

## Norwich Strangers Project – Brief for librettist

### Introduction

Subject to securing the appropriate funding, the **Norwich Philharmonic Society** is seeking to commission a substantial work for chorus, soloists and full symphony orchestra to be given its first performance at the 2025 **Norfolk & Norwich Festival**. The composer will be the award-winning young British composer **Dani Howard** and the purpose of this brief is to secure the services of a writer who will work with the composer to create the libretto for the new work.

### Norwich Strangers

The new work will be based on the ‘Strangers’ of Norwich, the incomers who settled in the city from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, fleeing persecution in Europe and happily finding welcome rather than hate. As a timely and topical reference to welcoming refugees, tolerance and diverse communities, it is a theme with a universal relevance as well as a particular meaning for local audiences. Through its wider salience, we expect this universal theme to give the work the potential to be embraced by other performers elsewhere. See Appendix 3 for more information on the Norwich Strangers.

### The composer

The British composer **Dani Howard** has produced a number of works for large scale orchestral forces, as well as mixed chorus (including an opera) and uses a tonal and harmonic language that is very approachable. She has recently been nominated for a South Bank Sky Arts Award for her Trombone Concerto and has also been nominated as a breakthrough artist by The Times alongside young artists from a wide range of other genres. See Appendix 1 for more information about Dani.

The Norwich Philharmonic Orchestra will perform Dani’s orchestral work *Argentum* (commissioned by Classic FM and premiered by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic in 2017) in the opening concert of the Society’s 22/23 season at The Halls, Norwich on 5 November 2022. Dani has confirmed she will be able to attend the performance in person to get to know both orchestra and choir. Tickets can be made available to prospective librettists who would like to attend the performance (please contact Catrina Nixon – see email below).

### Project partners

The commissioners of this project are the Norwich Philharmonic Society (see Appendix 2 for more information) but we are working with a number of key partners, notably:

- Norfolk & Norwich Festival <https://nnfestival.org.uk>
- National Centre for Writing [www.nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk](http://www.nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk)
- New Routes <https://newroutes.org.uk>

### The new work

Drawing on the themes of flight and refuge as witnessed by the Norwich Strangers, the new piece will be a substantial work of around 35 minutes in length, written for mixed chorus, full symphony orchestra and possible 1 or 2 vocal soloists. It will be given its first performance by the Norwich Philharmonic Chorus and Orchestra at the Norfolk & Norwich Festival in May 2025.

### The Text

There are a number of possible ways in which the text for the work might be developed and at this stage the composer is very open-minded. The final text may comprise any or all of the following components:

- New text based on the Strangers theme, perhaps actual stories found in research
- Existing relevant texts from literature exploring themes of persecution, flight and refuge
- Quotations and/or stories from contemporary refugees re-settled in Norwich

To arrive at the final text will require a critical phase of research and development working not only with the composer but also researching relevant historic sources and archives and engaging with local refugee groups. We have already established contact with many of these individuals and we will facilitate introductions where needed. However we would expect the selected librettist to undertake relevant research and to talk to appropriate individual and refugee organisations, possibly through workshops and/or interviews. Clearly the text must suitably express the chosen themes.

### **Timetable**

The project is contingent upon funding being secured but these are seen as the key milestones:

- Mid October 22 – Brief issued to prospective writers
- 5 November– Dani Howard attending NPO performance of her Argentinum in opening concert of Norwich Philharmonic Society 2022/23 season
- 9 December – Deadline for submitting proposals
- January 23 – Applications shortlisted and on-line interviews arranged with the composer.
- February 23 – Pump-priming funding secured
- Late February – Selection and appointment of librettist
- March – Start of libretto development phase
- December 2023 – outline draft libretto submitted to composer
- January – September 24 – composition period
- Mid-September 24 – Delivery of excerpts for initial read-through by orchestra
- December 24 – Delivery of final score and parts
- January 25 – Choir rehearsals begin
- March 25 – Orchestra rehearsals begin
- May 25 – First performance at N&NF

### **Fee**

To cover all aspects of the libretto development as outlined above and inclusive of all workshops/interviews, research and expenses, we have identified a maximum budget of £10,000.

