



INSTITUTE
FOR YOUNG
ARTISTS

INSPIRING MUSICAL EXCELLENCE IN YOUNG PEOPLE

news

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30 Years of Musical Excellence

It's a big year for Samling as in 2026 we celebrate our 30th birthday. We are recognised nationally and internationally for our expertise in the training of young classical singers and pianists and our work is most often described by them as transformational and life-changing.

All through the year we plan to honour the very people who make up our Samling family – our Samling Artists, our current and former Academy Singers and all those who so generously nurture the next generation. We will also be looking to the future to ensure that through our work with young people, song and opera continue to thrive.

'I am immensely proud of what Samling has achieved. From its earliest days in a barn in the Lake District I have seen it grow organically into something which is a force for good. I have watched talented young people from all backgrounds find their voice, grow in confidence, make friends and flourish not only in opera houses and concert halls across the globe but also amongst their peers and in their communities.

I am also so very grateful to all our funders over the years who have enabled us as a charity to make no charge for any of our programmes including our work in schools. Talent, potential, hard work and dedication are our only criteria for participation and I believe passionately that there should be no barriers to young people discovering the wonder of this precious art form now and in the future.'

Karon Wright, founding Artistic and Executive Director

We begin our year with those at the very start of their singing journey, or who have not yet even discovered that classical music is for them. In January, Samling Artists soprano Jessica Cale, tenor Nick Pritchard and pianist Alfred Fardell and a team of Academy Singers will lead Samling Futures workshops at seven state secondary schools in Newcastle, Northumberland, Sunderland and Durham, showing students what classical singing is all about and how they can progress through Samling Academy. Our Singing Schools programme continues to expand: we complete our introductory sessions at Queen Elizabeth High School, Hexham and Ponteland High School will join the programme.

One of our great pleasures over the years has been to see members of our Samling family grow and return to us in new roles. We're delighted that Samling Artists soprano Louise Alder and pianist James Baillieu will join Sir Thomas Allen as Patrons of Samling – read more about this on page 2.

This year Anna Stéphanie and Nicky Spence OBE will return to lead the Samling Artist Programme that they once benefitted from and another former Samling Academy Singer, Philippe Durrant, will become a Samling Artist.

Malcolm Martineau OBE, who was one of the leaders at our very first Artist Programme in 1997, will be joining us again at Marchmont House in March and, as we continue to develop our leadership team by bringing in fresh voices and new perspectives,

Samling Artist Nick Pritchard joins our Academy Singers on stage in the finale of their concert at The Glasshouse. Photo: Mark Pinder

we're delighted to announce that the award-winning actor Adrian Lester CBE will be joining us. Adrian has starred in acclaimed stage productions at The National Theatre including the title roles in *Othello* and *Henry V* and in *The Lehman Trilogy* on Broadway, and his extensive TV and film work includes the long-running BBC TV series *Hustle*.

Our Academy Singers will help us to mark our anniversary in style this summer in a glittering cabaret evening of song, opera scenes, dance and spoken word, inspired by Gatsby's parties. We're also looking towards our next opera production in summer 2027 and we'll be building preparation for this into this year's work with the Academy.

Our anniversary celebrations will conclude with a special showcase at Wigmore Hall on Friday 6 November which will bring together all the strands of our work. Look out for more announcements later in the year.



Adrian Lester

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WHY SAMLING INSTITUTE?

'Watching Samling grow, often from far off venues around the world, has been a most satisfying experience. Thirty years is a remarkable achievement. There's a continuing need for its existence, now more than ever. Long may it be there and here's a health to the next thirty years.' *Patron Sir Thomas Allen*

Meet our new Patrons

As part of our 30th anniversary celebrations, we are delighted that Samling Artists soprano Louise Alder and pianist James Baillieu have accepted an invitation to become Patrons of Samling Institute.

In their artistry, their international achievements and their commitment to supporting the next generations, Louise and James are shining examples of the qualities that Samling stands for and that we seek to nurture in younger artists. I am extremely grateful that they have agreed to find time in their busy careers to take on this new role representing Samling Institute and advocating for our work.

