**Joanna Marsh Long Biography**

Joanna Marsh, an award-winning British composer, has established herself as a significant figure in contemporary classical music. Hailed by *The Guardian* as “one of today’s leading composers for the voice,” Marsh’s work is celebrated for its emotional depth, structural clarity, and ability to resonate on both intimate and grand scales.

Born in Bolton but raised in South Wales, Joanna’s early exposure to music came through her parents, who would soothe their young children to sleep with a record collection dominated by Romantic symphonies. The family also had a piano, and from an early age, Joanna enjoyed improvising and creating short pieces on it. Her father, Leslie, a Methodist minister, encouraged both his daughters to learn the organ, and they gained early public experience by playing at Sunday services when local Methodist churches were in need of an organist. At 12, Joanna attended Kingswood School in Bath, which at the time was predominantly attended by the children of Methodist ministers. There, she won a music scholarship and became increasingly focused on the organ, later pursuing her studies at the Royal Academy of Music (1988–89) and as an organ scholar at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge (1989–1992).

After graduating, Joanna began her career as a school organist, first at Cranleigh School (1992–94), followed by St. Peter’s, York (1994–97), and later Christ’s Hospital (1997–2000). During these years, she continued composing, primarily for ensembles she conducted. Encouraged by the warm reception her music received from colleagues, she chose to pursue composition more seriously. She began taking lessons with Richard Blackford and later with Judith Bingham, who became a pivotal mentor, guiding her in shaping a professional path as a composer.

Joanna Marsh’s compositional output spans a broad spectrum of genres, from orchestral and choral works to chamber music and song. Her pieces frequently delve into intricate polyphonic textures rich in harmonic dissonances and suspensions, reflecting her early fascination with medieval and Renaissance music. Her voice as a composer is recognized as having a distinctively contemporary edge, while embodying the craftsmanship of those formative influences.

Joanna’s music has been widely performed internationally, and she has been commissioned by prestigious ensembles, including the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. Her BBC Radio 3 20-minute commission *SEEN* was featured by the BBC Singers at the 2023 Proms. For this work, Joanna collaborated with librettist Fiona Lindsay on a text exploring the stories of famous women from Greek mythology that have been misinterpreted over time. The work also incorporated live electronics by multi-instrumentalist and music producer Glen Scott.

In recent years, Joanna has enjoyed a special relationship with Cambridge choirs. In 2023, she was commissioned to write a triptych of anthems for The Choir of St John’s College, Cambridge, which included the prestigious opportunity to write for the college’s annual Advent broadcast. She also completed a five-year residency with the Choir of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, which culminated in the release of her album *Sanctifica Nos* in 2021. In 2022, she was honoured with a prestigious Ivor Novello Composer Award for her composition *All Shall Be Well*, praised by the panel as “a superbly crafted, elegantly original, and beautifully wrought work for voices.”

Joanna Marsh’s life in the Middle East since 2007 has opened up unique creative opportunities, including composing for the inauguration of the Burj Khalifa and writing a fanfare for Queen Elizabeth II’s visit to Abu Dhabi. Living in Dubai, where there is no government-funded arts sector, Joanna has had to be proactive in creating opportunities, drawing on her deep network of collaborators and commissioners across the UK and Europe, while frequently engaging with artists visiting the region. Her 2020 album *Flare* takes its name from her commission for the BBC Symphony Orchestra. The piece was inspired by the short story “Oil Field” by the Saudi writer Mohammed Hasan Alwan. The album also features performances by the BBC Singers, London Mozart Players, and The Choir of Royal Holloway, University of London, who commissioned her cantata *Pearl of Freedom* with librettist David Pountney. This work, which tells the story of suffragette Emily Davison, premiered on the centenary of the Representation of the People Act.

Beyond her commissioned work, Marsh is deeply reflective about the creative process. She champions boldness in compositional choices, urging others to take risks and trust their instincts. A dedicated mentor to young composers, she is also a passionate advocate for creative expression in all its forms.