



Photo Credit: Alexander L'Estrange.com

Composer Profile: Alexander L'Estrange (b. 1974)

Alexander L'Estrange is an award-winning British composer, arranger, jazz musician, choral animateur and workshop leader, of international acclaim.

He grew up in Oxford and attended New College School, during which time he was a member of New College Choir as chorister and soloist. And later went on to read Music at Merton College, Oxford, gaining a First Class Honours Master of Arts Degree in Music.

Although with a background in English choral tradition, Alexander's compositional voice is characterised by his love for jazz harmony and groove - he is a professional jazz pianist and double bassist, as well as a jazz examiner and trainer.

Alexander is passionate about music education and his belief in the importance of singing in our schools and communities informs his compositions. Utilising these together, he teaches choirs about rhythm, groove, style, audience communication, presentation and so much more.

Known for his charismatic and engaging leadership style and consummate musicianship, Alexander has led singers in choral workshops and performances throughout the UK, from school halls, to the Lyceum Theatre and Royal Albert Hall in London, and for the King's Singers' Summer School, as well as the American Choral Directors Association in the USA.

So far, Alexander has been best known for his popular series of large-scale choral works which draw together singers of all ages across the community.

The first of these was *Zimbe! Come, sing the songs of Africa!* - which is a 40-minute fusion of African song and jazz.

The ingenious piece took the choral world by storm when it was released in 2008, receiving 150 performances worldwide within its first five years, something of a record for a new choral piece, and firmly established L'Estrange as one of Britain's most popular living choral composers.

From the large-scale choral works which draw together all singers, to the more intimate sacred anthems and part-songs, it is this combination which has contributed to the universal appeal of Alexander's music.

It's no wonder that he's been dubbed "*the ideal 21st century musician*" by Howard Goodall CBE.

Zimbel's success has generated a series of commissions in a similar vein, each featuring a winning combination of SATB choir, unison children's choir and professional jazz quintet.

Large-scale choral works:

Ahoy! Sing for the Mary Rose (2013) is a fusion of Tudor songs and sea shanties, commissioned to commemorate the opening of Portsmouth's state-of-the-art museum; which houses the hull of King Henry VIII's warship, the *Mary Rose*.

Zadok rules – hallelujah! (2013) was commissioned by the Hanover Band to celebrate sixty years since the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

Based on Handel's coronation anthems, the piece is scored for SATB adult choir, unison children's choir and Baroque orchestra and the text traces all of Britain's monarchs from William the Conqueror to Elizabeth II.

Song Cycle – vive la vélorution! (2014) is a choral work comprising songs (both original and arranged) about cycling and the great outdoors, performed in York Minster at the opening of the Tour de France in 2014.

His *Wassail! Carols of Comfort and Joy* which won the Music Teachers Award for Best Classical Educational Initiative, was commissioned by the United Learning group and premiered in November 2017.

In 2018 came his next large-scale work written in collaboration with his wife, composer and lyricist Joanna Forbes L'Estrange - *Freedom! The power of song* (2018), commissioned by Salisbury Choral Society, and premiered by Salisbury Community Choir.

Other large-scale choral works include: *And the Stones Sing* and *Let All the World in Every Corner Sing*.

Small-scale choral works:

Alexander's choral anthems with organ include: *Lute-book lullaby* and *Tune me, O Lord*.

In 2016 the professional chamber choir Tenebrae recorded an album of L'Estrange's sacred and jazz inspired choral works, called "On Eagles' Wings".

Unaccompanied choral anthems include: *Love Comes Quietly*, *My Song is Love Unknown*, *Oculi Omnium*, *Epiphany Carol* (runner-up in the St Paul's Cathedral commission competition 2013) and *Prayers For Peace*; three settings of the prayers *God be in my head*, *Lighten our darkness* and *The Lord's prayer*.

Most of L'Estrange's compositions are published by Faber Music. However, since 2018 some of his more recent works have been self-published through his own record label *Andagio*.

