

Wednesday 30 September 2026
7.30pm
Milton Court Concert Hall



Love without Borders

A Journey in Three Chapters

Aigul Akhmetshina mezzo-soprano
Jonathan Palmer Lakeland piano

Milton Court

Please silence your devices and lower the brightness of your display.

Eating is not permitted in the auditorium. Drinks are allowed inside the auditorium in polycarbonates.

Filming or recording of the performance is not permitted.

Latecomers will be able to enter the auditorium at a suitable break in the performance.

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Welcome

Love Without Borders, conceived by mezzo-soprano Aigul Akhmetshina and pianist, conductor and composer Jonathan Lakeland, explores the many ways we experience love. Bringing together music from different countries, languages, genres and centuries, the programme traces how our understanding of love changes with experience. It moves beyond the familiar world of romantic love songs to explore love in all its contradictions: idealistic and passionate, joyful and painful, destructive and restorative, naïve and wise.

The programme unfolds in three chapters. The first explores the idealism of young love through Russian song by Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Rachmaninoff and Balakirev. The second turns to heartbreak, loss and destructive relationships through music by Bizet, Weill, Guastavino, Piazzolla and Elena Roussanova. After the interval, Britten, Bernstein and Lakeland offer a more reflective perspective, shaped by experience and the knowledge that love's joy and vulnerability are inseparable.

Access our digital programme for biographies, programme notes and more.

Scan the QR code or visit:

www.guildhall-programmes.co.uk/love-without-borders



Guildhall School is provided by the City of London Corporation as part of its contribution to the cultural life of London and the nation.



Programme

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1874–1943)

‘Morning’ (1891)

Sergei Rachmaninoff

‘I Wait for Thee’ (1894)

Mily Balakirev (1837–1910)

‘I Loved Him’ (1896)

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840–1893)

‘Whether the Day Reigns’ (1880)

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844–1908)

‘Captivated by the Rose’ (1866)

Carlos Guastavino (1912–2000)

‘La rosa y el sauce’ (1942)

Georges Bizet (1838–1875)

‘Adieux de l’hôtesse arabe’ (1866)

Kurt Weill (1900–1950)

‘Je ne t’aime pas’ (1934)

Elena Roussanova (b. 1974)

‘Mujer Fatal’ (2025)

Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992)

‘Yo soy María’ (1968)

Interval (20 minutes)**Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)**

‘Tell Me the Truth About Love’ (1938)

George Gershwin (1898–1937)

‘The Man I Love’ (1924)

Kurt Weill

‘Speak Low’ (1943)

Sergei Rachmaninoff

‘How Fair This Spot’ (1902)

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

‘Softly the Spirit Flew up to Heaven’ (1880)

Jonathan Palmer Lakeland (b. 1990)

‘The Temple Bell Stops...’ (2025)

Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990)

‘Somewhere’ (1957)

Jule Styne (1905–1994)

‘People’ (1963)

Song Texts & Translations



Song texts and translations are available on Aigul Akhmetshina’s website.

Scan the QR code or visit:

www.aigulakhmetshinamezzo.com/love-without-borders-guildhall

Programme Note

Somewhere in London

August 2026

Dear all,

Amidst one of the hottest summers the UK has ever had, we have spent many hours sweating somewhere in London (usually at Aigul's) debating the details of today's programme. Amidst coffees, glasses of sparkling water and the occasional bottle of wine (poured and consumed completely by accident, of course), we have analysed and wondered about how, after millennia of human experience, the two of us could have anything novel to say about the idea of love.

We spent hours moving pieces around, trying different combinations and debating what exactly we wanted this programme to say. Repertoire centred on the idea of "love" can work in so many different ways, and we realised how reordering and substituting pieces could change our intended meaning completely.

Love, similarly, is something so dynamic, so evolving, so multidimensional that there is no way to pin down one clear, unchanging and perfect definition of it.

