

PRESS RELEASE

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Birmingham Contemporary Music Group celebrates its 30th anniversary with a month of concerts in September, including:

- **Peter Maxwell Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King* at the BBC Proms**
- **The first outdoor classical event staged on Birmingham's canals and 30th anniversary concert at CBSO Centre, Birmingham**
- **A concert to welcome its Founding Patron, Sir Simon Rattle, to London.**

Concerts each weekend, 2 – 23 September 2017

Birmingham Contemporary Music Group is turning 30. Considered one of the world's foremost new music ensembles, BCMG has commissioned over 170 pieces of music from the world's finest composers and emerging international talent, and brought the very best of new music to audiences worldwide in the three decades since it was created by musicians of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the orchestra's then Principal Conductor and Artistic Adviser (and from 1990, Music Director), **Sir Simon Rattle**.

The ensemble celebrates its 30th birthday this September with a series of concerts in Birmingham and London, including an outdoor serenade to Birmingham's historic canals (10 September), and a welcome to BCMG Founding Patron, Sir Simon Rattle as he starts his new role as Music Director of the London Symphony Orchestra (16 September). The month of celebrations starts on Saturday 2 September with two performances of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, staged at Wilton's Music Hall as part of the BBC Proms.

Stephan Meier, Artistic Director of BCMG comments: *"September will be a joyous celebration of developing our future's music and BCMG's pioneering role in commissioning and supporting composers today, and over the past three decades. Our Canal Serenade and 30th anniversary concert underline BCMG's commitment to international exchange, and we are looking forward to welcoming composers new to BCMG alongside those who have a long-standing relationship with the ensemble, and to taking new music into the fabric of a city that has always embraced the new. Sir Simon Rattle was there at the very start of BCMG, and it is fitting that our Artist-in-Association Oliver Knussen, who has also been such an important part of the ensemble's musical life, initiated and will be leading our 'welcome' concert to him in London. Here's to another 30 years of risk-taking, forward-thinking new music."*

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Saturday 2 September 2017

BCMG @BBC Proms - Wilton's Music Hall, 3pm + 7.30pm

Peter Maxwell Davies's Eight Songs for a Mad King

BCMG returns to the BBC Proms for two staged performances of Peter Maxwell Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, staged by **Olivia Fuchs** and conducted by **Sian Edwards**, with soloists baritone **Marcus Farnsworth**, and soprano **Jennifer France**.

Peter Maxwell Davies's dramatic monologue explores the crazed fantasies and crumbling visions of George III. The fluttering and chattering of the king's pet bullfinches which run through the work find an echo in bird-inspired pieces by Messiaen and Pulitzer Prize-winning American composer John Luther Adams, which also feature, with Rebecca Saunders's *Molly's Song 3* completing the programme.

Programme:

John Luther Adams – *songbirdsongs* (excerpts)

Olivier Messiaen – *Le merle noir*

Rebecca Saunders – *Molly's Song 3*

Peter Maxwell Davies – *Eight Songs for a Mad King*

Sunday 10 September 2017 at 4pm

BCMG CANAL SERENADE

A collaborative composition performed on narrow boats, by **Ondřej Adámek**, **Richard Baker** and **Yannis Kyriakides**

Outdoors, on the canal towpath between Brindleyplace, the Barclaycard Arena and the National SEA LIFE Centre, Birmingham City Centre, B1 2LG

Birmingham Contemporary Music Group takes classical music onto Birmingham's canals for the first time, with a serenade to the watery arteries that powered the growth of its home city. BCMG's *Canal Serenade* is a celebration of Birmingham canals, with music travelling on the water by narrow boats to the point in Birmingham City Centre where the Main Line, the Fazeley and the Worcester Canals merge. It's a serenade for a City that was built on investing in the new, with a proud tradition of bold and free-thinking, invention and making things happen (which is reflected in BCMG's own approach).

Canal Serenade is a free outdoor performance – an exchange of musical ideas on a stretch of water where goods were once exchanged – with a single work jointly written by UK composer **Richard Baker**, and two composers new to BCMG, Cypriot **Yannis Kyriakides** and Czech **Ondřej Adámek**, for an array of instruments including trombone, accordion and percussion, voice and electronics. The compositions will be performed on three separate narrowboats, uniting at the meeting point of three canals. All three composers have recently visited Birmingham to explore the architecture and the geography of the City's waterways together. **Richard Baker** and **Ondřej Adámek's** new pieces have been commissioned as part of BCMG Sound Investment, with

Yannis Kyriakides's work commissioned by Gaudeamus.

Canal Serenade is **Stephan Meier's** first commission for BCMG since becoming the ensemble's Artistic Director. As a prelude to the *Canal Serenade*, the foyers of BCMG's home, CBSO Centre, will be filled with special activities for younger audiences (from 1.30pm).

The Canal Serenade receives a second performance at 2pm on Saturday 23 September as part of Birmingham Weekender.

