

Thaxted Festival celebrates Holst 150th anniversary with star studded line up: Nadine Benjamin, VOCES8, Iyad Sughayer, Zeb Soanes, London Mozart Players, Nash Ensemble and English Chamber Orchestra



Thaxted Festival announces its 2024 Festival from **21 June to 14 July 2024** celebrating the 150th anniversary of the birth of local composer Gustav Holst. The festival features **soprano Nadine Benjamin, The Joanna Eden Band, The Nash Ensemble, and pianist Iyad Sughayer**, alongside **VOCES8, Mozart's The Magic Flute** with **Wild Arts, the English Chamber Orchestra**, and The Festival's resident ensemble **London Mozart Players**. There will be a **world premiere of Symphony No. 1 by Noah Max**, who is composer in residence in 2024. The Festival has a partnership with the Young Classical Artists Trust and London Mozart Players to feature their musicians throughout the year.

Holst stumbled upon Thaxted on a walking tour of north Essex and was so enamoured with the village that he rented a house there from 1913 – it is where he began work on what subsequently became known as *The Planets*. Holst was fascinated by the planets and their astrological significance, and especially how this affected the lives of ordinary people.

Artistic director Andrew Jenkins commented,
"Thaxted Festival is indelibly linked to Gustav Holst, and this year we celebrate the 150th anniversary of his birth, with performances of his works throughout the

Festival. The highlight will be his First Choral Symphony with the English Chamber Orchestra and the Choir of King's College London, the same forces that memorably brought us Holst's Cloud Messenger in 2022."

With a whole evening inspired by Holst on 5 July, the Festival celebrates the life of the great English composer, whose lifelong friend Ralph Vaughan Williams was a great influence. On **Sunday 7 July**, the Choir of Kings College London will perform Holst's First Choral Symphony, a work that sets verses by John Keats in a traditional four-movement structure. Premiered at Leeds Town Hall in October 1925 by conductor Albert Coates and soprano Dorothy Silk, the work was initially well-received but fell into neglect, and today is rarely performed.



Thaxted Parish Church amidst the rolling Essex countryside near Saffron Walden has been described as the finest parish church in the country, and provides the perfect venue for the Thaxted Festival. **With its origins in Gustav Holst's 1916 Whitsun Festival**, Thaxted Festival attracts outstanding British and international musicians in genres ranging from orchestral, chamber and vocal music to jazz, folk, big-band and swing, from early music to contemporary styles – and Holst is never overlooked. The area

is home to a number of writers and filmmakers and has a good working relationship with Saffron Hall to collaborate on orchestral concerts.

Festival Patron, Zeb Soanes commented, *"Thaxted Festival has its origins in the music-making of Gustav Holst, whose 150th anniversary we will be celebrating next year. His Whitsuntide Festivals and other events brought together students, professionals [in] 'a feast' of music-making. Thaxted's new Developing Artists Programme continues Holst's passion and delight in developing young musicians. Providing a platform for musicians and composers at the earlier stages of their careers. On a summer's evening, there really is nowhere better to relax and enjoy the music of your choice in beautiful surroundings, than at the Thaxted Festival."*

The 2024 Festival will feature events for younger audiences and educational projects with schools in collaboration with the **London Mozart Players**. The Festival has a Developing Artists Programme, supported by a dedicated Fund in partnership with YCAT (The Young Concert Artists Trust). It provides a platform for professional musicians and composers at the earliest stages of their careers, both within the main summer season and throughout the year.

Weekend One – 21 to 23 June



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Opening the 2024 Festival with **Holst's A Fugal Concerto No. 2**, the London Mozart Players give the **world premiere of composer-in-residence Noah Max's Symphony No. 1**. This first weekend of the Festival also features **soprano Nadine Benjamin** performing Puccini, and a screening of *In the Bleak Midwinter* (2011), a film made about Holst's life and introduced by director Tony Palmer.

Weekend Two – 28 to 30 June

Folk duo Stevens and Pound open the second weekend of the Festival, and Nash Ensemble are set to perform some of chamber music's classics from Schubert and Beethoven, alongside Franz Berwald's Grand Septet in B-flat. Making a return to Thaxted this year, Wild Arts will perform their celebrated production of Mozart's well-loved classic *The Magic Flute*, in English.



Weekend Three – 5 to 7 July



© Simon Jay Price

Echo Ensemble, directed by Noah Max, opens the third weekend of the Festival with **COSMOS: A Celebration of The Planets**, featuring words and music around Holst and his most well-known work, all presented by Zeb Soanes, patron of the Festival. **Rising star baritone Neil Balfour** will perform an afternoon recital of Schumann's *Frauen-Liebe und Leben* with pianist Sholto Kynoch, alongside music by Puccini, Fauré and Holst. The same evening, Balfour will perform with the Armonico

Consort in **Purcell's Fairy Queen**: after its first performance in 1692 at the Queen's Theatre in London's Dorset Gardens the score was lost until the early 20th century. It was **republished in 1903 and given its modern revival by Holst in June 1911** at The Old Vic. The English Chamber Orchestra and the Choir of King's College London will close the third weekend with Holst's First Choral Symphony.

