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Lighting a Sacred Fire

When **Sarah Class** wrote to Prince Charles, she didn't expect a reply – now she's composing for the King

It wasn't the most convenient time to have a "lightbulb moment" – but just as Sarah Class was dropping off to sleep, she had the idea for a composition that will be heard by millions. The musician (who has penned scores for David Attenborough's flagship series natural history *Madagascar* and *Africa*) had been asked to compose a piece for the coronation three days before Christmas.

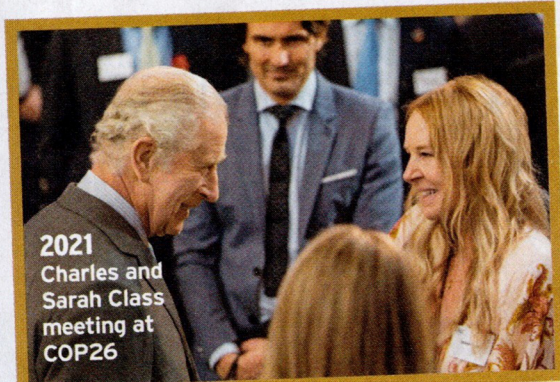
It was, she says, an "are you sitting down moment?" and she set her sights high. "I wanted to write the most beautiful piece I've ever written, a sacred work, with a sense of the protection of all beings, hope in these troubled times, the abundance of the natural world and a feeling of faith, love and unity."

However, the idea for the piece came to the Emmy-nominated composer, not while she was seated at her Bechstein piano but when she was tucked up in bed. "I had to wake myself up and get my recording device out," she says. "I often get great ideas when I'm dropping off to sleep. It's annoying but that's the time when all is quiet and it's almost like everything settles and you can hear much more clearly."

At the coronation, Class's composition *Sacred Fire*, with lyrics by poet Grahame Davies and imagery based on the Bible, will be sung by South African soprano Pretty Yende.

It will be a reunion of sorts after Class first met the then Prince of Wales when he visited her school on the Isle of Wight when she was a teenager. "I never would have thought that one day I'd be composing music for his coronation," she says.

Years later, having forged a career as a composer, she sent him a letter: "I wrote saying that I composed a lot of music for BBC Natural History programmes and that I was an



2021
Charles and
Sarah Class
meeting at
COP26

'I sent him some music, too. I forgot about it completely'

ambassador for [international conservation charity] the World Land Trust, raising awareness for their campaigns through my music. I explained that I felt emotion in music can sell conservation.

"I sent him some music, too, then I forgot about the letter completely. It was about a month or six weeks later when I had a lovely letter in the post from him. I think he even apologised for the delay, which was so nice! I didn't really think in a million years that he would reply. He said that he also believed that emotion through music could convey the conservation message."

In 2021, the Prince asked Class to write a theme tune, *Rhythm of the Earth*, for his sustainable futures project at COP26, the United Nations Climate Change conference in Glasgow. "It was a dream come true, marrying my love of nature with music," Class says.

Her new composition, ringing through Westminster Abbey, will be another career highlight. "I was trying to create a bridge between the angelic realms – because, for me, music is very spiritual – and the human realms, and somehow convey all of this, and the emotion of the music. I hope *Sacred Fire* will be cinematic and epic." **SN**

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Sarah Class
has written
Sacred Fire for
the coronation