An initial payment of 25% of agreed fee will be made on signing of contracts. The contract will be between the chosen writer and the Norwich Philharmonic Society Ltd.

### **Application process**

If the project interests you and you would like to be considered as a potential librettist for the proposed new work, we would very much like to hear from you. Please submit a brief proposal (no more than 3 pages of A4) setting out the following:

1. Why the project interests you and why you believe we should choose you.
2. How you would approach addressing this brief as set out above, particularly:
  - a) Which areas you would wish to focus on during the research and development stage - which areas interest you most and which do you feel would be most necessary for this project.
  - b) Your vision for the libretto of this new work - overall thoughts on bringing text together, how you would want to tell the story etc.
  - c) How you would wish to collaborate with composer Dani Howard on this project - your ideal form of collaboration with a composer on a project like this.

In addition to this proposal, please include:

- A brief resume of relevant work, particularly any experience you might have had in setting words to music. However, please note, experience with writing text to music is not essential.

- Your availability over the period in question.
- Links to your website (if applicable)
- A sample of your written work (extract if from a larger work)
- Your contact details

Please email your proposal to: Peggy Hughes at National Centre for Writing – [Peggy@nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk](mailto:Peggy@nationalcentreforwriting.org.uk) To arrive **no later than 5pm on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> December**

All applications will be reviewed and assessed by Peggy and Dani Howard and those shortlisted will be invited to attend an online interview with the composer during January 2023.

In the meantime, for any questions about the brief or an informal discussion please contact **Catrina Nixon, Vice Chairman, Norwich Philharmonic Society, [catrinanixon@btconnect.com](mailto:catrinanixon@btconnect.com)**

We look forward to hearing from you!

## Appendix 1 – Dani Howard

Dani Howard is a British composer and orchestrator who is quickly gaining international recognition with regular performances across Europe, the US and Asia. In June 2021 she received the premiere of her Trombone Concerto with acclaimed reviews “an instant classic... lush... riveting...” (Richard Morrison, The Times) – with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and soloist Peter Moore. The piece received a Royal Philharmonic Society Award in the Large-Scale composition category, and has since seen the Irish and London premieres given by the Ulster Orchestra, and the London Symphony Orchestra.

2019 saw her debut with the London Symphony Orchestra (a new commission for Cheltenham Festival conducted by Elim Chan), BBC Symphony Orchestra and a return to the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic with a new commission for the opening of their 2019-20 season conducted by Vasily Petrenko. Her debut opera with ‘The Opera Story’ premiered in 2019 “a sophisticated and incredibly beautiful piece that surely places Howard amongst the best of contemporary British opera composers” (Bachtrack). In 2018 she received her Royal Albert Hall Debut with the RLPO performing “Argentum” – commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Society and Classic FM, and has had her works performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, NCPA Orchestra of China, City Chamber Orchestra of Hong Kong, Orquestra Clássica da Madeira, European Union Chamber Orchestra, National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain and Southbank Sinfonia among others.

She has recently been appointed Composer in Residence with the London Chamber Orchestra for their 2022-23 season. As part of the residency, she will be writing a new Saxophone Concerto for Jess Gillam among other projects/commissions.

Dani has just been nominated for a South Bank Sky Arts Award for her Trombone Concerto and has also been nominated as a breakthrough artist by The Times alongside young artists from a wide range of other genres. Writing about the awards in The Times Richard Morrison said: “Not quite 30, the composer leapt to fame in an unexpected manner: Howard wrote that rare beast, a trombone concerto. A virtuosic showcase for another talented twentysomething, the trombonist Peter Moore, it was lushly orchestrated and an instant hit when it premiered in Liverpool last year. It serves as an excellent calling card for a composer who is more interested in engaging the public than shocking them, but who has already shown herself to be a sophisticated creator of dazzling orchestral textures. She seems to be on a winning streak as a composer who reassures audiences that modern orchestral music can be fun as well as challenging.”