This was the starting point for this programme: *Love without Borders*. The title isn't only a geographical reference, though of course the music on the programme mixes cultures, styles, languages and genres. We wanted to present a programme which explores "love" as widely as possible. Our aim tonight is to show how varied a force like love is in our lives, how our definition of love can evolve over time and how the experience of love is a uniting force amongst humanity.

We could, of course, have given you an evening of perfectly respectable love songs that talk only about meadows and puppy love. We could sing you a hundred songs in which the lover always comes back and the passion is always polite, decent and family-friendly.

We decided against it.

Instead, tonight's programme unfolds in three chapters.

The first chapter begins in the world of Russian song with Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Rachmaninoff and Mily Balakirev. This music features images of beautiful, simple, if not occasionally naïve ideas of love. This is love at its most idealistic: tender, passionate and simple.

Depending upon your experience in life, you may believe that this kind of love exists, or you may not. It may be something you have and cherish, something you found and lost, something you are seeking, something that is not your destiny, or something you feel is a foolish errand. Regardless, this idea of love will impact your life at some point.

The second chapter moves both geographically and emotionally into a different world, through Bizet, Weill, Guastavino, Piazzolla and Elena Roussanova, whose piece 'Mujer Fatal' was commissioned by Aigul for her most recent recording.

What happens when love causes more harm than good? How can heartbreak and loss change us as people and alter our own perspective on love? Why do some of us remain in something harmful like a toxic love affair? How and when do we extricate ourselves from a situation like that? And once we recover, can the

walls we build to protect ourselves eventually prevent us from letting anyone in again?

After the interval, we return to the idea of love from a fresher and less dramatic perspective with music by Britten, Bernstein and Jonathan Lakeland, whose work 'The Temple Bell Stops' is from a larger piece currently being written for mezzo-soprano, orchestra and choir.

The pieces in this set feel as if they come from a place of wisdom and lived experience. They highlight the importance of relishing the good that love brings, while also maintaining the knowledge that love's joy does not insulate us from pain or heartbreak.

A romantic relationship can bring us immense happiness, but losing it can be devastating. A mother can feel ecstatic joy while holding her baby, while also feeling anxiety for her child's future. Human beings can create astonishing violence, while nature continues to offer peace and reassurance amidst it all. All of these things can be true at the same time. C.S. Lewis tells us:

"To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irreproachable. To love is to be vulnerable."

With our love,

Aigul and Jonathan

Thank you

Special thanks to Armin Zanner, James Alexander, Samantha Malk, Michael Wardell, Peter Smith, Lindsey Eastham and everyone else from Guildhall and the Barbican who made this event possible.

Forthcoming Events

Opera Double Bill: Menotti's 'Amelia al ballo' & Bernstein's 'Trouble in Tahiti'

2 – 9 November 2026
Silk Street Theatre

Italian comedy meets American Satire. Our Autumn Opera Double Bill pairs Gian Carlo Menotti's sparkling comic opera *Amelia al ballo* with Leonard Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*, a sharp, jazz-inflected portrait of suburban life and marital disconnection.

Tickets: £30 (£15 concessions)

Autumn Opera Scenes

26 November – 1 December 2026
Silk Street Theatre

Outstanding first-year singers from Guildhall School's Opera department perform a captivating selection of classical and contemporary operatic excerpts with piano accompaniment.

Tickets: £15 (£8 concessions)

The Eleanor Rigby Experience: 60 Years of Revolver

Friday 4 December 2026
Milton Court Concert Hall

Join us for a weekend double-bill celebrating the centenary of legendary producer and alumnus Sir George Martin. To kick things off, the Guildhall Session Orchestra will perform a spectacular new arrangement of The Beatles' groundbreaking album, *Revolver*.

