

Ragazze Quartet presents:

They Can't Burn Us All / Let them burn

a new theatrical song cycle about witches of the past and the present

They Can't Burn Us All / Let Them Burn is a powerful new song cycle for string quartet and voice by acclaimed composer **Freya Waley-Cohen**, performed by world-renowned tenor **Ian Bostridge** and the adventurous **Ragazze Quartet**, directed by the bold and visionary **Nina Spijkers**.

This international collaboration brings together leading voices in contemporary music and theatre to explore one burning question: why does female power still provoke fear? Drawing inspiration from historical witch trials, the work explores the male psyche on this subject, weaves past and present into a striking reflection on how women's voices have been silenced — and how they rise again.

Waley-Cohen, celebrated for her expressive and imaginative compositions, continues her fascination with the figure of the witch. Following her opera *WITCH* (2022, Royal Academy of Music) and the song cycle *Spell Book* (2024), she now turns her gaze outward — from the myths of history to the women of today.

The Ragazze Quartet, known for pushing the boundaries of chamber music and for tackling urgent social themes, joins forces with Bostridge, whose deep historical insight into witchcraft (his Oxford D.Phil. focused on its role in English public life, 1650–1750) adds a unique layer of meaning to the performance.

Stage director Nina Spijkers brings her fearless feminist vision to the production. Renowned for her subversive reinterpretations — such as reversing gender roles in *The Taming of the Shrew* and reframing eighteenth-century works through the #MeToo era — Spijkers transforms *They Can't Burn Us All / Let Them Burn* into a contemporary ritual of defiance and liberation.

A poetic, provocative, and deeply human work — one that asks not only what it means to be a “witch,” but what it means to be a woman who refuses to be burned.



Credits: Nichon Glerum, from *The World's Wife*

Credits

Composer: Freya Waley-Cohen

Librettist: Freya Waley-Cohen

Stage director: Nina Spijkers

Duration: 70 min

Tour: Summer 2027, Season 2027/2028

Performers:

Tenor Ian Bostridge

Ragazze Quartet

Who are involved?

Freya Waley-Cohen is a London-based composer known for her music that blends earthy rhythmic play with fragility, luminous textures, and an otherworldly quality. Her work has been commissioned and performed by leading ensembles and institutions, including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, BBC Proms, Wigmore Hall, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, The King's Singers, and the Manchester Collective, as well as at festivals such as Aldeburgh, Presteigne, Santa Fe, and Cheltenham.

Recent highlights include her dramatic song cycle *Spell Book*, staged at Longborough Festival Opera, and her opera *WITCH* (2022, Royal Academy of Music), which was nominated for a 2022 Ivors Composer Award. She has also created immersive works and installations, including *Permutations* (2017), a synthesis of music and architecture.

Waley-Cohen has held residencies and associate positions at Wigmore Hall, St. David's Hall, Snape Maltings, and with Nonclassical, and she was awarded the Royal Philharmonic Society Composition Prize in 2017. Her music is released on Signum, Nimbus, Nonclassical, Delphian, Platoon, and NMC records. Upcoming projects include new works for the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and a song cycle for Roderick Williams.



Ian Bostridge CBE is one of the world's leading tenors, renowned for his interpretations of Schubert and Britten. His distinguished career has taken him to major concert halls and opera houses including Carnegie Hall, Teatro alla Scala, the Bayerische Staatsoper and La Monnaie. In opera, he has earned acclaim for roles such as Aschenbach (*Death in Venice*) and Peter Quint (*The Turn of the Screw*).

A prolific recording artist, Bostridge's numerous award-winning albums have received 15 Grammy nominations. His recent recording of Schubert's *Winterreise* with Thomas Adès (Pentatone) was named Vocal Recording of the Year at the 2020 International Classical Music Awards.

Bostridge has held artistic residencies at venues such as the Vienna Konzerthaus, Barbican Centre, Wigmore Hall and Carnegie Hall, and has performed with leading orchestras under conductors including Sir Simon Rattle, Riccardo Muti and Daniel Barenboim.

Credits: Kalpesh Lathigra

Also an acclaimed author and scholar, his books *Schubert's Winter Journey: Anatomy of an Obsession* (2014) and *Song and Self* (2023) explore the intersection of music, literature and identity. He was appointed Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in 2004.

Whether they play well-known classics, works by neglected composers (m/f/x) or new talent, the **Ragazze Quartet** always fully commits itself to renewing, broadening and making the string quartet culture even more exciting. Restrictions do not deter them, but seem to attract them, which ensures a continuous stream of own projects and collaborations that stretch the string quartet genre.

In adventurous productions of their own, they address socially relevant themes such as climate, the history of slavery, mourning and feminism, working with special partners such as Abel Selaocoe, Conny Jansen Danst, Jorinde Keesmaat, Lucia Lucas, Via Berlin, Thomas Beijer, Nynke Laverman, and the Kronos Quartet.

They also regularly make exciting contributions to the renewal of the string quartet repertoire through commissioned compositions and special arrangements. For example, Aftab Darvishi, Caroline Shaw, Garth Knox, Calliope Tsoupaki, Annelies Van Parys, and Seung-Won Oh composed new works for the quartet.

Ragazze is a permanent artist with CD label Channel Classics and has released no fewer than ten albums with them already. Ragazze Quartet is curator of festival September Me.



Credits: Valentina Vos



Nina Spijkers (1988) is a Dutch theatre and opera director. She graduated in Drama and Theatre Studies at the University of Kent and studied directing at the Amsterdamse Hogeschool voor de Kunsten. In 2015, she won the Top Naeff Award for promising students.

Her most important productions to date include *The Nether* at Het Nationale Theater in The Hague, *The Taming of the Shrew* at Municipal Theatre Groningen, *Avventure di anima e di corpo* with Silbersee and DNO, *Seawall* with Zeelandia, *Ivanov* with Toneelschuur producties, *Dangerous Liaisons* with Bos Theaterproducties. Her production *Laura H.* with Toneelgroep Oostpool at the Internationaal Theater Amsterdam was selected for the Dutch Theatre Festival 2017.

Nina Spijkers developed *Kafka*, a musical theatre adaptation of Kafka's parable 'Before the Law' from *The Trial*, with the Cappella Amsterdam orchestra. She successfully staged *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at Volksoper Wien in 2023 and returns to Vienna for *Eine Nacht in Venedig* in 2025.