Selected works by Dani Howard:

Argentum <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbqiw5Vg1zl>

Coalescence <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HD5-clqfxWY>

Arches [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mgpl4134z\\_4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mgpl4134z_4)

Trombone Concerto <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8c1er431HuQ>

MIA TErra' for Symphony Orchestra and Chorus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jv5r-44M0ow>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHV3jD4veuc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cOEvOCWTgUM>

## Appendix 2: The Norwich Philharmonic Society

The Norwich Philharmonic Society – [www.norwichphil.org.uk](http://www.norwichphil.org.uk) - was established in 1841 and has remained at the heart of the city’s musical life ever since. With a full-size symphony orchestra and a mixed chorus of some 120 voices, the Society performs a wide repertoire of large-scale works, joined

by guest soloists of the highest calibre. 'The Phil' gives four concerts of choral and/or orchestral music each season at St Andrew's Hall, plus a very popular Family Christmas Concert.

In the absence of regular professional symphony concerts in Norwich, the Phil has a vital role to play in the musical life of the city and its wider area, giving performances of a consistently high standard and attracting strong support from local music lovers.

The Norwich Philharmonic Orchestra is one of the UK's leading amateur orchestras and certainly one of the longest established. Made up of talented non-professional, semi-professional and former professional musicians, the orchestra is acclaimed for its performances of major works from the symphonic repertoire and its work with gifted guest soloists, many of whom are the rising stars of the concert world. The Society's Orchestral Conductor is Matthew Andrews.

The Norwich Philharmonic Chorus, which has around 120 members, is directed by Choral Conductor David Dunnett, the principal organist for Norwich Cathedral and an acclaimed trainer of singers and chorus master. The choir regularly collaborates with the Musik Institut, Koblenz, Norwich's twin city, as well as with other choirs across the East of England.

The Phil celebrated its 175th anniversary in March 2016 and in May that year a memorable performance of Mahler's epic 'Symphony of a Thousand' as part of the Norfolk & Norwich Festival brought almost 2,000 people to their feet at the Showground Arena. The Phil was Music Award Winner in the 2015 Norfolk Arts Awards.

### **Appendix 3: Notes on the Norwich Strangers**

*The **Elizabethan Strangers**, often referred to as just the Strangers, were a group of Protestant refugees seeking political asylum from the Catholic Low Countries, who settled in and around Norwich. The first group came from Flanders in 1565, Protestant refugees invited by the City authorities to settle in Norwich to boost the City's textile industry. 30 households of master weavers, totalling almost 300 people, journeyed from the Low Countries to Norwich seeking refuge from religious persecution. They were the first of the "Elizabethan Strangers". Later, many more followed, eventually making up a third of the population of Norwich.*

#### **The Strangers of Norwich**

*From Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell (Refugee Week, June 2016)*

#### **Who were they?**

The Strangers first arrived in Norfolk in the 16th century. They came from the Low Countries and were initially met with mistrust by the local population, some were even treated as if they were smugglers. Many of the Strangers were weavers and they came to form one of three guilds of cloth makers working within Norwich. Each guild had their own seal which was stamped onto their cloth; a castle if made in the city, a lion if made in the county, and a ship if made by the Strangers.

By the 1570's over 4000 refugees had settled in Norwich fleeing the religious persecution they faced in their homelands for their Protestant beliefs. Among them was a second group of Strangers consisting of 24 Dutchman and 6 Walloons. The group were invited to settle in Norwich by the civic authorities in order to help revive the failing cloth industry.

#### **Why were the Strangers important to Norwich?**

When the Strangers arrived in Norwich, they brought with them their own tools and material and taught the local people their weaving techniques. They even took on some of the local people

as apprentices which helped build the local economy. Thanks to their weaving skills, Norwich's weaving industry was revitalised and our reputation for fine cloth lasted into the 19th century. A piece that they made as a thank you still hangs in St Peter Mancroft Church, which has the date of when it was woven in 1573.

### **What impact did the Strangers have on modern day Norwich?**

We can see the impact of the Strangers throughout Norwich in the Dutch style architecture of many of our buildings. Thanks to the wealth generated by the thriving weaving industry, Norfolk also has one of the largest concentrations of medieval churches in the world. Not only that, the Strangers brought with them their pet canaries which, in case you did not know, became the logo for Norwich City Football Club!