Sir David Bell KCB DL,
Chair of Samling Institute



Louise Alder is enjoying a stellar opera career – the past year has included her house debut at the New York Metropolitan Opera; a highly praised role debut as Countess *Le nozze di Figaro* at Glyndebourne and headlining the Last Night of the Proms. Her latest disc is a recording of Strauss songs with Nicholas Collon and the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

'I've always been so grateful for my time at Samling and I still draw on what I learned when I sing. As a patron, I am so excited to advocate for Samling and celebrate the opportunities it presents for young singers to learn important tools in an intimate setting, alongside important showcases, quite different from music college. In a fast-changing musical world that presents an increasingly difficult landscape for young artists, it is vital they continue to benefit in the way I did.'



James Baillieu is one of the leading song and chamber pianists of his generation and he also shares Samling's commitment to supporting the next generation, returning to us regularly to lead both of our core programmes. He is Associate Director of the Britten Pears Young Artist Programme, senior professor at the Royal Academy of Music and Head of Song at the Verbier Festival Atelier Lyrique.

'Samling's commitment to artistic excellence and to nurturing the next generation of singers and ensemble pianists is something I have long admired and the fact that all of this is achieved without public funding is truly remarkable. It has been a real pleasure to be involved with the Academy and the Artist Programme and I am genuinely delighted and honoured to be supporting Samling's work further as a Patron.'



Samling Academy 2025

We welcomed this year's cohort of thirty Samling Academy Singers for six days of classes and workshops hosted by The Glasshouse and Durham University and directed by Caroline Dowdle. Movement coach Desirée Kongerød joined the leadership team for the first time alongside soprano Joan Rodgers CBE, actor James Garnon and Samling Artists vocal teachers Miranda Wright and Katherine Aitken, tenor Nick Pritchard and pianists Jonathan Ware and Jo Ramadan. The concert at The Glasshouse ended with 'Sit Down You're Rockin' the Boat' from *Guys and Dolls*, with Nick Pritchard jumping out of the audience as Nicely-Nicely Johnson.



Photos: Mark Pinder

'I am so proud of everything that Samling has achieved over three decades. Although its reach is global it remains rooted in the North East where it is a powerhouse and advocate for classical music.'

Roger McKechnie



From top right: Roger McKechnie & Karon Wright (1996); Gala with Royal Northern Sinfonia (2017); arena Tom Woolford (2003); Patricia MacMahon, Simon Over, Malcolm Martineau & Thomas Allen, Samling Artist Programme (1997); Katarina Karnéus & Michael Pollock (1995); Christopher Maltman & Leigh Woolf, *Don Giovanni* (2007); Outreach with Samling Artists & Southbank Sinfonia (2006).



The word 'Samling' is a Norse word that means 'gathering' or 'collective' and the name still sums up exactly what we do. For thirty years, we have brought together talented young artists, expert leaders and audiences who are united by the unswerving commitment to excellence that underpins all our programmes.

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 very first concert of a series was in a converted barn on Lake Windermere, given by Katarina Karnéus, who had just won Cardiff Singer of the World, pianist Michael Pollock and poet Tony Harrison. This was followed by the first of our Artist Programme residencies which have continued ever since, led by world-class singers, conductors, pianists and actors. The Samling Artists who take part in these weeks remain at the heart of everything we do.

From the beginning our outreach work in schools reached thousands of young people across the North and in 2012 with

the founding of Samling Academy we drew on the expertise of our Samling Artists and leaders to create a unique programme of coaching for young people aged 14–21 who live or study in the North East. Hundreds of singers have benefitted and we are seeing former Academy Singers returning to us as Samling Artists and progressing to careers on stages across Europe. Increasingly, the intake is coming from state secondary schools, thanks to the success of our Samling Futures outreach initiative and the creation of our 'Singing Schools'.

In the early years we also ran a vibrant and innovative visual arts programme which, as well as a series of commissions and exhibitions for emerging young painters and sculptors, included large-scale projects. This culminated in arena in 2003 led by Sir Antony Gormley which saw five major public art installations across Tyne and Wear, including LAND, a huge light sculpture on the cliffs at Tynemouth and House-City in the centre of Newcastle. The five artists who were chosen each in turn mentored 12 A-level students who worked together over a period of months.