BCMG @30 – CBSO Centre, 6.00pm
Sunday 10 September

After the al fresco *Canal Serenade* on 10 September, audiences will also be invited to soak up more international new music when BCMG throws open the doors of CBSO Centre for a special early evening 30th anniversary concert. The concert features three pioneering works that reveal the complexity, subtlety and dazzling pleasure of the music of today, and the virtuoso skills of the ensemble's musicians. German composer **Helmut Lachenmann's** 1992 *Two Senses – Music with Leonardo*, takes the words of the artist and melds them into a rich musical palette, from dense, scratching strings to sighing, whooping winds; **Rebecca Saunders's** *Into the Blue*, written in 1996, is dedicated to filmmaker Derek Jarman and explores the blue that "transcends the solemn geography of human limits", from the limitless blue of the ocean to the sky; the "blue of beyond". **Ondřej Adámek's** *Sinuous Voices* (2004/2009) imagines the instrumental ensemble as the human voice, using techniques to evoke the ideas and patterns of speech, and the juxtaposition between outer exclamation and inner thought. **Emilio Pomárico** conducts. There is no fixed ticket price; instead audience members are invited to 'gift' a birthday donation to BCMG.

Programme:

Ondřej Adámek - *Sinuous Voices* (2004/09)

Rebecca Saunders – *Into the Blue* (1996)

Helmut Lachenmann – *Zwei Gefühle – Musik mit Leonardo* (1992) Text: Leonardo da Vinci

Saturday 16 September 2017

BCMG @This is Rattle - Milton Court Concert Hall, 7.30pm

BCMG makes a second visit to London to offer a hearty welcome back to the UK to its founding patron, **Sir Simon Rattle**, in a concert curated and conducted by BCMG Artist in Association **Oliver Knussen** as part of the Barbican's *This is Rattle* concert series at Milton Court Concert Hall.

The programme includes the London premiere of Knussen's *O Hototogisu! - A Fragment*, which was premiered at this year's Aldeburgh Festival, and *Polly Roe*, by Irish composer Patrick Brennan, who was BCMG Apprentice Composer in Residence for the 2015-2016 season. Harrison Birtwistle's *Silbury Air*, named after the prehistoric mound in Wiltshire which seen from a distance, Birtwistle describes as presenting "itself as an artificial but organic intruder on the landscape" and Stravinsky's *Two Poems of Balmont*, *Three Japanese Lyrics* and 1916 one act chamber opera *Renard* complete the programme.

Programme:

Patrick Brennan *Polly Roe*

Stravinsky *Two Poems of Balmont*

Three Japanese Lyrics

Sir Harrison Birtwistle *Silbury Air*

Oliver Knussen *O Hototogisu! – A fragment* (London premiere)

Stravinsky *Renard*

About BCMG @30

Birmingham Contemporary Music Group is one of the world's foremost new music ensembles. Over three decades, BCMG has developed the music of today for the audiences of tomorrow. The ensemble has commissioned over 170 pieces of music from the world's finest composers and emerging international talent. Many of the works have been commissioned through its innovative pioneering Sound Investment crowd-funding scheme to which over 500 donors have contributed more than £300,000; many of these works have subsequently found their way into worldwide repertoire. BCMG also supports the next generation of exceptional young composers through its Apprentice Composer in Residence scheme, made possible through its partnership with Sound and Music since 2011. Donghoon Shin is the BCMG Apprentice Composer in Residence for the 2017-2018 season.

BCMG was founded by musicians from the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in 1987, with Sir Simon Rattle as Founding Patron. Since then, BCMG has reached over 10 million people in concert and through broadcasts. The Group performs regularly at CBSO Centre, Symphony Hall and Town Hall Birmingham, Wigmore Hall in London and at the BBC Proms and Aldeburgh Festival. International tours have included visits to the USA (Library of Congress), Mexico, India and venues across France, Germany and Austria. The Group is regularly heard in concert on BBC Radio 3, and has recorded extensively. Recordings include discs of works by Thomas Adès, Mark-Anthony Turnage and Benjamin Britten, and a Grammy Award-nominated recording of Gerald Barry's opera, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, for NMC Recordings. Recent releases include Howard Skempton's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, a series of recordings devoted to British composers including its Artist-in-Association Oliver Knussen, Julian Anderson and Charlotte Bray (all on NMC) and a disc of the works of Elliott Carter on Ondine, due for release on 11 August 2017.

BCMG's work both inside and outside the concert hall has earned it many awards and accolades. Over the last decade it has been shortlisted for: ITV's South Bank Show's Classical Music Award; the Royal Philharmonic Society's Ensemble Award and BBC Music Magazine's Chamber Award. Its long established Learning and Participation programmes actively engage young people in composing and performing, and have earned BCMG nationwide recognition (in 2016, the Group was highly commended in the Family Arts Festival Awards).

BCMG:

Founding Patron – Sir Simon Rattle

Artists-in-Association – Oliver Knussen; John Woolrich

Artistic Director – Stephan Meier

BCMG is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.