Perhaps most importantly, Norwich is now recognised as a City of Sanctuary, which celebrates what the citizens of Norwich bring to the city and the hospitality that we offer new arrivals. The City of Sanctuary is formed from a coalition of local refugee groups and community representatives who aim to promote a culture of welcome and sanctuary.

The Strangers were an integral part of our city and helped shaped it into what it is today. Many citizens of Norfolk can trace their ancestry back to the Dutch and Flemish refugees who settled in the city. To many people, we may be the city that's in the bump in Britain, but to this group of refugees, we became their home.

### **Immigration and emigration: The Elizabethan Strangers**

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/immig\\_emig/england/norfolk/article\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/immig_emig/england/norfolk/article_1.shtml)

Strong trading links had already existed between Norwich and the Low Countries for centuries, and evidence from wills shows a Dutch and Flemish presence in Norwich prior to the 15th Century. But, on this occasion, the immigrants were officially encouraged to move to the area.

Since the Middle Ages, Norwich had been at the centre of an extensive textile industry in woollens and worsted. By the 16th Century, however, this industry was in crisis, with competition from cheaper and better quality merchandise from Flanders - a region in the south west of the Low Countries now split between Belgium, France and the Netherlands.

Skilled immigrants from the Low Countries could provide a solution to the economic crisis. At a time when skills were handed down through apprenticeships, the Strangers could teach local workers to produce new types of cloth, giving fresh impetus to Norwich's flagging industry.

In 1565, the city authorities sent a representative to Queen Elizabeth I, asking for permission for immigrant workers to settle in Norwich. Later that year, the queen issued a royal "letters patent", allowing "thirtye duchemen" and their households - totalling no more than 300 people - to settle within Norwich's city walls. Twenty-four of the householders admitted were Dutch and six were Walloon.

The Strangers also had their own, pressing motives for emigrating. The anti-Protestant policies of their Habsburg ruler, Philip II of Spain, together with economic hardship and war, forced many people to leave the Low Countries. Between 50,000 and 300,000 refugees sought religious freedom elsewhere, many of whom came to Protestant England, settling in towns like London and Southampton, as well as Norwich.

The Stranger community grew rapidly from the original 30 households. By 1620 there were around 4,000 Dutch and Walloons living in Norwich, comprising a quarter of the city's population.

They had an impact on all aspects of Norwich life. They rejuvenated the local economy, and by the end of the 16th Century the city was prospering again. English textile apprentices learnt new techniques, and the "New Draperies" produced proved lucrative exports to Europe and the East. By 1600 Norwich weavers were even facing a shortage of yarn and labour.

On the whole, the Strangers integrated well with the local community. With no restrictions on their residency, they were not deliberately "ghettoised". They rebuilt the whole area north of the River Wensum that had been devastated by a great fire in 1507, leaving their mark on the city's landscape.

Over the years, strong personal links were forged between the two communities: wealthy Strangers married into the Norwich elite, they sent their children to the local grammar school, and they formed business partnerships with local merchants.

But the Dutch and Walloons did not lose their own identity and culture. The Stranger churches were important as centres of communication and social care, and the immigrants continued to donate money to them, despite also having to support English parishes. One congregation of Strangers worshipped in Blackfriars' Hall, Norwich.

Dutch and French schools were established in the area, and strong links were maintained with their native countries, especially through trade. In the second generation, ties were strengthened as Stranger children returned to Holland to attend university.

Despite general harmony, there were some teething problems. When the refugees first moved into the area, they were subject to detailed restrictions - from controls over what they were allowed to buy and sell to an 8pm curfew, intended to stop drunkenness and disorder.

Frictions and disputes between the Strangers and indigenous locals sometimes erupted. Many Strangers refused to impart their skills to English apprentices, arguing that they had enough of their own children to set to work. Locals were often upset when immigrants set up business in other trades, such as tailoring and shoe-making, as this created unwanted competition.

