

Some radio highlights on BBC Radio 4 this December



Even though it is a busy time of year we often spend more time listening to the radio or watching TV.

On Radio 4 this festive season there will be some stellar guests on Desert Island Discs with Kirsty Young.

She will meet The Boss, Bruce Springsteen, on 18 December 2016. He explained how he chose the music he would take to the island with him : "This is the music that electrified me – they galvanised me into changing my life in some way."

On Christmas Day itself Gareth Malone who is the celebrity choirmaster will tell us what he will be singing at home this Christmas, and what music inspires him.

Sir Kenneth Grange may not be a name which is well-known to you but you will know all the things he has designed. He is responsible for the Intercity 125, the parking meter, the Kodak Instamatic camera and the Kenwood mixer. About his work he said: "Everything I design starts with a purpose, everything should be better than it was before." He will be on the programme on New Year's Day.

- Bruce Springsteen: Sunday 18 December, 11.15am
- Gareth Malone: Sunday 25 December, 11.15am
- Sir Kenneth Grange: Sunday 1 January, 11.15am
- Producers: Cathy Drysdale (BS) Paula McGinley (GM) and Sarah Taylor (KG) for the BBC

And one of my own personal music favourites Tori Amos will have a cameo role in Neil Gaiman's Stardust which will be

broadcast on 17 and 18 December.

Amos makes her Radio 4 acting debut as the Copper Beech Tree in Stardust, a role originally created for her by Gaiman, whilst Gaiman plays Seth, a resident of the village of Wall who is on guard duty when a basket containing a baby (Tristran Thorn) is pushed through the gap in the wall. The two have long been friends and have referenced each other repeatedly in their work.

Tori Amos says: "Being this tree has been the highlight of my fantasy life for so many years, so much so that I actually wrote about it in my song Horses. So it was great to make my fantasy come true by being able to give voice to the copper beech in this production."

The cast of the two-part dramatisation stars Matthew Beard (The Imitation Game, An Education, One Day) as Tristran Thorn and Sophie Rundle (Peaky Blinders, Happy Valley, Episodes) as Yvaine.

Glenda Jackson is King Lear on BBC Radio 4 this Boxing Day

Following the success of Glenda Jackson's performance as Lear at the Old Vic, directed for the stage by Deborah Warner, Radio 4 presents the radio dramatisation of this startling production, directed for radio by Susan Roberts and Pauline Harris.



On Boxing Day 1606, the play performed for King James I and his court was a new play by William Shakespeare – King Lear. Four hundred and ten years later, the cast of the Old Vic production assemble to bring this immortal play to radio in a two and a half hour dramatisation.

Glenda Jackson said : "This is a very exciting prospect for us

all. It will be very interesting to see how the play transfers from stage to microphone [and radio]. I look forward to it.”

Jackson is joined by Old Vic cast mates including Celia Imrie as Goneril, Jane Horrocks as Regan, Harry Melling as Edgar and Rhys Ifans as the Fool. This production marks Jackson’s return to the stage after a 25 year absence.

In addition, Glenda Jackson will shed light on making the role of Lear her own, at the Old Vic and on radio, in a documentary on Radio 4 which airs on Christmas Day.

Glenda Jackson and the Making of King Lear

- 25 December, 11pm
- Producer: Pauline Harris

The US Elections are given a much needed Disney-style fairy tale make over on BBC Radio 4 and cabaret meets Brexit in these two 15 minute musicals, both starring Jess Robinson, Dave Lamb and Richie Webb.

- Thursday 29 and Friday 30 December, 6.15pm
- Producer: Katie Tyrrell for BBC Studios

For the gardeners among you there is a Gardener’s Time Question Time recorded at 10 Downing Street. This will include an interview with Head Gardener Paul Schooling who has worked there for the last 27 years. The recording was made in The State Dining Room.

Paul Schooling said : “When Margaret Thatcher lived at Number 10, a rose from the garden was cut every day and put in her study, but when I arrived the roses needed changing. Then, John Major wanted a rose arch so we put that in and put in some new roses, which are still there now.

“When Margaret Thatcher came back for a reception, she noticed what we’d done and I got a bit of a ticking off for it. She said: ‘Why have the roses been changed? There was nothing wrong with them.’ But you couldn’t argue – you just had to take it.”

