboim. Meanwhile in 2005 she made history by becoming the first Black woman to win an international conducting prize when she was awarded the Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship.

Three years later, she founded the Philadelphia-based [Black Pearl Chamber Orchestra](#) of which she is artistic director. The orchestra aims to combine artistic excellence, cultural diversity and meaningful community engagement and has been recognised nationally and internationally as a leading innovator in social justice and racial equity.

[Johnson](#) has conducted many leading orchestras in the United States and internationally, and has also collaborated with contemporary artists such as [Jay Z](#), Alicia Keys and hip-hop band The Roots.

She is also a composer.

Watch Jeri Lynne Johnson talk about [how to bring classical music to the next generation](#).

### **Singers From Pegasus Opera Company**

[Pegasus Opera Company](#) exists to create opportunities for composers, singers and musicians of African and Asian heritage.

The professional opera company was established in Brixton in 1992 by its artistic director Lloyd Newton, whose credo is 'harmony in diversity'. It produces high-quality performances, balancing this with a focus on artist development and with an eye to promoting the talents of emerging artists on eminent platforms. Pegasus celebrates the music of the African, Asian and Caribbean diasporas, using creativity to challenge and advocate for positive change. It also seeks to break down stereotypical racial casting to allow singers of all backgrounds an opportunity to play the roles for which they would not normally be cast.

Hear Pegasus Opera Company singers perform Des Oliver's '[Rush, A Windrush Anthem](#)' in 2021.

## **Joseph Bologne, le Chevalier de Saint-Georges – *L'Amant Anonyme***

Overture to *L'Amant Anonyme*

*Depuis longtemps mon coeur soupire* (Act 1, Scene 1)

*Tant de Constance* (Act 1, Scene 2)

*Son amour, Sa constance extrême* (Act 1, Scene 3)

*Enfin une foule... L'Amour, deviant propice* (Act 2, Scene 1)

*Aimer sans pouvoir le dire* (Act 2, Scene 2)

*Non, non je ne puis rien entendre*

*Ah! Quel trouble*

The 2022 film [\*Chevalier\*](#) may have amped up the facts for the big screen, but there's no doubt [Joseph Bologne's](#) real life story is an amazing one.

Born in France's West Indian colony of Guadeloupe in 1745, the illegitimate son of a wealthy French plantation owner and an enslaved Creole woman, [Saint-Georges](#) was taken to France at the age of seven to be educated. Saint-Georges went on to become a superstar of the pre-Revolutionary French court and society, and was widely regarded as the most accomplished man of his age.

In addition to being a hugely talented violinist, conductor and composer, he was also a consummate athlete, arguably the finest swordsman in Europe (on a visit to London he sparred with the future George IV), and military commander.

A contemporary of Mozart, he was the first [composer of African descent](#) to attain widespread acclaim in Europe.

*L'Amant Anonyme*, or The Anonymous Lover, dates from 1780 and the two-act chamber opera comique is the sole surviving complete example of Saint-Georges' six operas.

The story, with a libretto by French writer and playwright Desfontaines, is based on a play by the Comtesse de Genlis. It centres around Léontine, a wealthy widow who is receiving gifts and love letters from an anonymous admirer who – spoiler alert – turns out to be her friend Valour who has been struggling to tell her how he really feels about her.

Saint-Georges' Italianate score is both light and witty but also deeply expressive, and the role of Leontine requires a wide range and vocal agility.

**Did you know? As the conductor of the French capital's Concert de la Loge Olympique orchestra, Saint-Georges premiered Haydn's six Paris symphonies.**

Listen to [the overture](#) from the Chevalier de Saint-Georges' opera *L'Amant Anonyme*.

## **Richard Thompson - *Aspects of Othello & Desdemona***

[Richard Thompson](#) is a composer and performer whose work encompasses jazz and Third Stream composition.

In 1999 he was awarded the first Individual Artist Award for classical music composition from Brooklyn Arts Council, and his piece *Legend of the Moors* – a musical depiction of the presence and influence of the Moors in Spain in the Middle Ages – was premiered at the Brooklyn Conservatory.

His other compositions include the song cycles *The Shadow of Dawn*, *Dream Variations* and *Song of Solitude*, *Mask Suite* (premiered by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra), and a chamber opera [The Mask in the Mirror](#), a dramatization of the courtship and marriage of prominent African-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar and Alice Ruth Moore.

In 2012, he was commissioned by the city of San Diego and Caltrans to compose a musical tribute to Martin Luther King Jr to accompany the installation of a mural by artist Philip Matzigkeit. *I Have a Dream*, scored for jazz quintet, male jazz singer and choir, was performed in October that year.

**Originally from Aberdeen**, he studied at the University of Edinburgh and Rutgers University in New Jersey and gained a jazz diploma from Berklee College of Music in Boston.

