

CHORWERK RUHR



SHE

A resounding dialogue between great female composers

They are many. They are impressive. They are strong: they are all women who have helped write music history, and whose vocal works are brought together in sound by the singers of CHORWERK RUHR in their concert programme 'SHE' under the direction of Florian Helgath.

The focus is on the American composer Caroline Shaw with her 'Partita for 8 voices', which CHORWERK RUHR successfully premiered in Europe in the summer of 2024. The Pulitzer Prize winner found inspiration for this in Sol LeWitt's painting 'Wall Drawing 305', which creates a new whole before the viewer's eye from 100 randomly placed dots.

Just as the dots grow into lines and shapes, Caroline Shaw is joined by international composers from the past and present, whose life lines intertwine through their works, opening up new connections, bridges and horizons in the ears of the audience.

In 'SHE', Hildegard von Bingen meets Florence B. Price, Fanny Hensel and Clara Schumann come together with Imogen Holst and Nana Forte. A grand musical 'hello' from great female composers.

SHE

from the very beginning...

Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179/ Germany)

O virtus sapientie (2 min)

Caroline Shaw (*1982/ USA)

Partita for 8 Voices | Nr. 1 Allemande (6 min)

about love and death

Maddalena Casulana (1544-1590/ Italy)

Morir non puo (3 min)

Vittoria Raffaella Aleotti (1575-1620/ Italy)

Surge, proper amica mea (3 min)

Caroline Shaw

Partita | Nr. 2 Sarabande (6 min)

longing and resignation

Fanny Hensel (1805-1847/ Germany)

Nacht ruht auf den fremden Wegen (2 min)

Florence B. Price (1887-1953/ USA)

Resignation (2'30 min)

Alice Tegner (1864-1943/ Sweden)

En hymn till stjärnan (2 min)

Clara Schumann (1819-1896/ Germany)

Gondoliera (3 min)

Caroline Shaw

Partita | Nr. 3 Courante (10 min)

...and what next?

Imogen Holst (1907-1984/ Great Britain)

Hallo, my fancy (6 min)

Nana Forte (*1981/ Slovenia)

We are the future rhymes *Auftragswerk für Chorwerk Ruhr* (12 min)

Caroline Shaw

Partita | Nr. 4 Passacaglia (6 min)

duration about 70 min, no intermission

Biographies

CHORWERK RUHR is one of the most important chamber choirs in Germany. Founded in 1999, the vocal ensemble has developed into a mainstay of vocal art in the German-speaking world. The choir's extraordinary quality lies in its ability to meet the special demands of solo performances while achieving perfect harmony in its choral sound. In November 2011, the multi-award-winning conductor Florian Helgath took over as artistic director. He sees one of the main focuses of his work as highlighting new choral music in relation to traditional musical forms, thus allowing it to have a new effect on the listener against the backdrop of the rich musical history. With this first-class ensemble, he performs choral music at the highest level. CHORWERK RUHR has established itself as one of the high-quality artistic hallmarks of the Ruhr metropolitan region and as one of Germany's top choirs. In concerts with renowned conductors and orchestras, performing music from all eras up to the present day, CHORWERK RUHR consistently thrills its audiences and receives outstanding reviews. The vocal ensemble's discography includes the CD *Bodenschätze*, which presents music from the 16th and 17th century Florilegium Portense collection together with Capella de la Torre, as well as a CD featuring Mozart's *Requiem*, completed by Michael Ostrzyga together with Concerto Köln. In August 2022, the ensemble received the German Record Critics' Award for its recording of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Carré* and Maurice Kagel's *Chorbuch*. In spring 2024, a highly acclaimed recording of Sergei Rachmaninoff's All-Night Vigil, Op. 37 was released. The most recent release, from November 2024, is a recording of Antonín Dvořák's *Stabat mater*. Frequent recordings by WDR, BR, and DLF and participation in national and international music festivals reflect the choir's popularity. Every year, CHORWERK RUHR cooperates in a special way with the Ruhrtriennale and is usually present at the festival with two projects. CHORWERK RUHR is part of Kultur Ruhr GmbH, funded by the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia.

Florian Helgath has established himself internationally as one of the leading choral conductors. Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of Chorwerk Ruhr and the Zürcher Sing-Akademie, has shaped the ensembles into top international choirs of the highest calibre, both with cappella music as well as in the field of choral symphonies. He is a regular guest with the RIAS Kammerchor, Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks, SWR Vokalensemble, MDR Rundfunkchor Leipzig, The Norwegian Soloists' Choir, Netherlands Radio Choir, Choeur de Radio France, Gulbenkian Choir, Coro da Música Porto, Flemish Radio Choir and Croatian Radio Symphony & Choir. He has also worked with orchestras such as the Gulbenkian Orchestra, Aarhus Symphony, Denmark Philharmonic, Stavanger Symphony, Brussels Philharmonic, Odense Symphony, Münchner Rundfunkorchester, WDR Funkhausorchester, Munich and Bochum Symphony Orchestra, Dortmund and Duisburg Philharmonic Orchestra, Zurich Chamber Orchestra and Ensemble Resonanz. In the field of historical performance practice he has realized projects with Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, Freiburg Barockorchester, Concerto Köln, B'Rock Orchestra and Orchestra La Scintilla of the Zurich Opera. Engagements led him to major concert halls and festivals such as Berlin Festspiele, Schwetzingen Festspiele, Bachfest Leipzig, Donaueschingen Musiktage, Eclat Festival Neue Musik Stuttgart, Thüringen Bachwochen, BR Musica Viva, ION Nuremberg and particularly to Ruhrtriennale with contemporary opera performances and numerous manifold projects. In addition to a cappella projects, Florian Helgath focusses on performances of choral symphonic and symphonic repertoire. Further ahead are visits with Nederlands Kammerkoor, Netherlands Radio Choir, NDR Vokalensemble Hamburg, Coro da Música Porto etc. apart of his projects with Chorwerk Ruhr and Zürcher Sing-Akademie.