From this fragile start, relations gradually improved. A number of "politic men", or arbiters, were appointed who negotiated agreements between the authorities and Strangers. Immigrants in Norwich were offered citizenship rights before those of any other town, and the corporation made full use of Stranger skills and expertise. The Dutch printer, Anthony de Solen, was employed to publish official orders and decrees. While in 1596, during a period of poor harvest, the authorities turned to a Stranger, Jacques de Hem, to help them secure provisions from Europe.

William Laud was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1633 to 1645. He strove to impose conformity on the Church of England, and attacked many beliefs of the Puritan and Calvinist Strangers. Under his leadership, more importance was given to the ritual aspects of religion, which many feared signalled a return to Catholicism.

During the Elizabethan era, foreigners became more numerous on the nation's streets. The government's response to this wavered between control and welcome. Restrictive policies were needed to minimise tensions between Stranger and local communities, but very different policies were necessary if the English economy was to benefit from the skills and technologies of immigrants.

Influenced by both religion and international politics, the Crown's attitude towards foreigners was constantly shifting, and this can be seen filtering down in the treatment of the Norwich Strangers. Initially, under Elizabeth I, the Strangers were allowed to hold their services at Blackfriars' Hall and St Mary the Less in relative freedom, but in the 1630s they suffered under Archbishop Laud, who ordered them to attend only English services.

Matthew Wren, Bishop of Norwich, was one of Laud's most committed followers, and frequently quarrelled with the Stranger community. He accused one congregation of Strangers of damaging the Bishop's Chapel, where they held their meetings. But, above all, Wren worried that locals might start attending Stranger services, and weaken the English church.

The Strangers' reputation was not helped by evidence that radical religious books were being smuggled into Norwich from the Low Countries, or by the flow of English Puritans to Rotterdam in the 1630s, where they established a gathered church. Even if the Strangers were not involved in these activities, as religious separatists they were still viewed with suspicion by the authorities.

The government also feared that immigrant communities were a threat to public order and security by assisting foreign powers to invade. In 1571, the authorities searched Strangers's homes for armour and weaponry, and in the unsettled years before the Civil War, it was feared they might be disloyal to the Crown.

But the relationship between the Norwich Strangers and the English was generally stable. Personal ties were formed through marriage and friendship. Some Englishmen even became godparents and guardians to Stranger children.

Norwich continued to flourish well into the 17th Century, and remained an important provincial centre, thanks mainly to its thriving textile industry, which had been given an extra impetus by the Strangers. And, with time, the immigrants became so well integrated into the local community that they were no longer "strangers".

Certainly there are few obvious reminders of these folk today. The Strangers did, however, bring with them a love of canary-breeding, which soon caught on with locals - it was not long before there was a new breed known as the "Norwich canary". Bizarrely this is their most visible legacy - today the nickname of the local football team is the Canaries!

### **Strangers - A brief history of Norwich's incomers**

by Frank Meeres, former Archivist, Norfolk Records Office

<https://norfolkrecordofficeblog.org/2016/06/24/strangers-a-brief-history-of-norwicks-incomers/>

The word 'Stranger' was originally used in records to mean anyone who was not a native of a particular town – it occurs in Norwich leet court rolls of the later thirteenth century, where the people described as 'strangers' are from places like Thorpe, Hellesdon and Earlham – and therefore, legally, not within the jurisdiction of Norwich. Later the word came to be used for a particular group of incomers – refugees from the Low Countries from 1567 onward, who were fleeing from persecution in their own land, and who found a welcome in the city. Most of these people were Dutch speakers, but a considerable number were French speakers; the latter are known as Walloons. By the late 1570s, one person in four in Norwich was a refugee who had come into the city within the previous ten years.

The city welcomed these incomers, but kept a careful check on their numbers. In the time of Mayor Robert Wood (1569-70), it was noted; 'by reason of the business in Flanders the city was very much

replenished with strangers'. In November 1569, the number of strangers was calculated at 2,827 (752 men, 681 women, 26 servants, 1132 children), 'all which company of strangers, we are to confess, do live in good quyet and order, and that they traveyle [work] diligently to earn their livings.' In October 1571 the total number of Strangers was 3,993 (1,056 men, 1,095 women, 1,862 children). It was calculated that 355 people had arrived since 25 March 1571, made up of 85 Dutchmen, 25 Walloon men, 85 women and an unspecified number of children – and also one Frenchman from Dieppe. Another census of 1583 calculates that there were 4,677 'Strangers' in the city. As there was a serious outbreak of plague in the city in 1579, in which the incomer community was particularly badly hit, there must have been well over 5,000, probably nearer 6,000, members of this refugee community before it struck – and this in a city with an English population of no more than 12,000.

