



Presented by the *Black British Classical Foundation*, this competition showcases the commonwealth's finest Black and South Asian singers, as they launch their international operatic careers.

Twelve singers will be shortlisted and brought to the UK in October 2025. After a series of Preliminary Rounds, five singers will progress to the Gala Final, where they will perform a twenty minute programme with orchestra, on 25th October at Fairfield Halls, Croydon, London. The judging panel will comprise of esteemed opera singers, representatives of major opera houses, conservatoires and other opera aficionados.

The Sir Willard White Trophy and £10,000 will be awarded to the overall winner of the competition.

The Samuel Coleridge Taylor Trophy and a specially written Song Cycle will be awarded for the best performance of a song by a Black composer.

The Voice of Black Opera (VOBO) Competition 2025

Eligibility Criteria

- Professional singers of Black or South Asian origin/heritage and holding a passport from one of the 56 commonwealth member states.
- A minimum age limit of 20 years on **25th October 2025**.
- Required to be available for competition commitments in London from **15th October to 27th October**, with the Final at Fairfield Halls on 25th October.
N.B. It is the Applicants responsibility to ensure they have the right to travel to/from and to remain in the UK for the purposes of competing in this competition.

Prizes

Sir Willard White Trophy

For the overall winner

- £10,000

Samuel Coleridge Taylor Trophy

For the best performance of a song by a Black composer

- 3 paid performances of a commissioned song cycle by a prominent Black composer

Finalists

- Five prominent Black British fashion designers will create a red carpet look, highlighting African fabrics for each Finalist.
- Finalists will also sing a duet as part of their 20-minute programme (preferred duet repertoire must be detailed at the point of application) The duet can be with a Soprano, Tenor or Baritone.

Non-Finalists

- The seven non-finalists will be invited to a public Masterclass working on a piece of their choice. Non-finalists will also attend outreach workshops with local schools students who will be invited to attend the Gala Final as guests.

All Contestants

- All contestants will prepare a group song/spiritual that will be sung before the announcement of the winners.

Application Requirements

All applicants must fill in the **application form** at the following link <https://forms.gle/Q28Gk8McUpSzUDPFA>, including a short biography and repertoire choices for the Preliminary Round and the Final. Singers with **specific access requirements** should indicate this with their initial application. Please also email the following documentation to competitionmanager@bbcf.uk:

- **A photo/scan of your current passport** showing photo, nationality and date of birth Please note, your passport must be valid for six months after 27th October 2025.
- **A letter of recommendation** from a singing teacher, conservatoire, or opera house with whom you have recently worked. If the letter is not in English, you must provide an English translation.
- **A completed measurements chart & full-length photo** for the designers to design a bespoke fashion item for the finalists. This chart is available on the Black British Classical Foundation Website.
- **Three audition video links** recorded within the last twelve months. We recommend uploading your unedited video onto YouTube and sending the *unlisted* link.

Recorded audition repertoire should include:

- Two Operatic Arias (contrasting in style and language)
- One Art Song, sung in the original language
- **Notification if a visa is required to visit the United Kingdom.**

The audition committee will hear all applications submitted online and make their assessments based on the following criteria: vocal quality, technical skill, musical and linguistic presentation, attention to text, artistic personality, and potential as future operatic performers.

The deadline for applications is Midnight (BST), 13th July 2025.

Twelve singers will be shortlisted for the Preliminary Rounds in October 2025 to perform their initial audition pieces, plus a contemporary song written or arranged by a Black or South Asian Composer at one public concert in London, accompanied by one of the Competition's official accompanists. From those singers, five Finalists will be selected for the Gala Final on **25th October 2025** (plus one singer in reserve).

Applicants will be notified whether they have been shortlisted for the Preliminary Round no later than 1st August 2025, and will have 24 hours to confirm their participation.

Enquiries should be emailed to the Black British Classical Foundation at:
competitionmanager@BBCF.uk

The final will take place at Fairfield Halls on 25th October 2025, with prior coaching sessions and rehearsals, and will include a mixed programme of songs and opera accompanied by the Orchestra of the Black British Classical Foundation, conducted by Enyi Okpara.

Repertoire Choices

Please submit all your programmes at time of application.

For any non-standard repertoire, we may ask the contestant to supply a piano vocal score.

Preliminary Round:

A programme of up to 15 minutes, accompanied by piano, with an option to include all or some of your original audition pieces, or to present alternative pieces. The programme must include two operatic arias in their original languages and keys, one art song in the original language, and additionally, one song written or arranged by a Black or South Asian composer (see below for a non-exhaustive list of composers).

Finals

All applicants must choose a programme of up to 20 minutes, to include a duet with a leading operatic Soprano, Tenor or Baritone. The programme must also include at least two operatic arias and one song (including spirituals) written or arranged by a Black or South Asian composer (see a non-exhaustive list of composers below. Other choices are acceptable).

The Competition organisers reserve the right to select, from the singers list of options, the repertoire choices they feel are best suited and which provide a balanced programme for the audience. Once the programme items have been agreed for the Final, no changes will be possible due to the sourcing and creation of orchestral parts. However, there may be flexibility for the Preliminary Round repertoire changes nearer the time.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Julius Eastman (1940 - 1990) • Undine Smith Moore (1904 - 1989) • Julia Perry (1924 - 1979) • George Walker (1922 - 2018) • Margaret Bonds (1913 - 1972) • Errollyn Wallen CBE (b. 1958) • Daniel Kidane (b. 1986) • Hannah Kendall (b.1984) • Eleanor Alberga (b. 1949) • Philip Herbert • Pamela Z (b.1956) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nkeiru Okoye (b.1972) • Adolphus Hailstork (b. 1941) • Justinian Tamusuza (b. 1951) • Zenobia Powell Perry (1908 - 2004) • Tania León (b. 1943) • Shirley Thompson OBE (b. 1958) • George Lewis (b. 1952) • Param Vir (b. 1952) • Samir Odeh-Tamini (b. 1970) • Sinta Wullur (b. 1958) • Joyce Bee Tuan Koh *b. 1976)
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Allowances

Preliminary Rounds, Masterclasses, Rehearsals & Concert in London, UK

- Bed and Breakfast accommodation in London (for those not living within a 30 mile radius of **Fairfield Halls**).
- Return Travel from home to London, (either a standard rail fare for singers based in the UK, or economy airfare for participants from abroad).
- No bookings should be made for non-refundable travel until approval has been received from VOBO.

N.B. Please note that a fixed contribution of £20 will be paid towards lunch and an evening meal for each day applicants are required to stay away from home.

Application Conditions

Decisions of the organisers, audition committee and judges are at their absolute discretion and are not subject to correspondence, either verbal or written. By applying, the applicant agrees to abide by these conditions and agrees not to make any claim against the *Black British Classical Foundation* or the organisers regarding auditions and all aspects of the Competition process.

Broadcast Coverage

A broadcast partner is being identified for the competition. By applying, the applicant gives consent to the filming, recording and photography of their participation in the competition, and any associated promotional activity, for use by the broadcaster and organisers across the associated television and radio channels and as online content to promote the competition in perpetuity and on all platforms.