



The Barber of Seville, Morgan Pearse, Andrew Shore © Mike Hoban

Arts & What's On

Why the support of Samling is so important to the region's music culture and a round-up of the best seats in the house this summer



A Summer Spectacular

This year Samling, the North East's leading classical music charity, is celebrating its 20th birthday, and how better than by hosting a musical soir e on the banks of the Tyne. You don't want to miss this



Images © Peter Atkinson Photography



What have you got planned for this summer? Listening to world-class musicians on the radio while enjoying a glass of wine in your garden? A picnic in the countryside? Meeting up with good friends? That all sounds great, but if you're going to do it, do it properly... How about listening to some of the country's finest classical singers in one of the most picturesque gardens in the North East with a glass of fizz and a delicious dinner to boot? Now you're talking.

Businessman Roger McKechnie founded Samling in 1996 together with Karon Wright, who has led the charity as its Artistic and Executive Director ever since. The charity is devoted to finding and nurturing talent in classical music both here and across the world. As well as hosting regular concerts and performances, facilitating projects and working with other talented creatives (such as Sir Antony Gormley) to boost the creative industry in the North East as a whole, they offer two major opportunities for young, emerging classical singers.

Samling Academy, run in conjunction with Newcastle and Durham Universities and Sage Gateshead, is a year-long intensive coaching programme for young singers (aged 14–21).

Taking students from local schools and universities, the programme is designed to recognise, encourage and support talent, giving young people opportunities that wouldn't have necessarily been open to them.

Likewise, Samling Artist Programme is a week-long training programme for young professional singers and pianists. Open to artists at the beginning of their careers, the programme offers them training, instruction and mentoring by some of the biggest names in classical music, including the charity's patron Sir Thomas Allen. It attracts artists from across the world, most of whom go on to have international careers in opera.

And – good news, we will all have the opportunity to enjoy these international talents as alumni of the Artist Programme return to the North East for the spectacular Samling Gala Concert in the Garden on Sunday 3 July. With solo performances by soprano Elin Pritchard, mezzo-soprano Helen Sherman, tenor Nicky Spence and baritone Morgan Pearse, it's sure to be an evening to remember.

'To have the chance to come back and be part of Samling's 20th birthday is a joy,' Helen tells us. 'Samling is not just a gem for the North of England, it's a big thing for the whole country.'



Helen Sherman as Dorabella in Opera North's production of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* in 2016 (photo by Tristram Kenton)

'She will take her place on stage alongside others who've benefited from this remarkable North East charity'

Helen took part in the Samling Artist Programme in 2012. Originally from Sydney and fresh from studying at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, it meant her relocating to the North for a week to train with acclaimed opera singer Olaf Bär and director John Fisher.

'The whole experience was more than I could have imagined it would be,' she explains. 'It was a week's residence and we all stayed together with the coaching staff. The fact that there was no separation between the staff and students meant we got tips on language and musical coaching, but there was also a real sense of mentoring going on. I remember going for a walk with Olaf Bär and talking to him about the trials and tribulations of being a performer and what I was going through at the time. You can't buy that kind of experience.'

Helen has gone on to have an exceptional career. She's performed with some of the world's most acclaimed opera companies, represented Australia at the 2011 BBC Cardiff Singer of the World competition and sung at the Opening Ceremony of the Tour de France in Leeds in 2014. But she still maintains an affiliation with Samling, describing it as 'a turning point' in her career.

Now she will take her place on stage alongside others who've benefited from this remarkable North East charity. The spectacular anniversary concert will take place at The Old Vicarage in Bywell, the house of Samling trustee Tony Trapp, and will also feature performances by two young singers from the current Samling Academy and the Northern Chords Festival Orchestra under the baton of conductor Jonathan Bloxham.

'With music such as *Largo al factotum* from Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*, *O soave fanciulla* from Puccini's *La bohème* and Bizet's *Pearl Fishers* duet, our audience can expect an unforgettable evening,' Karon Wright, Samling's director beams. With musical talents from far and wide flocking to the region to honour Samling, we're clearly in for a treat.

Samling Gala Concert in the Garden, Sunday 3 July, The Old Vicarage in Bywell. Tickets are available to purchase at www.samling.org.uk/events, 01434 602885 or by emailing enquiries@samling.org.uk



Elin Pritchard (centre) singing the title role in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the 2015 Buxton Festival (photo by Jonathan Keenan)



Morgan Pease in English National Opera's *The Barber of Seville* in 2015 (photo by Mike Hoban)

The Principal Sponsors of the Samling Gala Concert in the Garden are Rycroft Glenton Chartered Accountants and Square One Law. The sparkling reception is sponsored by UBS Wealth Management, and logistical support is being provided by Osbit. The stage marquee is provided by Bakerwood, who are also organising the catering for the event.