▪ Sunday 25 December, 2pm

And our very own Alexander McCall Smith has written some special stories set at Christmas-time and featuring the giving of gifts.

Ranging from a generous 75-year-old German female owner of a Wall of Death, to the dutiful President of an Eastern European country attending to the poor; from a hot-tempered Canadian chef discovering humility, to an enterprising elderly Professor escaping the confines of a compassion-free care home; and not forgetting Cousin Grace who, over a very dry Martini, shares her adventures in love (just the four marriages, so far) with three rapt young relatives.

▪ Monday 19-Friday 23 December, 10.45pm

And on Christmas Eve at 3pm

Live from the candlelit Chapel of King’s College, Cambridge and based around nine Bible readings interspersed with Christmas hymns and carols sung by the world-famous chapel choir. For many around the world, A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, live from the candlelit Chapel of King’s College, Cambridge, marks the beginning of Christmas.

It is based around nine Bible readings which tell the story of the loving purposes of God. They are interspersed with carols old and new, sung by the world-famous chapel choir who also lead the congregation in traditional Christmas hymns.

The College's Director of Music Stephen Cleobury says: "The commissioned carol this year is by Michael Berkeley, who has set the mediaeval poem This Ender Night. The first carol I commissioned (in 1983) was from Michael's father, Lennox, who is represented in this service by his I Sing Of A Maiden.

"Significant anniversaries of two composers strongly connected with the carol repertoire and the King's service are marked. Charles Wood (1866-1926) popularised Ding Dong! Merrily On High, and this is included in the recent arrangement by the American composers Mack Wilberg and Peter Stevens. Harold Darke (1888-1976) directed the King's Choir during Boris Ord's absence on war service in the early 1940s. His evergreen In The Bleak Midwinter is included.

"Although the main focus this year is on recent British composers, there are carols in French, German and Spanish, as well as settings not previously heard at King's of the well-known texts Adam Lay Ybounden (composed by Gaynor Howard) and of the Sussex Carol (in an arrangement by Bryan Kelly)."

- Hymn: Once in Royal David's City (desc. Cleobury)
- Bidding Prayer read by the Dean
- A Babe is born (Mathias)
- First lesson: Genesis 3 vv 8-19 read by a Chorister
- Jesus Christ the apple tree (Poston)
- Adam lay ybounden (Gaynor Howard)
- Second lesson: Genesis 22 vv 15-18 read by a Choral Scholar
- Riu, riu chiu (Flecha the Elder)
- In dulci jubilo (H. Praetorius)
- Third lesson: Isaiah 9 vv 2, 6-7 read by a representative of the Cambridge Churches
- Sussex Carol (arr. Brian Kelly)
- Hymn: O Little Town of Bethlehem (arr. Vaughan Williams)
- Fourth lesson: Isaiah 11 vv 1-3a, 4a, 6-9 read by a representative of the City of Cambridge
- The Lamb (Tavener)

- A spotless rose (Howells)
- Fifth lesson: Luke 1 vv 26-38 read by a representative of our sister college at Eton
- I sing of a maiden (Lennox Berkeley)
- Joys Seven (arr. Cleobury)
- Sixth lesson: Luke 2 vv 1 -7 read by the Chaplain
- Quelle est cette odeur agréable? (arr. Willcocks)
- This ender night (Michael Berkeley – Commission (world premiere))
- Seventh lesson: Luke 2 vv 8-16 read by the Director of Music
- In the bleak midwinter (Darke)
- Hymn: While shepherds watched (desc. Cleobury)
- Eighth lesson: Matthew 2 vv 1-12 read by the Vice-Provost
- Bethlehem Down (Warlock)
- Ding, dong merrily (Wood arr. Wilberg and Stevens)
- Ninth lesson: John 1 vv 1-14 read by the Provost
- Hymn: O come, all ye faithful (arr. Willcocks)
- Collect and Blessing
- Hymn: Hark, the Herald Angels sing (desc. Ledger)

Organ voluntaries:

- In dulci júbilo (BWV 729) (Bach)
- Dieu parmi nous (La Nativité du Seigneur) (Messaien)
[broadcast on Radio 3 on Christmas Day only]
- Director of Music: Stephen Cleobury
- Organ Scholar: Richard Gowers
- Saturday 24 December, 3pm with a repeat on Radio 3 on Christmas Day at 2pm
- Producer: Philip Billson for the BBC

Photos courtesy of BBC