

PRESS RELEASE

Tuesday 13 October 2026

SHARP SKILLS AND CREATIVITY DISPLAYED IN SECOND YEAR OF BSO MUSIC-MAKING COMPETITION



- A student, an account manager and a part-time midwife, student and carer have been announced as winners of the **BSO Music-Making Competition 2026**.
- The Competition, which is sponsored by **Lark Music**, part of **Howden**, offered non-professional instrumentalists the chance to win part of a **£3,000 cash prize pot**.
- **CHARLIE ASHWORTH-JEREM**, a student from London, wins the 18-24 category for his saxophone performance of Eugène Bozza's *Pulcinella*.
- **BRANDON ROKU ALI** wins the 25-39 category: the account manager from Bournemouth performed his own piano composition, *Walking on Water*.
- **JEN TOWNSEND**, a part-time midwife, student and carer from York, wins the 40+ category for her performance of Edwin Roxburgh's *Stardrift*, for solo flute.

Sharp instrumental skills and infectious creativity have been displayed by non-professional musicians across the UK, as the BSO Music-Making Competition awards its trio of winners – from Dorset, London and York.

Over 100 people submitted an entry to the competition, which made a call out earlier this year to hear 'your music, your way' from UK residents for whom music-making isn't the day job. Thirty finalists were selected from the line-up, before **three winners won a £1,000 cash prize to support their musicianship**.

The judging panel included: presenter **Helen Arney**; sound engineer **Chris Caton**; violinist **Tania Davis**; conductor **Enyi Okpara**; broadcaster and writer **Tom Service**; BSO Principal Cello **Jesper Svedberg**; and guitarist **Dagan Wilkin**. The panel individually assessed recordings based on merits of control, creativity, musicality and communication.

The musical journey of flautist Jen Townsend – winner of the 40+ category – paused for more than 20 years, while she focused on life as a midwife and carer. In 2024, inspired by her new partner – and having navigated a series of personal challenges – she purchased a flute and resumed a deep and lifelong passion to perform. Today, aged 48 and a student at the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM), Jen hopes her story will “*inspire other people to return to making music*”.

Jen’s love of playing saw her graduate through examinations, local music ensembles and county groups to reach undergraduate study, before other paid work took centre stage. She returned to further study last year, at the University of Leeds, before taking her place at the RNCM.

Her performance of Edwin Roxburgh’s *Stardrift* was described as judges as “*extraordinary*” and “*virtuosic*”. Jen was inspired to perform the work having been introduced to it by her teacher, Dr Carla Rees, whom herself had studied with Roxburgh. Jen plans to spend her winnings on her postgraduate fees.

During his time as a postgraduate student at Cardiff University, pianist **Brandon Roku Ali – winner of the 25-39 category** – would spend the twilight hours practising piano in a hospital chapel, where he found peace and solace. The experience repeatedly helped him connect to a vision of being under water, and it was through this *Walking on Water* was composed.

Roku Ali’s performance of *Walking on Water* was described by judges as “*compelling*” and “*seamless*”. Brandon explained: “*The work unites two experiences: the intimate, bodily sensation of floating and finding relief in water; and – inspired the biblical story of Moses and the parting of the Red Sea – the collective, almost mythological experience of crossing through water towards freedom*”.

Brandon’s love of music was nurtured as a pupil at Poole High School, in Dorset, during which time he was able to hear performances by the BSO. His earliest influences, in Equatorial Guinea, included music by Western artists, Bollywood and rap performers – he later found a deep and lasting love of the music of Beethoven and Mozart. Having reignited his musical purpose during the Covid pandemic, Roku Ali plans to use his winnings to host a concert in 2027 inspired by Beethoven.

Saxophonist Charlie Ashworth-Jerem – winner of the 18-24 category – enjoys performing Eugène Bozza’s *Pulcinella*, which he described as: “*a mythical and cheeky gremlin-like creature. It’s a fun piece to play*.” Having grown up in an arts-loving household, Ashworth-Jerem’s musical journey began as a pianist and boy chorister at Lincoln Cathedral, ahead of further studies at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, in Cardiff.

Judges described Charlie Ashworth-Jerem’s winning performance as “*confident*” with “*a real sense of fun and joy*”. A current postgraduate student at London’s **Royal College of Music**, he studies with Kyle Horch and Martin Robertson. Having also recently won the College’s prestigious Concerto Competition, Ashworth-Jerem is set to perform Henri Tomasi’s Saxophone Concerto next January.

Now in its second year the BSO Music-Making Competition is sponsored by **Lark Music**, part of **Howden, a specialist insurance provider dedicated to protecting musicians and their instruments**. Through its partnership with the BSO, Lark Music is proud to support the Music-Making Competition and wider initiatives that give more people the opportunity to play, perform and be heard. Find out more about Lark Music's support of the BSO and the Music-Making Competition at larkmusic.com/bso

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra's Chief Executive, Dougie Scarfe OBE DL, said:

"The BSO Music-Making Competition exists to inspire, encourage and initiate music-making – so to see such an outpouring of musicality from people across the UK is deeply moving. The range of talent and breadth of instrumentation on display confirms what we know to be true, that creativity is all around us if we take the time to listen. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who submitted a recording and shared their music-making with us - it means so much - and congratulations to the winning entrants, Charlie, Brandon and Jen."

Lark Music Insurance's Partnership Account Executive, Brian Hillstead, said:

"At Lark Music, we speak to musicians every day about protecting their instruments, so we're delighted to sponsor the BSO Music-Making Competition and support an initiative that celebrates the creativity, dedication, and passion behind those instruments. The standard of entries was exceptional, and we were inspired by the variety of instruments and musical styles on display, as well as the dedication each musician brought to their music-making. We are incredibly grateful to everyone who took the time to participate, and we send our congratulations to Charlie, Brandon and Jen. Bravo!"

