

Your guide to the world's greatest classical music festival



B B C

Proms

19 JULY – 14 SEPTEMBER 2024
ROYAL ALBERT HALL • AROUND THE UK

Concert listings
plus feature articles
by leading writers

RADIO 3

Proms 2024 Calendar

Mon

22
Jul

Prom 5
7.30pm • Schoenberg, Zemlinsky
BBC NOW/Bancroft

29
Jul

Prom 14
7.30pm • E-S. Tüür, Beethoven, Bruckner
Lim, BBC SO/Järvi

Tue

23
Jul

Prom 6
7.00pm • Verdi: Requiem
soloists, Crouch End
Festival Chorus, BBC
NCW & NOW/Bancroft

Prom 7
10.15pm • G. Caccini,
Cavalli, Frescobaldi,
Monteverdi, Strozzi, etc.
Orliński, Il Pomo d'Oro

30
Jul

Prom 15
7.30pm • A. Clyne, Messiaen
The Swingles, Osborne, Millar, BBC Philharmonic/
Collon

Wed

24
Jul

Prom 8
7.30pm • Nick Drake: An Orchestral Celebration
BBC SO/Buckley

31
Jul

Prom 16
7.30pm • C. Miller, Shostakovich
Power, BBC Philharmonic/Storgårds

Thu

25
Jul

Prom 9
7.30pm • Brahms, Schoenberg, Mahler
Coote, BBC SSO/Wigglesworth

1
Aug

Prom 17
7.30pm • Ives, Ravel, Debussy, Tchaikovsky
Kozhukhin, Philharmonia Chorus,
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/V. Petrenko

Fri

19
Jul

Prom 1: First Night of the Proms 2024
6.30pm • Handel/Mackerras, Bruckner,
C. Schumann, B. Nobuto, Beethoven
Bevan, I. Kanneh-Mason, BBC Singers,
BBC SC & SO/Chan

26
Jul

Prom 10
7.30pm • Britten, C. Frances-Hoad, Elgar
van der Heijden, BBC SSO/Wigglesworth

Gateshead
7.30pm • Tailleferre,
Sibelius, Dvořák
Baeva, RNS/Sousa

Gateshead
11.00pm • Night
Tracks
Mohr-Pietsch, Peel

2
Aug

Prom 18
8.00pm • Sam Smith: In the Lonely Hour
Smith, BBC CO/Hale

Sat

20
Jul

Prom 2
7.30pm • Everybody Dance! The Sound
of Disco
BBC CO/Bartholomew-Poyser

27
Jul

Proms 11 & 12
11.00am & 3.00pm • CBeebies Prom: Wildlife
Jamboree presenters, BBC Singers, CBeebies East
London Schools' Choir, Southbank Sinfonia/Ryan

Gateshead
7.30pm
Rakei, RNS/Ames

Gateshead
10.00pm • BBC Music
Introducing: Live at the
Proms

3
Aug

Prom 19
7.30pm • Harvey, Elgar, Holst
Dandy, Rummukainen, BBC SC & SO/Oramo

Sun

21
Jul

Prom 3
11.00am
B. Chilcott,
M. Dunphy,
E. Ešenvalds, Holst,
Van Heusen/
B. Howard, B. Joel,
P. Simon, Wallace,
etc.
The King's Singers,
VOCES8

Prom 4
7.30pm
J. MacMillan, Mahler
Hallé choirs, Hallé/
Elder

28
Jul

Gateshead
2.30pm • Fantasy,
Myths & Legends
VOTRE, RNS/Slorach

Gateshead
3.00pm
Pioro, Hughes, Gordon

Prom 13
7.30pm • Sarah Vaughan: If You Could See Me Now
BBC CO/Barker

4
Aug

Newport
3.00pm • Bloch, Dvořák, etc.
vision string quartet/M. Mirarab

Prom 20
11.00am • Bartók,
Bacharach, Brahms,
Marley, L. Mvula, Trad.
B. & S. Kanneh-Mason,
Fernandes, Fantasia
Orch/Fetherstonhaugh

Prom 21
7.00pm • W. Marsalis,
Copland, Barber,
Gershwin, Ives,
J. Adams
Osborne, Sinfonia of
London/Wilson