Weekend Four – 12 to 14 July



The final weekend of the 2024 Festival features **pianist Iyad Sughayer, who is joined by oboist Armand Djikoloum**. Sughayer has performed with leading orchestras, including the BBC Philharmonic, as well as in New York and Dubai.

In the composer's 150th anniversary year, VOCES8 perform music by Holst, alongside works by Giovanni Croce and contemporary American composer Caroline Shaw.

The strings of the London Mozart Players bring this year's Thaxted Festival to a close with **Elgar's String Serenade and Holst's St Paul's Suite**, followed by

Vaughan Williams' Tallis Fantasia scored for two string orchestras and quintet. Closing the programme is Dvorak's Serenade for Strings, a staple of the string repertoire.

"An impressive debut disc as Sughayer is clearly master of the complex demands of Khachaturian's virtuoso piano writing yet also brings in a fine element of character and passion"

Planet Hugill

2024 Festival Listings

Weekend One

Friday 21 June 2023, 19:30

Thaxted Parish Church

Holst A Fugal Concerto Op. 40 No. 2

Noah Max Symphony No. 1 **WORLD PREMIERE**

Holst Lyric Movement

Holst Brook Green Suite

Mozart Piano Concerto No. 23

Iyad Sughayer piano

London Mozart Players

Jonathan Bloxham conductor

Opera Arias (Puccini and more)

Nadine Benjamin soprano

Jan Karl Rautio piano

Sunday 23 June, 14:00

Saffron Screen

Film: In the Bleak Midwinter (2011)

Introduction from director **Tony Palmer**

Saturday 22 June, 19:30

Thaxted Parish Church

Sunday 23 June, 19:30

Thaxted Parish Church

Joanna Eden Band

Weekend Two

Friday 28 June, 19:30

Thaxted Parish Church

Stevens and Pound

Saturday 29th June, 12:00

Thaxted Parish Church

Peter Holden organ recital

Saturday 29 June, 19:30

Thaxted Parish Church

Schubert String Trio in B flat, D.
471

Franz Berwald Grand Septet in B
flat

Beethoven Septet in E flat, Op. 20

Nash Ensemble

Sunday 30 June, 17:00

Thaxted Parish Church

Mozart *Magic Flute*
(with 90-minute interval)

Performed by **Wild Arts**

Weekend Three

Friday 5 July, 19:30

Thaxted Parish Church

**COSMOS: A celebration of The
Planets**

**Works by Ives, Britten, Schubert,
Stravinsky, and Ravel**

Echo Ensemble

Zeb Soanes presenter

Selina Cadell

Noah Max conductor

Saturday 6 July, 15:00

United Reform Church

Schumann Frauen-Liebe und Leben
Works by **Holst, Puccini and Fauré**

Neil Balfour baritone

Sholto Kynoch piano

Saturday 6 July, 19:30

Thaxted Parish Church

Purcell Fairy Queen

Armonico Consort

Sunday 7 July, 15:00

United Reform Church

Pre-concert talk with **Philippa
Tudor**

Fauré tbc

Holst *12 Humbert Wolfe Songs*

Dickinson *Without Words* **WORLD
PREMIERE**

Sarah Leonard soprano

Stephen Dickinson piano

Sunday 7 July, 18:00

Thaxted Parish Church

Holst First Choral Symphony

**Choir of King's College London
English Chamber Orchestra
Joseph Fort** conductor

Weekend Four

Friday 12 July, 19:30

Thaxted Parish Church

**Programme to include music by
Croce, Caroline Shaw, Holst, Paul
Smith, and Arthur Sullivan**

VOCES8

Lili Boulanger *Nocturne*
Saint-Saëns Sonata for Oboe and
Piano

Iyad Sughayer piano
Armand Djikoloum oboe

Saturday 13 July, 19:30

Thaxted Parish Church

Mozart Fantasia and Sonata in C
minor K. 475
Khachaturian *Suite for Piano*
Alma Mahler *Die Stille Stadt*
Clara Schumann *3 Romances* Op.
22
Hindemith Sonata for Oboe and
Piano
Marina Dranishnikova *Poème*

Sunday 14 July, 18:00

Thaxted Parish Church

Elgar *Serenade for Strings*
Holst *St Paul's Suite*
Vaughan Williams *Variations of a
Theme of Thomas Tallis*
Dvorak *Serenade for Strings*

**Strings of the London Mozart
Players**

thaxtedfestival.co.uk

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