Full scale opera productions with Samling Artists followed in 2005 (*Così fan tutte*)

and 2007 (*Don Giovanni*) directed by our Patron Sir Thomas Allen with Northern Sinfonia. With the formation of Samling Academy Opera we produced *Albert Herring* (2013), *L'enfant et les sortilèges* (2015), *Venus and Adonis* (2018) and *Dido and Aeneas* (2024). We have also presented hundreds of concerts at venues including Wigmore Hall, Sage Gateshead, Leeds Lieder, Oxford Song, St John's Smith Square and Cadogan Hall as part of our ongoing support for Samling Artists and have collaborated with Southbank Sinfonia, Royal Northern Sinfonia and Dunedin Consort.

The performing arts continue to face many challenges – some of them unimagined when we first began. We are building a legacy for the next decades, in the sure knowledge that whatever else changes in the world, there will be always be people who share our values to inspire musical excellence and a belief in the importance of investing in brilliant young people and creativity.

You can be part of our story by supporting our 30th anniversary appeal today. To donate, use the QR code or visit samling.org.uk





SAMLING IN MASTERCLASS

Saturday 7 March, 2–5pm

Marchmont House, Duns, Berwickshire, TD10 6YL



Tickets £25 available from marchmonthouse.com

Star of film and stage Adrian Lester CBE joins the Samling Artist Programme for the first time alongside pianist Malcolm Martineau and Samling Artist Anna Stéphany. Meet them in a fascinating afternoon of artistic insight and discovery.



A bus transfer from Berwick-upon-Tweed station is available and can be booked with your ticket.

With Samling Artists

Eyra Norman soprano

Caitlin Mackenzie mezzo-soprano

Louisa Stuart-Smith mezzo-soprano

Zheng Jiang countertenor

Philippe Durrant tenor

Jack Holton baritone

George Herbert piano

Alina Tluschch piano

With staff pianist Samling Artist Ella O'Neill.



SAMLING ACADEMY 'THE PARTY'

11 – 12 July

The Glasshouse International Centre for Music

With balloons and banners and in glad rags and dancing shoes, Samling Academy invites you to a party. Celebrating the 30th birthday of Samling Institute's work inspiring musical excellence in young people, this semi-staged concert will introduce you to a cast of time-travelling revellers, the gate crashers and hangers-on in this fizzing evening of words and music.

Tickets on sale later in the year.



SAMLING IN MASTERCLASS

Saturday 1 August, 2–5pm

Marchmont House, Duns, Berwickshire, TD10 6YL



One of Britain's leading operatic tenors, Samling Artist Nicky Spence OBE returns to led the programme he once benefitted from, alongside pianist Roger Vignoles and actor James Garnon.



Together, they will coach six singers and two pianists in an afternoon of musical discovery.

With staff pianist Samling Artist Jo Ramadan.



SAMLING ACADEMY

9–11 October and 23–25 October

Our 2026/27 cohort of thirty Academy Singers begin their year with six intensive days of coaching and workshops, directed by Caroline Dowdle (Royal Ballet and Opera). They'll work on every aspect of their vocal technique and stagecraft skills with a team of opera singers, vocal teachers, pianists, an actor and a movement specialist.

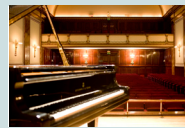


Samling Academy In Concert

Sunday 25 October, 3pm

Sage Two, The Glasshouse International Centre for Music.

Catch up on what our Samling Academy Singers have been working on as they put their skills into practice in a joyful afternoon of song and opera.



SAMLING ARTIST SHOWCASE

Celebrating Thirty Years

Friday 6 November, 7.30pm

Wigmore Hall, London

This year's Showcase brings together all the strands of our work in a glorious evening of music-making.

More details to follow.



HELP US RAISE £30,000

For thirty years we have given life-changing opportunities to young people. To mark this milestone, we are seeking to raise £30,000 which a generous donor has promised to match fund, doubling every pound you donate.

If your life has been touched in any way by our work – as a course participant, a parent, a teacher or an audience member – your donation will help us continue transforming lives.

Samling does not receive any public funding and does not have an endowment so your support really matters to us.



To donate, visit samling.org.uk/support or use the QR code



INSTITUTE FOR
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