

Jules Buckley

Despite his relative youth at just 45 years of age, famed conductor Jules Buckley is about to celebrate his 25th BBC Proms performance. Fresh from his concert with Grammy-winning singer Arooj Aftab and acclaimed composer Ibrahim Maalouf, on 3 September he will be taking to the stage of the Royal Albert Hall once again for a hotly-anticipated collaboration with American pop sensation St Vincent.

The St Vincent concert will be your 25th BBC Proms. What do you remember of your very first performance?

When I did my first couple of Proms, I really had a lot to learn. I guess I felt like there was something I could bring to the large ensemble world, but looking back on it, I was probably surviving by the skin of my teeth. The first one was in 2010 with Jamie Cullum and the Heritage Orchestra, and my abiding memory was just this sense of awe and joy being involved in a festival that I'd seen so many times as a kid. The BBC Proms is so well respected around the world for championing new music and also looking after great music.

You've worked with some major names from the pop world during your career, including Florence + the Machine, Tori Amos and Boy George. How did this latest collaboration with St Vincent come about?

It's been a three-year journey, in the way of general discussions. St Vincent is one of those artists, if you look at her discography, every record is just crazily different from the next. She has a kinship to Bowie in that regard, in that she changes character. I find that I'm attracted to artists who are that devoted to their craft. So at the moment we're elbows-deep into the arrangements for that. The process is really rewarding, but also very challenging.

You're performing songs from across St Vincent's career. How do you decide what tracks to do?

I have a very simple process with most projects where I spend three or four days doing mundane tasks, like moving loads of boxes or tidying up the loft, and I put on the entire back catalogue and listen to everything on repeat and I have a notebook, and I make notes as I'm going. Then after about three or four days, as with St Vincent, I read through everything and make a big playlist, then I'll start killing all the darlings as the second phase, and then the third phase is bringing it down to a concert length of material. So I presented this playlist to Annie [Clark, St Vincent's real name], and she was really into it and up for playing stuff that was from very early in her career, right up to now.

Are you already eyeing up collaborations for next year's BBC Proms?

I try to plan about a year and a half to two years ahead. When you're dealing with a commercial artist, if they've got a record out, they're often touring, and if they don't have a

record out they're often in the studio writing a new one. So the tricky part is about trying to forge collaborations with artists is fitting into their cycle. So myself and my team, we always tend to put out the feelers and ideas early. But you know, I don't take it for granted. When you're hitting 25 BBC Proms, I could just be commentating or something on the next one!

Is there an artist you've love to work with, or an album you'd love to perform live, like you did with Florence + the Machine's Lungs LP?

I would go back to something quite old, or for me, somehow nostalgic, so something from the early 90s, I reckon. I've always thought Eddie Vedder from Pearl Jam has an incredible voice for an orchestra. And I've tried Tom Waits a few times, but I got a polite shutdown. As regards an album, though, I'd love to perform Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon.

Do you find that your audiences are younger and more diverse than for standard orchestral performances?

Yes, it's really cool. I think it's a combination of listening habits, of how music is available, and also how much accessibility to music understanding there is from online like YouTube tutorials. A lot of the boxes have gone away compared to how it used to be, which is a really heartwarming place to be.

You've been at this a long time, but you still get nervous before a concert?

Not if I'm prepared. I've sometimes been a victim of my own lust for life. There's nothing worse than if you're going out on stage and you're not prepared as a conductor. One time I did that when I was very young, and it was probably the greatest lesson of my life in terms of my work. These days I'm happy being older and knowing exactly what I can and can't do. I don't piss around with stuff that people can do so much better than me.

What's next for you? You've previously teased your first album – what stage is it currently at?

I'm halfway through. From a time standpoint, I need to get to the end of October, and then I've got the space to get this thing finished. I guess you could say it's going to come out at the end of 2026 which is about four years after I planned on it! All of the music I've written is there, I've just got to finish it. It's not like I've had a crisis of creativity or something, it's that I'm not very good at doing two or three things at the same time – that's an Achilles' heel of mine!