5 Aug	Prom 22 ☀ 11.15am • Relaxed Prom B. & S. Kanneh-Mason, Fernandes, Gillam, Fantasia Orchestra/ Fetherstonhaugh	Prom 23 7.30pm • Rachmaninov, Busoni Grosvenor, Rodolfus Choir, LPC & LPO/Gardner	12 Aug	Prom 32 7.30pm • G. Williams, K. Jenkins, Farrerc, Beethoven Gillam, BBC NOW/Venditti	19 Aug	Prom 40 7.30pm • J. S. Bach: St John Passion soloists, Bach Collegium Japan/Suzuki
6 Aug	Prom 24 7.00pm • Purcell: The Fairy Queen soloists, Compagnie Käfig, Les Arts Florissants/ Agnew		13 Aug	Prom 33 7.30pm • Elgar, Holst, Stanford, Vaughan Williams Maltman, BBC SO/Brabbins	20 Aug	Prom 41 7.30pm • Mozart Kang, Ridout, Ensemble Resonanz/Minasi
7 Aug	Prom 25 7.30pm • R. Schumann, Sibelius, H. Abrahamsen, Tchaikovsky Dohr, BBC Philharmonic/Storgårds		14 Aug	Prom 34 7.30pm • Reel Change: Soundtracks at the Cutting Edge London Contemporary Orchestra/Ames	21 Aug	Prom 42 7.30pm • Beethoven's Ninth by Heart soloists, BBC Singers, National Youth Choir, Aurora Orchestra/Collon
8 Aug	Prom 26 7.30pm • Beethoven, S. Gibson, Brahms Feldmann, BBC Philharmonic/Bihlmaier		15 Aug	Prom 35 7.30pm • Ellington/Gould, M. L. Williams, A. Braxton soloists, Aaron Diehl Trio, BBC SSO/Volkov	22 Aug	Prom 43 7.30pm • Ravel, Mozart, Holmès, Mussorgsky/Wood Lewis, CBSO/Yamada
9 Aug	Prom 27 6.00pm • Saariaho, Mozart, R. Strauss Aalto, Karttunen, Cho, BBC SO/Oramo	Prom 28 ☾ 10.30pm H. Goebbels: Songs of Wars I Have Seen London Sinfonietta, OAE/Rooke	16 Aug	Prom 36 7.30pm • Bonis, Mozart, Mendelssohn McGill, NYCOS Chamber Choir, BBC SSO/New	23 Aug	Prom 44 7.30pm • L. Boulanger, Debussy, Prokofiev, Ravel Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra/Shani
10 Aug	Prom 29 ☀ 11.00am • Wagner/ Lemare, J. S. Bach, Chaminade/Scott, Grison, Ives, Tchaikovsky/Scott Scott	Prom 30 7.30pm • Wagner, M. Mazzoli, D. Howard, Mahler The NYO, NYO Inspire/ Stutzmann	17 Aug	Prom 37 7.30pm • Britten: War Requiem Romaniw, Clayton, Liverman, Tiffin Boys' Choir, BBC SC, London Symphony Chorus & Orchestra/ Pappano	24 Aug	📍 Bristol 6.00pm & 8.30pm • The Virtuous Circle: Mozart, O. Vibrans Paraorchestra/Hazlewood Prom 45 7.30pm • Eastman, Mahler, Sibelius Barton, BBC SO/Stasevska
11 Aug	📍 Belfast ☀ 3.00pm • Holmès, Debussy, Fauré Atkinson, Pandya, Quatuor Van Kuijk	Prom 31 7.30pm • Brahms, Schubert Mutter, West-Eastern Divan Orchestra/ Barenboim	18 Aug	Prom 38 ☀ 11.00am • Dukas, F. Coll, Puccini, Stravinsky Gabetta, BBC SO/Lu	25 Aug	📍 Bristol ☀ 3.00pm BBC Singers at 100 BBC Singers/Jeannin 📍 Bristol ☀ 5.00pm Akimenko, J. Higdon, N. Nourbakhsh, Tchaikovsky Glennie, BSO/Karabits Prom 46 7.30pm • L. Poe, Sibelius, Holst Komsí, RCM Chamber Choir & Symphony Orchestra, Sibelius Academy Symphony Orchestra/Oramo