A registered charity, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra exists to bring music into people's lives. In addition to its world-class concert hall performances, the Orchestra supports people of all ages and backgrounds across creative health and wellbeing, music education and community music-making. Last year, it delivered almost 48,000 participations in outreach activities, in 122 venues throughout the South West of England.

For further information, and to register interest in future competitions, visit bsolive.com/create – and to find out more about how the BSO and Lark Music work together to support accessibility in music-making, visit larkmusic.com/bso

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NOTES TO EDITORS

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1. Winners

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|-------|--|
| 18-24 | Charlie Ashworth-Jerem: Eugène Bozza's <i>Pulcinella</i> [saxophone] |
| 25-39 | Brandon Roku Ali: their own composition <i>Walking on Water</i> [piano] |
| 40 + | Jen Townsend: Edwin Roxburgh's <i>Stardrift</i> [flute] |

2. Judging panel
Presenter, Comedian and Musician **Helen Arney**
Sound Engineer **Chris Caton**
Musician **Tania Davis**
Conductor **Enyi Okpara**
Broadcaster and Writer **Tom Service**
Musician **Jesper Svedberg**
Guitarist, Presenter and Product Demonstrator **Dagan Wilkin**

3. High resolution images available on request.

4. **ABOUT BOURNEMOUTH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA** | bsolive.com

Chief Conductor – Mark Wigglesworth
Celebrated Composer – Thomas Adès | Artist-in-Residence – Boris Giltburg
Principal Guest Conductor — Chloé Van Soeterstède | Associate Guest Conductor – David Hill MBE
Conductor Laureate & Artistic Director, Voices from the East – Kirill Karabits OBE
Conductor Emeritus – Marin Alsop | Conductor Laureate – Andrew Litton
Calleva Assistant Conductor – Michal Oren

One of the UK's best-loved orchestras, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra (BSO) is known for championing the role of culture in people's lives. Based at Lighthouse, Poole, the Orchestra is resident in Bristol, Exeter, Portsmouth, Southampton and Yeovil, and performs in towns and villages across the region. A registered charity, it is the largest performing organisation in the South West of England, serving one of the biggest and most diverse regions in the UK.

Mark Wigglesworth became the Orchestra's Chief Conductor in 2024, and his opening seasons have magnified the BSO's reputation for the highest quality music-making. The Orchestra boasts an enviable list of named conductors, including Principal Guest Conductor **Chloé Van Soeterstède** alongside **Marin Alsop**, **David Hill MBE**, **Kirill Karabits**, **Andrew Litton** and new Calleva Assistant Conductor, **Michal Oren**.

In 2026/27, the BSO welcomes **Thomas Adès** as its Celebrated Composer in a series that shines a spotlight on new British music. The Orchestra shares eight performances, including one that Adès conducts – and local pupils will interact with his music through further events.

The Orchestra's **two-year Beethoven celebration: Road to Joy** runs from October 2026. Alongside symphonic performances, the series provides three immersive Beethoven Now weekends, delving deeper into the enduring legacy of the composer's music and humanity.

The BSO welcomes pianist **Boris Giltburg** as Artist-in-Residence, with five performances across the season. Further highlights include debut performances from conductor **Charlotte Corderoy**, pianists **Junyan Chen**, **Eva Gevorgyan**, **Isata Kanneh-Mason**, and violinist **Johan Delane**. The BSO's celebrated **Digital Concert series** continues into its seventh year, with 18 live performances broadcast globally from Poole – this year, supported by **Digital Concert Sponsor, Lark Music**.

Celebrated for its pioneering community-based **BSO Participate** work, the Orchestra brings music into people's lives beyond the concert hall thanks to a network of partnerships spanning health, care and music education; with a unique team of dynamic **BSO Associate and Young Associate Musicians** living in the heart of communities across the South West, it delivered more than 58,000 experiences last year. Its creative health programme continues to expand, with regular sessions at **Dorset County Hospital**, **Dorset HealthCare** sites, and **Southampton Hospitals Charity**. Several **Community and Wellbeing Orchestras** support a range of needs across the region from Bodmin, Boscombe and Bristol to Chard, Exeter, Newquay and Wincanton.

Following international attention for igniting change, **BSO Resound**, the world's first professional disabled-led ensemble at the core of a major orchestra, continues to challenge perceptions. The group joins conductors **Tom Fetherstonhaugh** and **Enyi Okpara** in 2026/27.

A National Portfolio of Arts Council England, the BSO is a registered charity and relies on generous philanthropic support from individual donors, gifts in wills, corporate partners, and charitable trusts and foundations.

5. **ABOUT LARK MUSIC INSURANCE** | larkmusic.com

Lark Music is part of Howden, a leading global insurance intermediary group with employee ownership at its heart. Founded in 1994, it provides insurance, reinsurance and underwriting services and solutions to clients ranging from private individuals to the largest multinational companies. The Group operates in 57 countries worldwide, employs over 24,000 people and manages premiums totally USD 50 billion on behalf of its clients.

For over 35 years, Lark Music has supported musicians by offering specialist, flexible and easy insurance solutions for musicians. We leave our customers free to focus on what is most important to them: making music happen, however they choose. Our passion for music underpins everything we do, from our personalised service to our partnerships with organisations who are dedicated to making music accessible to everyone.

For more information about Lark Music, our musical insurance policies, and the support we give to the BSO, visit larkmusic.com/bsa