

POLARIS

SAXOPHONE & HARP DUO

"What a joy it was to hear this unusual pairing of instruments...the sax was beautifully controlled and the harp rich in sound, resulting in a beautiful colour to the music. With their musicality and engaging stage presence they are already well accomplished. They are destined to be rising stars of the future."

- Peter Ruddock (Ribfest)



Gillian Blair (saxophone) and Elinor Nicholson (harp) formed the Polaris Duo in 2011 whilst studying at the Royal Northern College of Music. They have since been exploring an eclectic range of repertoire and possibilities for this unusual instrumentation.

The duo perform regularly around the UK and recently made their international debut in Croatia at the World Saxophone Congress. They have performed at UK venues including the Bridgewater Hall, Buxton Opera House, Warwick University and the International Anthony Burgess Foundation as well as regularly performing for music societies. They are BBC Introducing Artists, were 2nd prize winners in the British Harp Chamber Music Competition and have been featured in the Lake District Summer Music 'New Generation Artists' Concert Series.

The Polaris Duo is dedicated to presenting new music and expanding the repertoire for this uncommon pairing of instruments. The duo enjoy arranging existing works and commissioning new music from composers which has led to them giving UK, European and World premieres of numerous works. Their most recent commissions include compositions by Melissa Douglas and Paul Mitchell-Davidson. In July they will be collaborating with composer Gavin Wayte on an Arts Council England funded project to create a new work alongside pupils from a local school.

They released their debut album; 'illuminate' in April 2018. The music featured includes original works by Manchester based composers Andy Scott, Rob Buckland and Melissa Douglas alongside arrangements of works by well known composers including C.P.E. Bach and Camille Saint-Saëns.

In addition to their work as performers, the Polaris Duo is passionate about education and outreach and has delivered workshops for the 'Classical Kids' Concert Series and Piccadilly Symphony Orchestra's Outreach Programme. They are proud to be artists for Yehudi Menuhin's 'Live Music Now' Scheme where they perform to people who may not normally have the opportunity to experience live music.

www.polarisduo.com

Gillian Blair - Saxophone

Praised for her *'flawless and accomplished'* performances (Peterborough Telegraph) and *'honest and genuine music-making'* (D'Addario Competition), Gillian Blair enjoys a varied career as a classical saxophonist, chamber musician and educator. She has won first prize in competitions including the International Young Musician Competition at the Llangollen Eisteddfod, the D'Addario Single Reed Competition, the RNCM Woodwind Competition, the Charles Scarratt Award for Young Musicians and the RNCM's Sir John Manduell Prize.

As a soloist, she has performed around Europe, North America and Asia at festivals and concert series' including the BBC Proms, EurSax, Koganei Miyajigakki Hall (Tokyo), PepsiCo Recital Hall (Texas), University of Arkansas, World Saxophone Congress, Oklahoma State University, North American Saxophone Alliance Conference, the Palaver Festival and several broadcasts on BBC Radio 3. She has appeared as a guest soloist with ensembles including the Band of the Coldstream Guards, Commonwealth String Orchestra, Piccadilly Symphony Orchestra, University of Arkansas Saxophone Ensemble, City of Peterborough Symphony Orchestra, Wirral Symphony Orchestra, Bolton Chamber Orchestra, the RNCM Percussion Ensemble and the RNCM Saxophone Orchestra.

Gillian is passionate about chamber music and performs regularly with the Polaris Duo, the Borealis Saxophone Quartet and the Blair/Mertens Duo. She has also worked with larger ensembles including the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestra of Opera North, the Royal Northern Sinfonia, European Union Youth Wind Orchestra, Piccadilly Symphony Orchestra, Soundscape Chamber Orchestra and the Tenor Saxophone Collective.

Gillian holds Bachelors and Masters degrees from the Royal Northern College of Music where she studied with Rob Buckland, Carl Raven and Andy Scott. During her studies she was a finalist in the RNCM's prestigious Concerto and Gold Medal competitions and upon graduating, she was awarded the Timothy Reynish Award for outstanding contribution to the RNCM.

Gillian is an active educator and is on the faculty at the Junior Royal Northern College of Music and the Universities of Sheffield and Huddersfield. She has presented masterclasses around the UK and USA and enjoys leading workshops for woodwind days and summer schools, as well as visiting schools and care homes as a musician for 'Live Music Now'.

Gillian is a Henri Selmer Paris Artist and a Vandoren UK Artist.

www.gillianblair.com

Elinor Nicholson - Harp

Award-winning Scottish harpist Elinor Nicholson graduated from the Royal Northern College of Music with a Masters in Music (Distinction) in 2016 and a Bachelor of Music with first class honours in 2014. Whilst at the RNCM, Elinor was twice a finalist in the Gold Medal competition and won the prestigious RNCM Concerto Competition in 2016, which resulted in a performance of Debussy's 'Dances' for harp and string orchestra.

Professionally Elinor has performed in some of the country's most notable concert halls, including; Royal Albert Hall, Symphony Hall (Birmingham), Sage Gateshead, Royal Glasgow Concert Hall and the Bridgewater Hall. She regularly performs with ensembles such as the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Northern Ballet.

Elinor regularly performs with her two chamber duos, Meridiem and Polaris. The Polaris Duo recently recorded their debut CD 'illuminate', which features works for Saxophone and Harp. Most recently they have been selected as 'BBC Introducing Artists' and have subsequently had their music broadcast on BBC Radio 3. Elinor's flute and harp duo, Meridiem, regularly perform for music societies across the UK and are looking forward to performing Mozart's 'Flute and Harp Concerto' in 2019 with Sale Chamber Orchestra. Most recently, Elinor has performed extensively with CLOUDS – a genre-defying harp quartet. The ensemble performs folk-inspired original compositions by Esther Swift and have recently recorded a new CD titled 'Up She Rises' which was released alongside a UK tour in May.

Elinor is passionate about performing music in outreach settings and works regularly for Yehudi Menuhin's ground-breaking scheme 'Live Music Now!', which sends musicians to perform in schools, care homes, hospitals and day centres. Elinor is fellowship musician on the LMN scheme and is spending a year working in a special school, supporting children's musical and personal development.

www.elinorharp.com