

Reflections on being a New Elizabethan Award holder

Being one of the holders of the inaugural New Elizabethan Award has been an honour and privilege. It has allowed me to further explore the diverse repertoire of the two Elizabethan eras, and has also given me the opportunity to perform in prestigious and historical venues throughout the UK.

It was a particularly rewarding experience to perform Benjamin Britten's *Nocturnal after John Dowland* a number of times. It enabled me to continually deepen and refine my interpretation of this masterpiece, which is inextricably linked with both Elizabethan eras. Being able to perform it at the Aldeburgh Festival, almost 55 years to the day after the premiere was given there, was a special experience.

I also enriched my repertoire with works such as Michael Tippett's *The Blue Guitar*, Phillip Houghton's *Stele*, Steve Goss' *Threnody*, as well as works by John Dowland. In addition to performing this repertoire at NEA organised events, I also have been regularly performing it in other concerts around Europe, and will surely continue to do so.

Jesse Flowers, December 2019

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As the winners of the inaugural Musician's Company New Elizabethan Award, Andrey Lebedev (guitar) and I, alongside fellow winner Jesse Flowers, have enjoyed a most enriching and rewarding year. It is an honour to have been selected in this wonderful venture that celebrates British and Commonwealth guitar chamber music through the two Elizabethan ages.

Andrey, Jesse and myself are passionate about early as well as new music, and the opportunity of being the inaugural New Elizabethan awardees was ideal for us, in that with each programme we presented we were able to combine early and contemporary music. Throughout the year we paid homage to Elizabethan lutenist and composer John Dowland, exploring a wide range of his song repertoire, as well as other works by Elizabethan composers such as Thomas Morley and William Byrd. We also focused on the voice and guitar repertoire of Benjamin Britten, covering everything he wrote for this combination throughout the year, and paying special attention to the works that were directly inspired by Dowland and his peers, such as the Lute Song from his Elizabethan opera "Gloriana".

As the NEA celebrates music of the past and the present, Andrey and I wanted to take the opportunity to present contemporary work as well as early music. As all three of us are Australian, we included contemporary Australian music in a number of the programmes, including works by Brett Dean, in the case of Andrey and myself, and Philip Houghton in the case of Jesse. The Dean cycle was written especially for us in 2016 and is based on

Shakespeare's Hamlet, also drawing inspiration from Dowland's compositional style, so this link connecting past and present resonated throughout each programme we put together.

We were also honoured to premiere two brand new songs during the year by British composer Arthur Keegan-Bole, which were performed at the Guildford and Aldeburgh concerts respectively. Given our interest in new music, it was especially thrilling to have the chance to add to the voice and guitar repertoire through the NEA.

In the most unusual programme of the year, Andrey and I presented songs by 70's British singer songwriter Nick Drake, who was by all accounts a true "New Elizabethan". We interspersed his music with Dowland songs, all performed on an acoustic steel string guitar as opposed to classical guitar. Although separated by centuries, these composers had so much in common in terms of compositional style but also as lyricists. Combining these two composers in one programme highlighted how timeless British voice and guitar repertoire can be. It was a particularly enjoyable and exciting project to develop and perform.

Through the NEA we have been privileged to perform at a number of wonderful venues throughout the year, starting with one of the most prestigious in the UK, Wigmore Hall. We also performed in two historic buildings, the London Charterhouse and the Guild Hall of Guildford, which was particularly special considering the focus on Elizabethan music in our programming. Further concerts during the year took place at the astonishing gothic church St Bartholomew The Great, (London's oldest parish church), and we finished the year with a recital in Britten's library at The Red House Aldeburgh, which was a very moving experience for us, having spent so much of our year working on and performing the music of Britten.

We would like to thank all the presenters of the NEA concerts - Wigmore Hall, Guildford Festival, Britten-Pears Foundation, The Charterhouse London and City Music Society - as well as other presenters for whom we performed this year; Wiltshire Music Centre, Barbican Sound Unbound Festival, City Music Foundation, Matlock Music and Bristol University. Thank you also to everyone at the Musicians' Company, especially Pastmaster Michael Lewin and Steve Goss, and the NEA Panel: Judith Weir CBE, Dame Emma Kirkby, John Gilhooly OBE, Nigel North, Craig Ogden, and Fabio Zanon.

Andrey, Jesse and I are most grateful to have been the first New Elizabethan Awardees, and will no doubt carry the experienced and repertoire learned this year into our future careers. I look forward to commissioning more works for voice and guitar, and honouring the journey that the British guitar song has taken over the centuries.

Lotte Betts-Dean and Andrey Lebedev, Jan 2020

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The New Elizabethan Award has provided me with a wealth of musical experiences and opportunities. I was able to fulfil a lifelong dream of performing a solo recital at Wigmore Hall, as well as other prestigious venues across the UK. I was also able to record my second album using funds from the award.

It has allowed me to explore and discover more deeply an interesting and varied vein of guitar repertoire, first expanded and popularised by Julian Bream, far beyond what I had imagined possible. I will be forever grateful to The Musicians' Company and the New Elizabethan Award for all they have made possible, and for musical memories I will cherish forever!

Michael Butten, August 2023

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My time as a NEA holder was incredibly valuable in my development as a musician. During this time, I took part in a year-long scheme which involved performing and exploring the extraordinarily rich music of the two Elizabethan periods. I had the opportunity to perform at some of the UK's top venues and festivals, a highlight being my debut at the Wigmore Hall.

In addition to performance opportunities, the NEA encouraged me to explore new repertoire and think creatively about programming. As a result, I was able to curate engaging and varied programmes, combining thematically relevant works from the Renaissance, 20th and 21st century. The NEA's attention to new music and forward-looking approach to expanding the guitar's repertoire also gave me the opportunity to include a new commission in my performances.

The NEA has also been incredible in supporting me towards accomplishing professional development projects. With their assistance, I am aiming to record an album of Shakespearean themed music for solo guitar. I am forever grateful to the Musicians' Company and the New Elizabethan Award for their support and encourage all guitarists and lutenists to apply for this wonderful award.

Sasha Savaloni, December 2023

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We are extremely grateful to the Musicians' Company and NEA Committee for the opportunities we have been given through the New Elizabethan Award. Our ensemble has greatly developed both professionally and musically thanks to this unique award.

We have always had a keen interest in exploring different styles and lesser-known music. This is something which through doing the NEA, with its somewhat unusual repertoire requirements, led to us discover lots interesting and unknown repertoire. It also forced us to really think about new and interesting ways of programming. This resulted in us performing the 'Seasons in Time' programme at the selection round which then developed into 'Shakespeare and the Seasons in Time' which we performed alongside Sasha Savaloni at Wigmore Hall!

The concert at Wigmore Hall along with the other amazing performance opportunities we were given through the award have been invaluable for our ensemble. We have really grown as performers from these NEA concerts and off the back of them have received more concert opportunities including Petworth Festival and Dillington House Festival. It has been an amazing kickstart for our duo's professional development and we are extremely excited about the future ahead. Next year we will be recording our first album with the label Deux-Elles and we are planning to continue exploring our 'Seasons in Time' theme!

We are intent on using the 'professional development' part of the award for promotional material for our duo; for example, we are going to get some professional headshots and build a website with the money. We are also considering buying a camera to make recordings of ourselves and, potentially, putting some of the money towards buying an amplifier to use at some of our gigs. Any remaining money we will most likely put towards the Deux-Elles recording!

Eleanor Grant and Gus McQuade, January 2024