Songs

L'Estrange's output as a songwriter includes secular songs: *Love's Philosophy*; three settings for solo voice and piano of poems by Shelley, Tennyson and Byron: *She walks in beauty*, *Now sleeps the crimson petal* and *Love's philosophy* – which are on the ABRSM singing syllabus.

Alexander has also written a one-woman musical, in collaboration with author Michelle Magorian, called *Hello Life!* and several jazz originals recorded on the album *New Things To Say* - by his jazz ensemble 'L'Estranges in the Night'.

Arrangements

Alexander is the go-to arranger for world-class vocal groups, and he has written hundreds of arrangements of songs from across the musical spectrum for Faber Music's Choral Basics series, for which he is consultant editor and chief arranger.

As a consummate arranger, he is highly sought after by the world's leading a cappella groups including The Swingle Singers, Amarcord, Voces 8, Tenebrae, and The King's Singers, for whom he arranged and produced the *Great American Songbook* in 2013, to great acclaim.

L'Estrange's stunning sacred choral music has been recorded by the award-winning chamber choir Tenebrae on the album *On Eagles' Wings*.

"On Eagles' Wings is an album I will return to again and again; I recommend it warmly to all lovers of choral music" - John Rutter

Television

Alexander composed the theme tune and incidental music for the BBC's CBeebies programme *Magic Hands* (2012), recorded by his sons, Toby and Harry L'Estrange.

He also writes for the market-leading television production music company Audio Network Ltd with his music featuring on such television programmes as *The One Show*, *Grand Designs* and *Antiques Roadshow*.

"If you had to create from scratch the perfect 21st century musician, Alexander L'Estrange would be your template." - Howard Goodall

"Alexander has a rapport with performers which is rare and charismatic. His sympathy for and understanding of an extremely wide variety of musical styles and traditions makes him a superb communicator and musical director. He is a wicked bass and piano player and does the best vocal warm-ups in the world. Plus, he's really nice, very generous with his time and effort, and delightfully unstuffy and modest about his musical brilliance." - Howard Goodall CBE

"I have had the privilege to be an ABRSM examiner for 33 years now and yesterday was one of the highlights of those 3+ decades. Mark and Alexander have now honed their business down to a very fine art. Their unquestionable accomplished musicianship and presenting skills shone throughout the day. I was totally engaged and involved from 10:00 until 17:00. I enjoyed every minute. I didn't really need to write much down as important issues were presented in such a way that the message just stuck in the brain." - Robert Pell, Head of Academic Studies at the Junior Guildhall School of Music

"As a serial commissioner of choral works over many years, it is a real pleasure and honour to engage in a collaboration of such quality with Alexander L'Estrange."

"Alexander L'Estrange is a many-sided composer of prodigious gifts and this is an album I will return to again and again ... one gorgeous piece after another, in pristine, dew-fresh performances by the ever-wonderful Tenebrae." - Choral composer John Rutter (of "On Eagles' Wings" disc)

“L’Estrange’s [sacred choral] works add a jazz-infused chordal depth and a roving harmonic eye to Howells’s declamatory muscularity and modal palette. It’s attractive, approachable music. This is sacred music written to be used.” - Gramophone Magazine

“It is unusual and deeply gratifying to find a ‘voice’ like Alexander L’Estrange’s... Approachable, highly popular but, at the same time, beautifully crafted and full of integrity ... this is the music of someone steeped in a great tradition since childhood, bringing new life and creative vigour to what he so loves and understands.” - Conductor Simon Halsey CBE (“On Eagles’ Wings”)

“Alexander L’Estrange is the added ninth of contemporary church music—his eminently practical music combining the utmost respect for the tradition with a gently subversive wit. Nigel Short and the expert singers of Tenebrae warmly embrace these exciting new works.” - Hyperion Records

“Alexander L’Estrange is a great and innovative arranger, surely one of the best we have around.” - Music Teacher Magazine

“Alexander L’Estrange’s delicious arrangements go naughtily off-piste and the CD, all a cappella, is superb.” - The Times, The King’s Singers “Great American Songbook” CD