Tickets: £30 (£15 concessions)

Aigul Akhmetshina

mezzo-soprano

A Decca Classics recording artist, British-Russian mezzo-soprano Aigul Akhmetshina begins her 2026/27 season with a role debut as Donna Elvira *Don Giovanni* at the Royal Ballet and Opera, followed by returns as Angelina *La Cenerentola* at Teatro di San Carlo, Dalila *Samson et Dalila* at The Metropolitan Opera, Charlotte *Werther* at Opéra national de Paris and Bayerische Staatsoper, Adalgisa *Norma* at Teatro Real Madrid, Lyubasha *The Tsar's Bride* at Staatsoper Berlin, and the title role in *Carmen* at Bayerische Staatsoper.

On the concert stage, she makes her role debut as Giovanna Seymour *Anna Bolena* at Tiroler Festspiele Erl, performs the mezzo-soprano solo in Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* at Gran Teatre del Liceu, gives a recital at the Polish National Opera and appears at The Metropolitan Opera Diamond Anniversary Gala.

Recent seasons have seen her make role debuts as Dalila *Samson et Dalila* at both the Royal Ballet and Opera and Staatsoper Berlin, and as Carmen and Fenena in a new production of *Nabucco* at Arena di Verona.

In concert, she has presented recital programmes at Den Norske Opera & Ballett in Oslo, Teatro Colón Buenos Aires and Teatro di San Carlo in Naples, performed gala concerts at the Hungarian State Opera and with Piotr Beczała at the Baden-Baden Festspielhaus. She has also appeared with the Oslo Philharmonic in Ravel's *Shéhérazade* and at the Musikverein Wien in Elgar's *Sea Pictures* and Chausson's *Poème de l'amour et de la mer*.

Since her breakout debut as Carmen at the Royal Ballet and Opera at the age of 21, Ms Akhmetshina has rapidly ascended the international operatic stage. She has appeared at major opera houses including The Metropolitan Opera, the Royal Ballet and Opera, Wiener Staatsoper, Bayerische Staatsoper, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Teatro Real Madrid, Opéra national de Paris and Arena di Verona.

Awards and recognition include: CD of the Year – OPER! Awards 2025 for her debut album *Aigul* (Decca Classics), Female Singer of the Year – International Opera Awards (2023), Sky Arts Award – Classical Music (2024), Olivier Award Nominee – Outstanding Achievement in Opera (2024) and First Prize – International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition (2017).

Jonathan Palmer Lakeland

piano

Jonathan Palmer Lakeland is a versatile pianist, composer, and producer whose work spans classical music, musical theatre, jazz, improvisation and crossover. His recent projects include collaborations with Aigul Akhmetshina and Sir Antonio Pappano, Wu Tsang and *Moved by the Motion*, and Julieth Lozano Rolong, with performances at Carnegie Hall, the Barbican, Tate Modern, Wigmore Hall, Schauspielhaus Zürich and Salle Cortot in Paris.

Lakeland and Akhmetshina have developed a close artistic partnership over the last several years, with performances and collaborations across Europe and the United States. His arrangement of *Besame Mucho* was featured on Akhmetshina's latest album for Decca with Sir Antonio Pappano at the piano.

A believer in removing the boundaries around classical music, Lakeland's projects are often unconventional and involve exploring collaboration between music, dance, drama and visual and performance art. His recent credits include as conductor/music director of a new adaptation of Bizet's *Carmen* at Schauspielhaus Zürich with Wu Tsang and *Moved by the Motion*, featuring additional new music by cellist and composer Andrew Yee. He continued his collaboration with Tsang and *Moved by the Motion* in *composition V (rebellious birds)*, a semi-improvised music-theatre work presented by the Tate Modern as part of its recent Picasso exhibition.

Jonathan made his opera conducting debut in Vienna in 2021 with a new production of Tobias Picker's *Thérèse Raquin* at the Theater an der Wien, where he previously worked as an assistant conductor. He held the 2018 Billy Joel Keyboard Fellowship at the Tanglewood Music Center, and studied at the Royal Academy of Music and Westminster Choir College. He is also proud to be a guest faculty member at Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London. Jonathan is deeply grateful to his parents, his partner Maxi, and his many mentors who have supported him throughout his career.