Florian Helgath's discography includes numerous highly acclaimed albums such as *Carré/Chorbuch* with Chorwerk Ruhr on the Coviello Classics label (Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik 2022), the album *Geistliche Gesänge* with works by J.S. Bach, Reger, Knut Nystedt with the MDR Rundfunkchor (ICMA Award 2017) or *Da Pacem: Echo of the Reformation* with the RIAS Kammerchor and Capella de la Torre (ECHO Klassik 2017).

The album of Tigran Mansurian's *Requiem* with the RIAS Kammerchor with Munich Chamber Orchestra by ECM Records was nominated for a Grammy in 2018 (Best Choral Performance).

Florian Helgath gained his first musical experience with Regensburg Domspatzen and at Hochschule für Musik und Theater Munich. Michael Gläser, Stefan Parkman and Dan Olof Stenlund were among his important teachers who had a decisive influence on his development as a conductor. Further important steps in his career was international success as a prize-winner in competitions such as the Eric Ericson Award 2006, the Competition For Young Choral Conductors 2007 in Budapest and the Choral Conductors' Forum of Bavarian Radio 2007.

In 2020, Florian Helgath was appointed as professor at the Hochschule für Musik und Tanz in Cologne. Since 2024 he has been Professor of Choral Conducting at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Munich.

Introduction

SHE - Women in a thousand years of music history

Music history is still told today as the story of great men – yet women have always played music, composed and played a decisive role in writing this very history, albeit often away from the big stage. With its concert programme 'SHE', Chorwerk Ruhr invites you to broaden this perspective. Under the direction of Florian Helgath, the vocal ensemble presents a resounding gallery of female composers spanning almost a thousand years of music history. Im Zentrum des Abends steht die US-amerikanische Komponistin **Caroline Shaw** (*1982).

Her *Partita for 8 Voices* forms the structural backbone of the programme: in four movements, she takes up historical dance forms and transforms them into a contemporary sound language using extended vocal techniques, breath, speech and movement. Shaw was inspired for this work by Sol LeWitt's wall paintings, in which randomly placed dots form lines and thus new relationships. This is exactly what happens acoustically in the programme 'SHE': the life lines of women from Germany, Italy, America, England, Sweden and Slovenia connect to form a greater whole.

The programme opens with **Hildegard von Bingen** (1098–1179) and her unison hymn *O virtus sapientiae* – a hymn to divine wisdom, interpreted by the composer as female power. Four hundred years later, **Maddalena Casulana** was the first woman in Western musical culture to have an entire volume of her own compositions printed, including the madrigal *Morir non può*, in which she set to music a classic paradox of Renaissance poetry: the desire to kill the heart in order to end the pain of love, knowing full well that this would mean her own death. *Surge, proper amica mea* takes us to the musical centre of Ferrara around 1600 and to another extraordinary personality: **Vittoria Rafaella Aleotti**. The Augustinian nun worked at the renowned monastery of San Vito as prioress, composer, organist and conductor.

With the advent of Romanticism, inner conflicts and social constraints came to the fore in the sheet music of female composers of the 19th and early 20th centuries: **Fanny Hensel** is probably the most famous 'sister' in music history. While her brother Felix Mendelssohn made music his

profession, for Fanny it was only allowed to be a pastime, even though she was said to be even more talented than her brother. Her song *Nacht liegt auf den fremden Wegen* (Night lies on strange paths) is a musical testimony to a quiet longing and great musical quality. **Clara Schumann**, on the other hand, lacked the leisure to compose due to other constraints, as she had to earn a living for her family as a pianist. *Gondoliera* is one of the few choral works she penned. **Florence B. Price**, an African-American woman who ultimately failed to overcome the hurdles she faced in the USA between 1887 and 1957, set the feeling of giving up to music in her piece *Resignation* as a silent cry. Her contemporary **Alice Tegnér** (1864-1943) had a much easier time establishing herself as an organist, composer and choir director in Sweden. *En hymn till stjärnan*, one of her artfully composed choral pieces, is included in the concert programme.

British composer **Imogen Holst** is the link to the present day, in which female composers such as herself, Caroline Shaw and Slovenian **Nana Forte** (born 1981) take their place on the concert stage with self-determination and as a matter of course. They represent a generation that no longer has to justify itself, but simply composes how, where and when it pleases. Nana Forte has written a commissioned work for Chorwerk Ruhr. It is called *We are the future rhymes*, and it is about the self-determination of each and every one of us to shape our future.