

**Music****JAM on the Marsh – high-quality coverage of the music festival in Kent**

A week of concerts with an emphasis on New British composers is available online from St Leonard's Church in Hythe



Rachel Fryer plays Bach's 'Goldberg Variations' interspersed with contemporary composers' responses

**Richard Fairman** AUGUST 18 2020

---

The scene could hardly be set in a more appealing way. An aerial camera circles lazily over St Leonard's Church in Hythe, Kent, taking in a picture of pastoral tranquillity on a lovely, sunny day. One half expects Agatha Christie's Miss Marple to pop out from behind a gravestone.

The church is the base for JAM on the Marsh, an arts festival that spans the Romney Marsh wetland. For 20 years, JAM (the John Armitage Memorial Trust) has been promoting the arts in the area and has made a name for itself commissioning new music from a carefully sifted range of British composers.

This year JAM on the Marsh, like many other festivals, has gone online. Over the past week, the festival webcasts have built up a complete online programme of nine concerts. All are free to view on JAM on the Marsh's website and YouTube channel, though donations are invited.

In addition, there are three online exhibitions to provide a visual accompaniment. Each draws on the landscape of the area and offers a range of evocative images, including Jon Foreman's remarkable beach art and nocturnal photographs of the marsh taken by local "night owl" Susan Pilcher.

For the nine concerts, the interior of St Leonard's Church presents a light and airy atmosphere. Filming is of high quality and the acoustics work well, especially for the pair of concerts with The Gesualdo Six, a one-to-a-part choir making its festival debut.



The Gesualdo Six makes its festival debut with two concerts



Beach art by Jon Foreman in partnership with Carsten Birkebaek features in an online exhibition

The group's opening concert places the golden age of polyphony alongside contemporary British music. Women composers are prominent throughout this year's festival, so Tallis's *Lamentations of Jeremiah* find a counterpart in the spirituality of Hildegard von Bingen. The recent works include Judith Bingham's haunting *Watch with Me* and the whistling breezes of Alison Willis's *The Wind's Warning*, and there is a premiere in Joanna Ward's *Christus factus est*, a mix of murmurings, echoes, and clouds of sound.

It is a fair bet that the most popular webcast will be The Gesualdo Six's other concert, Fauré's *Requiem* with members of the London Mozart Players. This is the *Requiem* at its most intimate, performed by a mere handful of musicians and quietly radiant under Owain Park's musical direction.

A pair of recitals called "Variations down the Line" features pianist Rachel Fryer playing Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, but down the line also come new ones, freshly composed and interspersed. This is not a new idea — the BBC Proms did something similar for Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos* — but Fryer's clean-cut Bach dovetails nicely with some imaginative responses from Samuel Becker, Julian Broughton, Nicola LeFanu, Michael Finnissy and Alison Kay.

The performers at the final concert filled St Leonard's Church. Michael Bawtree conducts the London Mozart Players in Barber, Bartok, Peter Aviss's *The Seafarer* and a mysterious exploration of *The Hythe* by Judith Bingham, all leading up to the premiere of Paul Mealor's Piano Concerto, a glittering conclusion, played with flair by John Frederick Hudson.

★★★★☆

[jamconcert.org](http://jamconcert.org)

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2020. All rights reserved.