26 Aug	<p>📍 Bristol * 2.00pm & 4.00pm CBeebies Prom: Ocean Adventure Southbank Sinfonia/Ryan</p>	<p>Proms 47 & 48 * 2.30pm & 7.00pm Doctor Who Prom BBC NOW/King</p>	2 Sep	<p>Prom 57 7.30pm • Ultra Lounge: Henry Mancini and Beyond BBC CO/Outwater</p>	9 Sep	<p>Prom 67 7.30pm • Vaughan Williams, Schoenberg, Shostakovich Kopatchinskaja, BBC SO/Peltokoski</p>														
27 Aug	<p>Prom 49 7.30pm • Dvořák, Suk Kobekina, Czech Philharmonic/Hrůša</p>		3 Sep	<p>Prom 58 7.30pm • Debussy, Stravinsky, Berlioz Chamayou, Orchestre de Paris/Mäkelä</p>	10 Sep	<p>Prom 68 7.00pm • Britten: A Midsummer Night's Dream soloists, Garsington Opera, Philharmonia Orchestra/Boyd</p>														
28 Aug	<p>Prom 50 6.30pm • Kaprálová, Dvořák, Janáček soloists, Prague Philharmonic Choir, Czech Philharmonic/Hrůša</p>	<p>Prom 51 🌙 10.15pm • Tinariwen</p>	4 Sep	<p>Prom 59 6.30pm • L. Boulanger, Fauré, Ravel Schultz, Kilsby, Mole, BBC SC & SO/Denève</p>	<p>Prom 60 🌙 10.30pm • E. Whitacre BBC Singers, 12 Ensemble, Glynn/ Whitacre</p>	11 Sep	<p>Prom 69 8.00pm • Symphony of Lungs Florence + The Machine, Jules Buckley Orchestra/ Buckley</p>													
29 Aug	<p>Prom 52 6.30pm • Bizet: Carmen soloists, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, London Philharmonic Orchestra/Bihlmaier</p>		5 Sep	<p>Prom 61 7.30pm • T. Adès, Bruckner Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra/Rattle</p>		12 Sep	<p>Prom 70 6.30pm • Bacewicz, Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev Radulović, BBC NOW/ Martin</p>	<p>Prom 71 🌙 10.15pm • J. S. Bach: The Art of Fugue Schiff</p>												
30 Aug	<p>Prom 53 7.30pm • Stravinsky, S. Reich, R. Schumann Synergy Vocals, BBC SO/Davis</p>		6 Sep	<p>Prom 62 8.00pm • Mahler: Symphony No. 6 in A minor Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra/Rattle</p>		13 Sep	<p>Prom 72 7.30pm • Mozart, Farrenc, Beethoven OAE/Manacorda</p>													
31 Aug	<p>Prom 54 * 4.00pm • Beethoven for Three Ax, Kavakos, Ma</p>	<p>Prom 55 8.00pm • R. Schumann, Smetana Ólafsson, Berliner Philharmoniker/ K. Petrenko</p>	7 Sep	<p>Prom 63 * 10.30am • Choral Day 1 The Sixteen, Johnson/ Christophers</p>	<p>Prom 64 * 2.00pm • Choral Day 2 Jason Max Ferdinand Singers, Stoddart/ Ferdinand</p>	14 Sep	<p>Prom 73: Last Night of the Proms 2024 7.00pm • Chapí, Fauré, Ives, Puccini, Saint-Saëns, C. Simon, Wood, Arne/Sargent, Elgar, Parry/Elgar, Trad./Campbell, etc. Blue, Hough, BBC Singers, BBC SC & SO/Oramo</p>													
1 Sep	<p>📍 Aberdeen * 3.00pm • Blow, F. Caccini, Handel, Purcell, etc. Williams, Kenny, Beard</p>	<p>Prom 56 7.30pm • Bruckner BBC Singers/Park, Berliner Philharmoniker/ K. Petrenko</p>	8 Sep	<p>📍 Nottingham * 4.00pm • Carwithen/Lane, E. Kelly, Rachmaninov, Korngold, Sibelius Hammond, BBC CO/Helsing</p>		<p>📍 2024 Proms Venues Around the UK</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Aberdeen</td> <td>Cowdray Hall</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Belfast</td> <td>Ulster Hall</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bristol</td> <td>Bristol Beacon</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Gateshead</td> <td>The Glasshouse International Centre for Music</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Newport</td> <td>The Riverfront</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Nottingham</td> <td>Albert Hall; Royal Concert Hall</td> </tr> </table>			Aberdeen	Cowdray Hall	Belfast	Ulster Hall	Bristol	Bristol Beacon	Gateshead	The Glasshouse International Centre for Music	Newport	The Riverfront	Nottingham	Albert Hall; Royal Concert Hall
Aberdeen	Cowdray Hall																			
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Gateshead	The Glasshouse International Centre for Music																			
Newport	The Riverfront																			
Nottingham	Albert Hall; Royal Concert Hall																			
				<p>Prom 66 7.30pm • Tchaikovsky/Ellington & Strayhorn, S. Goodyear, Tchaikovsky Goodyear, Chineke! Orchestra/Grams</p>																