He made his debut as a pianist at the Purcell Room, Queen Elizabeth Hall, in 1984. Thompson performs as a soloist in both jazz and classical concerts and in many chamber groups, including his own jazz quintet, and is currently Professor Emeritus of Music at San Diego State University where he teaches theory, jazz performance and jazz history.

*Five Aspects of Othello*, five settings of pivotal soliloquies from Shakespeare's tragedy, was composed for operatic bass Kevin Maynor and chamber orchestra, and was premiered by Newark's Trilogy Opera in July 2020.

Soliloquy One comes from Act 1, Scene 3 of the play and starts 'most potent, grave and reverend signiors'.

The second soliloquy – **her father loved me, oft invited me** – also comes from Act 1, Scene 3, while Soliloquy 3 (from Act 4, Scene 1) which opens with 'lie with her?' shows Othello's jealousy, fuelled by Iago, becoming increasingly desperate.

Soliloquy 4 and 5 both use monologues from Act 5, Scene 2 in which Othello convinces himself what he is about to do is an act of love ('it is the cause',) and, facing justice after murdering Desdemona, prepares to kill himself ('soft you, a word or two').

### **Des Oliver and Edson Burton - "Windrush Opera" (Scenes 3 and 4)**

Post-minimalist, and at times impressionistic, infused with African-diasporic influences, **Des Oliver's** music draws from a variety of genres and styles and combines driving rhythms with vivid colours, often culminating in mesmerising and immersive musical landscapes.

Commissions include works for the Bach Choir and Faust Chamber Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Oxford Philharmonic Orchestra. His *Dionysian Rivers Flow Through Me* was selected for the International Computer Music Conference in South Korea, and he has composed works for the soloist Clio Gould, All India Radio artist Shruti Jauhari, and most recently for accordionist Mingyuan Ruan.

His work has been performed at the Southbank Centre, Battersea Arts Centre, LSO St Lukes, Oxford Playhouse, the Sheldonian Theatre and Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival.

He is also a filmmaker and his curated documentary series *Identity and the Anxiety of Influence*, commissioned by Sound and Music for the British Music Collection, explores issues surrounding black identity with the breadth of new music produced by BAME composers across the UK.

Oliver studied composition with Robert Saxton and Simon Bainbridge at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He won a scholarship at the Royal Academy of Music and has had masterclasses with Thomas Ades, Nicholas Maw and the BBC Singers among others.

He holds a doctorate in composition at Worcester College, Oxford, and is a composition tutor at Christ Church, University College and Magdalen College. He is also a Jerwood composer with the London Symphony Orchestra.

Writer, poet, academic and curator **Edson Burton's** work is informed by the diversity of voices which form part of his navigation of class, ethnic and geographic communities.

He is a writer of drama for radio, stage and screen and his work has been produced by Show of Strength, Trinity Community Arts, and the Bristol Old Vic where he is associate artist. He is also co-founder of Black theatre company Dip & Fall Back.

Burton's academic specialisms include Afrofuturism, the Transatlantic Slave Trade, Race and Representation, and he has worked as a consultant and coordinator for a range of national and regional-based history projects.

In 2022, he was one of five writers who created the libretto for *Migrations*, a new work for Welsh National Opera.

He was made an MBE in the King's New Years Honours in 2023 for services to the arts and community in Easton, Bristol.

Oliver was originally commissioned by Pegasus Opera Company to compose *Rush – a Windrush Anthem* during the Covid lockdown to be performed by its online community choir, with the musical and lyrical content coming from his conversations with choir members over Zoom.

*Windrush Opera*, with a libretto by Edson Burton, is Oliver's first full-length opera and centres on four distinct characters – Avril, a timid young woman aspiring to be a nurse on arriving in England; Smiley, a resolute individual with a strong moral compass and hidden feelings for Avril; Vanley, Avril's charming yet somewhat promiscuous husband, hailing from Trinidad; and Don, a conscientious former soldier of World War II deeply invested in the concept of the 'Empire'.

As they forge an unlikely friendship aboard the Empire Windrush, each harbours individual aspirations and ambitions.

Set a year or so after their initial encounter, Scene 3 unfolds in shared lodgings in the dilapidated quarters of Notting Hill. The atmosphere is fraught with neglect, mirroring the tumultuous journey of these characters as they navigate life in England through various epochs.

Infused with the rich tapestry of Caribbean music, the opera resonates with diverse styles and genres that enhance its narrative.

In Scene 3, the lively 'cockroach' trio, led by Vanley, exudes the vibrant rhythms of 1950s calypso, adding a playful charm to the ambience. Meanwhile, Scene 4 introduces "Snow Child," a children's song infused with Cuban influences, enriching the emotional depth of the storyline with its melodic strains.

Through these musical interludes, the opera not only captivates the audience but also transports them across time and space, immersing them in the vivid landscapes of the characters' lives.