Many people have 'Stranger' ancestors and want to find out more about them. The best book to start with is still 'The Walloons and their Church in Norwich at Norwich' by W J C Moens, published in 1887-8. In spite of its title, the book lists Dutch incomers as well as Walloons. The book is very hard to find these days, but there is a copy on the open shelves in the Norfolk Record Office.

The Norfolk Record Office has many documents that Moen did not use which bring alive the Stranger communities in the city. For example, Mayor's Court books contain records of apprenticeships, which show how English people gained skills through contact with the incomers. A Norfolk tailor, Richard Whitterel had two sons, who both became apprentices of incomers, one to be trained as a bay weaver the other as a pin maker. Indeed in 1581 the city authorities employed a Dutchman, Nicholas Beoscom, to teach pin making to their orphans housed in the Great Hospital. Girls benefited too – two female orphan sisters named Browne were found work in service with Dutchman in the city. Similar entries occur within the records of Norwich Quarter Sessions where, to take just one example, it is recorded that Thomas Bucke is assigned as apprentice to John Halfebers, alien, in 1573, to be taught the 'mystery' of lace weaving.

Details of a new skill brought to the city by incomers are revealed in Mayor's Court entries in 1590. Gyles Cambye, a Dutch immigrant dyer living in Norwich, told the court that he was trading with Arthur Rotye, another Dutch immigrant, who lived in London. Rotye was an expert in the use of green dyes, and Cambye wanted him to come to Norwich. Rotye did come, and he taught his skills to an English dyer in the city and his apprentices.

The Mayor's Court dealt with petty offences in the city, and inevitably some incomers found themselves involved. Two minor criminal cases before the Mayor's Court reveal the Dutch love of gardening. In 1582, three English men, probably boys as one was described as an apprentice, were whipped for breaking into the orchard owned by Giles Vanderbrook, alien, and stealing apples and pears. Eight years later, five Norwich men were charged with breaking into a close outside St Stephen's Gates and stealing roots, the property of a Mr Vertngoose.

In June 1602, Willemyne Clyncket, the wife of James Demara, went to the leaders of the Dutch community to complain that her daughter had been badly bitten by a dog owned by Pyrma, widow of Francis van Dycke: Willemyne had called in a surgeon and the Dutch leaders decided that Pyrma would have to pay the surgeon's fee of £3. However, because she 'obstinately refused' to pay, the matter came before the Mayor's Court, which sent her to prison. All the people involved in the case were incomers; we are not told whether or not the dog was also from the Low Countries!

First generation immigrants are – sometimes at least – recorded as such in wills or letters of administration. There are 22 wills or letters of administration for people described as 'Dutch' between 1570 and 1610, with a further one in 1639; eleven more for people described as 'alien' or 'stranger' and six more for people described as 'French'. From the beginning of the seventeenth

century, the original wills sometimes survive, such as that of John Hovenagel, made 19 January 1603: he describes himself as: 'Drapier; inhabitant and allient within the cittie of Nortwich in the kingdom of Inglornd'. A later will of great interest is that of John or Johannes Elison, pastor of the Dutch church in Norwich, and best-known from the portraits that were painted by Rembrandt of him and his wife. He names his wife Mary and his son Theophilus (also later the pastor of the Dutch church in the city) as executors, and two other prominent members of the community, Francis Dacket and John Cruso, as supervisors.

As these examples demonstrate, there is an enormous amount of information about the community and its members to be gleaned from archives held in the Norfolk Record Office: further research would undoubtedly provide a great deal more fascinating detail as to the economic and social life of this refugee community in Norwich four centuries ago.

Frank Meeres *'The Welcome Stranger'* (Poppyland Publishing 2022)