At a Glance

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Contemporary Voices

Sixteen years after being spotted by BBC Music Introducing, Florence Welch brings her indie vocal expression to the Proms for the first time. Together with the Jules Buckley Orchestra she revisits tracks from her debut studio album *Lungs*, released 15 years ago. Sam Smith also makes their first Proms appearance, in another debut album anniversary celebration – for *In the Lonely Hour*, released in 2014. They are joined by the chameleon-like BBC Concert Orchestra.

PROM 18 • 2 AUGUST (*Smith*)

PROM 69 • 11 SEPTEMBER (*Welch*)

See also Proms 8 & 13

Sheku and Friends

Since winning BBC Young Musician in 2016, star cellist Sheku Kanneh-Mason has played at a royal wedding, released four albums and appeared at last year's Last Night of the Proms. This year he appears at the Proms alongside his violinist brother Braimah, Brazilian guitarist Plínio Fernandes and the dynamic Fantasia Orchestra for a tour around the fringes of classical, folk and beyond, ranging from Bartók and Brahms to Marley and Mvula.

PROMS 20 & 22 • 4 & 5 AUGUST

(*Prom 22 is a Relaxed performance*)

Doctors and Daleks

The nation's favourite Time Lord returns for the first Doctor Who Prom in over a decade, presenting a brand-new showcase of Murray Gold's music from the *Doctor Who* series. With the dramatic TV scores brought to vivid life by the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and specially selected scenes shown on big screens, you can also expect guest appearances from cast members past and present ... as well as monster visitations.

PROMS 47 & 48 • 26 AUGUST



Seville Ceremony

Set in Seville, Bizet's *Carmen* – centring on the fiercely independent Gypsy girl and the fateful passion she inflames in the hot-headed young soldier Don José – remains one of the best-loved operas in the canon. Scenes of revelry in a tavern and smugglers hiding in the mountains add further Spanish colour – as does the new hero in town, the toreador Escamillo. Glyndebourne brings its new production to the Proms in a special semi-staging.

PROM 52 • 29 AUGUST

See also Proms 24 & 68

International Orchestras

The Proms is unrivalled for the sheer range of international orchestras (not to mention conductors and soloists) it brings together in one festival. Highlights this year include two concerts under Sir Simon Rattle in his first season at the helm of the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, as well as performances from the Berlin Philharmonic and Czech Philharmonic, West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris and Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra.

See Proms 7, 24, 31, 41, 44, 46, 49, 50, 55, 56, 58, 61 & 62

Voices in Harmony

Choral blockbusters have long been a key aspect of the Proms: Verdi's *Requiem*, Britten's *War Requiem* and Bach's *St John Passion* appear in 2024. In this centenary year of the BBC Singers – as well as showcasing children's and youth choirs, music college students and young professionals – there's a focus on world-class smaller groups, including The King's Singers and VOCES8 (together), The Sixteen, The Swingles and Synergy Vocals. Plus a three-concert Choral Day concluding with Handel's *Messiah*.

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Welcome to the 2024 BBC Proms



Welcome to the 2024 Proms – one of the most ambitious and wide-ranging seasons we have ever presented.

This year we have a total of 89 concerts, 16 of which take us beyond the boundaries of the Royal Albert Hall, and all of which are broadcast on BBC Radio 3. With a further 24 programmes available on BBC TV and BBC iPlayer, plus a span of music that encompasses many different styles and composers, we are truly fulfilling Proms founder-conductor Henry Wood's vision 'to bring the best of classical music to the widest possible audience'.

