

ALEC ROTH

Born near Manchester, of German/Irish descent, Alec Roth studied music at the University of Durham, where he was awarded the Scott Prize; conducting with Diego Masson (Dartington) and Rafael Kubelik (Lucerne); and gamelan at the Academy of Indonesian Performing Arts (ASKI) in Surakarta, Central Java. From 1986 to 1989 he was holder of the Collard Fellowship, and in 2000 received a major grant to further his composition work from the Gulbenkian Foundation.

Posts he has held include Founder / Artistic Director of the Royal Festival Hall Gamelan Programme and South Bank Gamelan Players (1987-91); Music Director of the Baylis Programme at English National Opera (1988-93); Composer in Association, Opera North (1994-96); and Lecturer in Music, University of Edinburgh (2002-03). He now works as a freelance composer.

Alec Roth's collaborations with the Indian writer Vikram Seth include the song cycles *Chinese Gardens* (Chester Festival commission 1998) and *Romantic Residues* (Bury St Edmunds Festival commission 2003) and *Earth and Sky* for children's chorus (BBC commission for the Proms 2000 season). Vikram Seth was also the librettist for *Arion and the Dolphin*, commissioned by English National Opera and premiered in the Royal Navy Dockyard, Plymouth in 1994. Subsequent productions include Singapore (1996), Nottingham (1998) and Rotterdam (1999).

Other works include a version of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* with gamelan (Vancouver 1989); *Gretel and Hansel* (1988), an opera for young people, libretto by David Sulkin; *The Big Wash Cycle* (1994), songs to words by Jo Shapcott; *All Summer in a Day* (1996), a musical drama for children to perform to adults, based on the story by Ray Bradbury; and four commissions for the Academy of St Martin in the Fields: *Departure of the Queen of Sheba* (1999) for oboe, cor anglais and string orchestra, *Nocturne* (2000) for viola and string orchestra; *Concertino Piccolo* (2006) for string orchestra with two groups of young violinists; and Concerto for Guitar and String Orchestra (2010). This last was for the Mexican guitarist Morgan Szymanski for whom he has also composed a Quintet (2006) and several solo works including *The Unicorn in the Garden* (2003).

Between 2006 and 2009 he completed *The Rivered Earth*, a sequence of four major works created in collaboration with Vikram Seth and violinist Philippe Honoré, co-commissioned by the Salisbury, Chelsea and Lichfield Festivals. The first, *Songs in Time of War*, for tenor (Mark Padmore), violin, harp and guitar is available on CD on the Signum label. The second, a pair of works – *Shared Ground* for unaccompanied choir (Ex Cathedra) and *Ponticelli* for solo violin – was premiered in 2007. The third, *The Traveller*, an oratorio on the theme of the Ages of Man for violin, tenor, choir, children's choir and orchestra (Britten Sinfonia) received its first performance in Salisbury Cathedral in May 2008. The series was completed with *Seven Elements* for tenor (James Gilchrist) and piano (Rustem Hayroudinoff), and *Seven Elements Suite* for violin and piano in 2009. *Shared Ground / Ponticelli* was also recorded by Signum in 2011, to coincide with the publication by Penguin of Vikram Seth's book *The Rivered Earth*, which tells the story of their four-year collaboration. In 2012 all four works were performed together over two days at the Music and Beyond Festival in Ottawa.

2010/11 saw the first performances of *Earthrise* for unaccompanied choir in 40 parts, commissioned to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Ex Cathedra and inspired by the 1969 Apollo 8 image of the Earth from the Moon; a second String Quartet for the Allegri Quartet; and *My Lute & I*, a song cycle to words by Thomas Wyatt, the latest in an ongoing series of works for Mark Padmore and Morgan Szymanski.

A Time to Dance, commissioned to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Summer Music Society of Dorset, was first performed in Sherborne Abbey by Ex Cathedra in June 2012. The same month also saw the premiere of *Old Earth*, a music-theatre work using texts by Samuel Beckett, for actor (Alan Howard) and unaccompanied voices (The Sixteen/Harry Christophers), commissioned by the Spitalfields Festival and staged at Village Underground. In November 2012, the anthem *Jubilate*, commissioned by the Musicians Benevolent fund for the annual Festival of St Cecilia was given its first performance at St Paul's Cathedral by the combined Choirs of St Paul's, Westminster Abbey and Westminster Cathedral.