This year we return to Gateshead with a series of events at The Glasshouse, following a highly successful weekend of concerts last summer that saw over 5,000 visitors. We also start a new relationship with the Bristol Beacon – the city's magnificent new concert hall, opened last November – and visit Nottingham's Royal Concert Hall for the first time to mark the BBC Concert Orchestra's residency there. All these programmes stem from strong partnerships with individual venues, with the Proms building on local initiatives to create work of both regional and national significance. In Bristol, for example, we are presenting the first ever Prom with the Paraorchestra – one of the Beacon's resident ensembles – and out of this creating a weekend that highlights the venue's pioneering work in promoting accessibility in music. In Gateshead, our

programme is built around the Royal Northern Sinfonia, the flagship orchestra of the North-East and the UK's only full-time chamber orchestra.

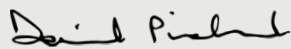
Our anniversary celebrations this year embrace mainstream composers such as Holst, Fauré and Schoenberg but also rarely performed works such as Suk's 'Asrael' Symphony and Busoni's mighty Piano Concerto. Introducing audiences to less familiar work is a vital part of the Proms tradition and this year, alongside a range of new pieces, we also focus on some of the female composers who have helped shape France's musical life. For the 200th anniversary of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony – commissioned by London's Philharmonic Society in 1824 – an exploration of the composer's hearing loss precedes a memorised performance by the Aurora Orchestra. And the 100th anniversary of the BBC Singers allows us to celebrate not only the achievements of that group and other specialist vocal ensembles, but also the power of choral singing, culminating in a performance of Handel's *Messiah* in a day dedicated to group-singing, large and small.

Two titans of popular music were born 100 years ago and inspired a whole generation of artists. There are few jazz singers today who were not influenced by the astonishing range and versatility of Sarah Vaughan, while Henry Mancini's six-decade career as a composer for film and TV spawned a whole genre of lounge music, reflected in our Proms tribute to him. From a younger generation, Nick Drake's all-too-short musical career

created a legion of fans. Fifty years on we revisit his highly individual songs in new symphonic versions. Bringing us right up to the present, two of today's most exciting singer-songwriters, Sam Smith and Florence Welch, bring their own unique orchestral offering to the Proms this summer.

While the Proms rightly celebrates the astonishing range of homegrown talent in the UK – including the BBC's own orchestras and choirs – we are also proud to be an international festival. It's a special event when orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic come to the Proms (one of 12 visiting ensembles this summer) and, as ever, we welcome some of the finest artists from around the globe, many of whom are new to the festival.

On a personal note, 2024 will be my ninth and final season as Director of the BBC Proms. As a young Prommer back in the 1970s, I never imagined that I would one day have the great honour of running this remarkable festival. I hope that I have been able to live up to the achievements of my distinguished predecessors and contribute to the continued development of the Proms. Like all great institutions, it is founded on a strong vision that allows for the reassurance of continuity and the scope for change. I hope you enjoy what we have to offer this year, and I look forward to seeing the Proms continue to thrive in the years ahead.



David Pickard
Director, BBC Proms

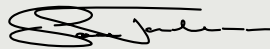


Last summer was a memorable eight weeks at the Proms. Buoyant attendance at the Royal Albert Hall and at venues across the UK was

complemented by record-breaking figures on BBC Sounds and iPlayer, as millions of people enjoyed this great festival. It is a privilege to bring the Proms to such a broad audience and, as ever, every Prom this season is broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and available on-demand on BBC Sounds.

It's an exciting time at Radio 3: in April we launched our refreshed schedule with a raft of new programmes, ranging from Clemency Burton-Hill's celebration of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra's 25th anniversary, to Jools Holland's Saturday-lunchtime show *Earlier...* Our weekday programme *Classical Live* celebrates the best of live music from across the UK, and we have new offerings from presenters Tom McKinney, Sara Mohr-Pietsch and Tom Service. If you are not already a listener, we would love you to join us.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to David Pickard, who has led the BBC Proms brilliantly for nearly a decade and will soon get to enjoy this unique festival at his leisure. Whether you, like David, have attended the Proms since childhood or are embarking on your first season, we are thrilled to have you with us.



Sam Jackson
Controller, BBC Radio 3 and BBC Proms



I'm very much looking forward to another vibrant summer of Proms on BBC Television and iPlayer. Responses from last season's

coverage showed us that audiences are hungrier than ever for gold-standard classical music performance on TV.

This year we have an equally compelling line-up across 24 programmes, featuring artists and ensembles including Isata Kanneh-Mason, Yo-Yo Ma, The Swingles, London Symphony Orchestra and West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, as well as a wildlife-themed CBeebies Prom.

On BBC Four we range far and wide, from Sarah Vaughan to Henry Mancini, Messiaen to Mahler, Beethoven to Britten. On BBC Two it's glitterballs and bell bottoms for the Disco Prom, while Mozart takes centre stage in a concert celebrating his genius, and Sam Smith and Florence Welch bring a new, orchestral flavour to their chart-topping songs. And on BBC One the Last Night will once again unite audiences across the UK in a mass singalong. Finally, the Doctor Who Prom returns this summer. But you won't need a TARDIS to go back and enjoy our concerts time and again: they'll be on BBC iPlayer for a whole year. Here's to enjoying a fantastic season of excellent music-making.



Suzy Klein
Head of Arts and Classical Music TV



The Runaway

A short story by Kit de Waal
Illustrations by Nathalie Lees

The second time Robert got cancer, someone at the clinic told him there was a painting class for patients. Art therapy, they called it. Local place, off 22nd Street. No experience necessary, no talent required, \$15 for a whole afternoon, five off with his Seniors Discount. Would he like to go, they said, and because he wasn't quick enough with an excuse he found himself signed up. He had no intention of going. But the next day somehow found him peering through the wired-glass door of a small room at the community centre and, before he knew it, he was sitting on a three-legged stool in front of an easel with three or four others who were in varying stages of disease and acceptance.

The hand on his shoulder told him to paint whatever he felt. When he couldn't work out what he felt, it suggested he paint what he remembered. What he remembered would always start with the colour blue.

So he dipped his brush and covered the sheet of smooth white paper. As he sat and stared at the blue, he found himself like a sightseer wandering down the streets and lanes of his past finding landmarks. A sunny day, a golden journey to a white-sand beach where he made paste from the sand and built a castle with a moat that he filled with silver, sparkling sea. He dipped in the yellow. Then he saw himself lean and suited in an emerald shirt and corduroy tie. He dipped in the green. There was a holiday with a girl, Greece or Spain, Portugal maybe, her sun-dyed skin against a white sheet. The brown. And, later still, there he was lying with another woman with eyes as blue as his own and he remembered her song and the things he left behind.

Robert was famous for running away. He was only a boy the first time, 8 or 9, 1958, something like that, in Luton, a nowhere street, modern houses that wished they were old. He and his brother were

messing with their father's car parked out on the street, middle of the day, trying to get it open without the key. He'd talked his brother into it. Screwdrivers were involved. He remembers a scratch deep into the paintwork and a broken window, and his brother, older by two years, saying: 'He'll kill us.'

Robert inspected the damage like a mechanic might before giving a price for the repair. He traced the scratch with his forefinger all down the side of the passenger door and stood back to assess the broken window. He then calmly sauntered up the road, with his hands in his pockets, towards the park. He stayed there playing with other kids until it got dark. Then he walked the long way back home, not quite sure of the route but sniffing out his mother's cooking like a hunting dog. Then he went in through the back gate carefully, his hand silencing the latch, and hunkered down between the garden shed and next door's fence.

The kitchen door was open, every light in the house burning. He could hear his father with the neighbours talking about ringing the police because it was black now, gone 10pm. They clustered on the back step, not 20 feet from him, and lowered their voices so the women couldn't hear. Dangerous men were mentioned and what plans they might have for a boy as pretty as Robert, with jewels for eyes and a halo of white hair.

“It wasn't jazz, it was more than that, and as she played Robert felt a shift in his world, like he'd been waiting for her and for those notes in that order and that here was a moment in his life when he was exactly where he was supposed to be, where he might always be, where he might stay.”

Robert listened and as he heard the worry in his father's voice he crouched down smaller still and stayed right where he was, kneeling on rotting leaves until his stomach cramped and his lips were dry. Then, quietly, he scuffed himself a couple of times against the mossy shed and smeared dirt on his cheeks. He scuttled his way to the road and the front of the house, letting his arms hang long against his sides, letting his eyes fill with water.

He was very hungry, after all, and he'd been bored and uncomfortable for hours. It wasn't hard to be upset.

He didn't even have to knock on the front door. His mother threw it open and dashed from her vigil down the garden path, wailing and gathering him up and then holding him away from her, stroking his hair.

'Bobby! Bobby!' She was crying. She guided him like an invalid into the house, where his father was swallowing and huffing and shaking hands with the men that had gathered for a search party. 'He's home now,' he kept saying. 'He's safe.' Whisky appeared.

Only his brother knew. Only his brother, who had been told off and blamed and sent to his room and called down again and questioned over and over and who should have known better and who hadn't given a second's thought to the possibility of the damage to the car and how his little brother might react when he realised it would have to be paid for. Only his brother knew of Robert's calculation, that their mother would be so relieved to have him home she would say nothing about him running off, and their father wouldn't give a fig about a damaged car if he could only have his son home safe. Only his brother, who had failed in life's only task, to 'look after your family at all cost, Christopher', stood apart from everyone, watching the fuss and the outworking of Robert's brilliant plan.

That night in the bedroom they shared, single beds separated by a no-man's-land

of three feet and a carpet runner, Robert turned under his blankets and whispered his apologies.

'Sorry if you got into trouble, Chris. I got lost.'

'No, you didn't,' he said.

It became a habit then. In the years that followed, Robert ran away from school and flats and unpaid rent, from friends he no longer liked, jobs he could no longer tolerate, his mother and father when they became unbearably old and needed round-the-clock care, girlfriends galore. He now knew no other way to live.

By the time he was 38 he part-owned a jazz club in Soho, a two-roomed basement with no fire escape and a single toilet shared between punters and staff. His partner did the hard yards of bookings and accounts, hiring, firing and tax returns, whereas Robert, whose prettiness had hardened irresistibly, charmed the customers and waitresses, drinking and joking with them until the early hours while they emptied their wallets or worked overtime for next to nothing. Everyone loved Robbo.

One evening his brother walked in, stockier now, thin on top. The club was barely open, too early on a Tuesday night for any kind of a crowd. Robert saw him straight away and grabbed his arm.

'Chris! Chris! Long time no see.'

Chris was nervous and Robert knew he wanted to talk. He expected the usual exhortation to go and see their parents,

that it was tiring looking after them all on his own, that he owed them something, after all, and he was very much missed.

Robert steeled himself and wondered how Chris always managed to track him down and if he would make a habit of turning up to the club and whether it might be time for Robert to make another move.

'I need a favour, Bobby,' Chris said, sitting on a bar stool, lighting a cigarette.

That was new, the cigarette. Robert did the same. 'Go on,' he said.

'It's my girlfriend, Simone. She needs a job.'

'Yeah?'

'Yes, and I wondered if you had anything in the ...'

'We're always looking for girls, Chris. Has she got any experience? Tell her to come in and we can give her a ...'

'She's not like that, Bobby. She's a musician. Piano. She's good. Really good. But she's different.'

'Ah, right. Listen, it's my partner that does the bookings, Chris. I can ask him and see ...'

'She's outside.'

There was a piano on the little stage at the back of the club. It was a good one apparently, rich and smooth, people said. But still Robert wasn't expecting what he heard. Chris had brought her in and she'd shaken hands with Robert. She wasn't a looker by any means, and Robert was

glad Chris hadn't asked him to give her a job as a waitress – she'd never cut it. She had long hair, fashionable at the time, a sheepskin coat and boots, hippyish and worn-down. She kept the coat on, adjusted the piano stool and picked out a few notes while Chris wrung his hands and said, 'She's good, Bob, really good.'

It wasn't jazz, it was more than that, and as she played Robert felt a shift in his world, like he'd been waiting for her and for those notes in that order and that here was a moment in his life when he was exactly where he was supposed to be, where he might always be, where he might stay. He knew his face betrayed it and he knew Chris was watching so he turned to him and said, 'You're right, Chris. She's not bad.'

She played for 22 minutes. The whole club, three punters, two girls and the barman, all of them stood stock-still and when she finished they cheered and Chris slapped Robert on the back.

'See!' he said. 'See!'

She got up and walked over to the two brothers, more confident now, smiling and prettier.

'What was that?' Robert asked.

'Gershwin,' she said.

'Right,' he said and clapped his hands because he wanted to call himself back from where he had wandered. 'Let's see now. Do you know any standards? *All of Me?*, *Blackbird?* *Misty?*

She shook her head.

