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Summer Tour 2024

EARTH, HEAVEN AND SKY

WITH THE SCO CHORUS

8-9 June 2024

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PROGRAMME

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EARTH, HEAVEN AND SKY

WITH THE SCO CHORUS

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Saturday 8 June, 7.30pm, St John's Kirk of Perth
Sunday 9 June, 8pm, Stirling Castle

*The Stirling
concert is with*



JAMES MACMILLAN Data est mihi omnis potestas (from the Strathclyde Motets)

JOHN TAVENER Svyati

JAY CAPPERAULD The Night Watch

VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (arr. Drayton) The Lark Ascending

JOHN TAVENER Chant

ROXANNA PANUFNIK Kyrie after Byrd

ANDREW CARVEL Psalm 150

TARIK O'REGAN The Ecstasies Above

Please note that there will be no interval

Gregory Batsleer Conductor

SCO Chorus

Gordon Bragg Violin

Amira Bedrush-McDonald Violin

Brian Schiele Viola

Philip Higham Cello

Gregory Batsleer and the SCO Chorus



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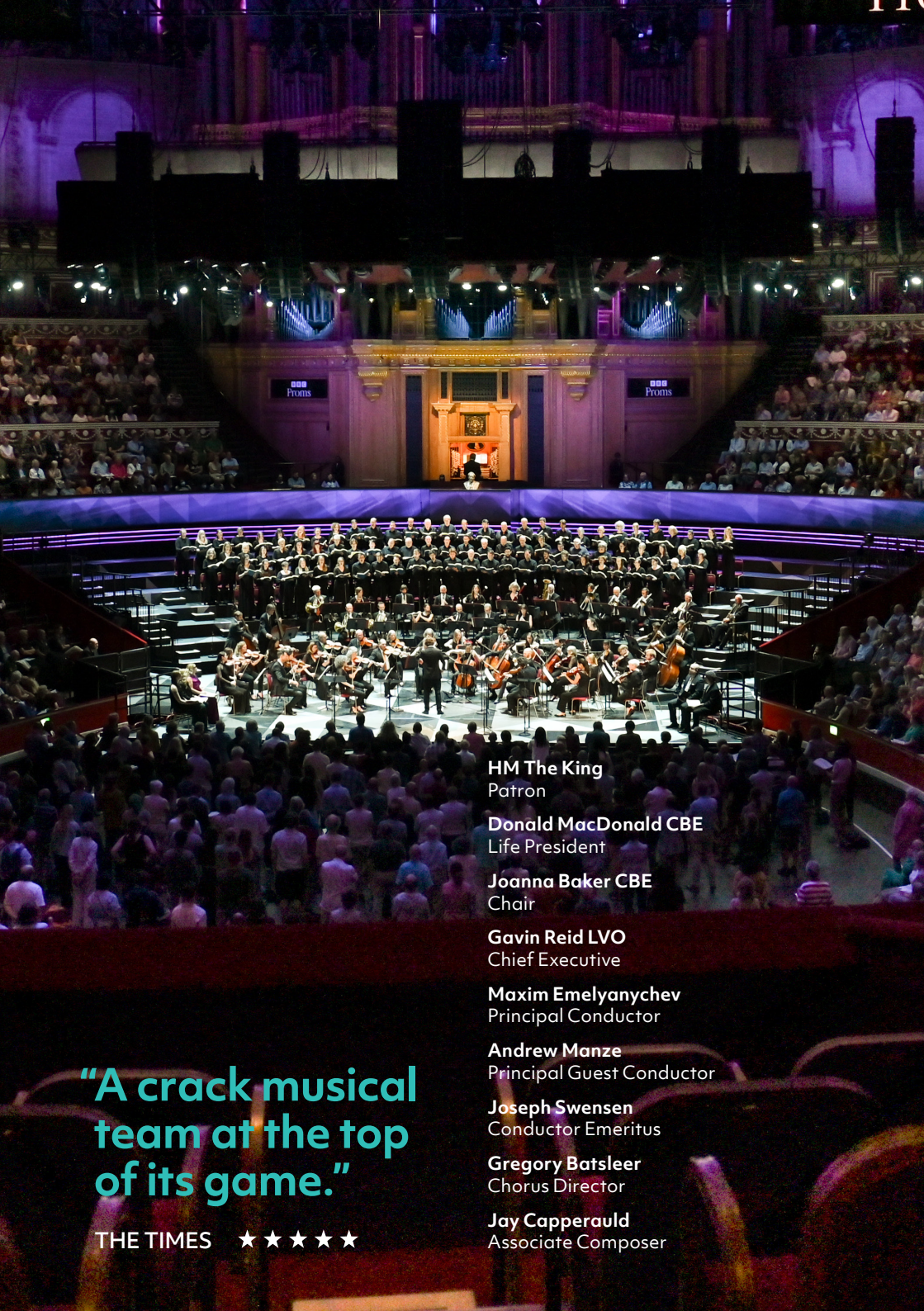


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WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO HEAR

From birth through to death, and far beyond. Choral music seems better able than many forms to ponder and probe some of the profoundest issues, from life itself to spirituality and human connection. Perhaps it's the uncanny potency of a choir, and its ability to harness something that almost all of us possess – a voice – and transform it into sonic spectacle, and a force to console, provoke and inspire. There's something of all three of those impacts among tonight's wide-ranging music.

We begin with a deeply spiritual work, but one that's deeply practical too. Sir James MacMillan wrote his set of 14 *Strathclyde Motets* between 2005 and 2010, each of them intended for liturgical use on a particular feast day in the Catholic church calendar (as well as for concert performances, of course). In 2005 he'd taken on the role of choirmaster at St Columba's Roman Catholic Church in Maryhill, Glasgow, and set about creating a substantial body of work for the church's choir. The pieces that he produced as a result, MacMillan has explained, deeply influenced his thinking about choral music more generally, so much so that he deliberately conceived his *Strathclyde Motets* for good church choirs, rather than necessarily professional choral groups. Indeed, many of the *Strathclyde Motets* received their first performances at St Columba's. Despite their more modest technical demands, however, MacMillan hardly holds back any of his musical sophistication or expressive intensity in the pieces.

The *Strathclyde Motets* often evoke a somewhat mystical, otherworldly atmosphere, in music that's thoughtful, sometimes even intimate. MacMillan himself has described several of the pieces as simply existing and then stopping, rather than developing musical ideas in a traditional sense: "There's a kind of suspended animation about them... they kind of float as an entity."

'Data est mihi omnis potestas' opens Book I of the *Strathclyde Motets*, though it was composed in 2007, after several of the other motets had already been written. It's a particularly urgent, joyful piece, with a text from St Matthew's Gospel, chapter 28, in which Christ implores his disciples to teach the word of God to the nations of the world. Accordingly, there's a muscular energy to MacMillan's leaping opening, before a calmer central section with a flowing soprano melody, and a brief return for its urgent opening music towards the piece's sonorous end.

From MacMillan's celebration of God's power, we move to the end of human life. Born in Wembley in 1944, John Tavener first made a name for himself in the late 1960s with freewheeling, experimental works that captured the spirit of the times: his fantastical, theatrical cantata *The Whale* was a prime example, and did well when he managed to persuade the Beatles to release it on their Apple Records label.

Things changed dramatically in 1977, however, when Tavener converted to the Eastern Orthodox Church, a decision that would have a profound impact on much of his later music, which draws directly on its spiritual teachings and explores its often mystical themes. He said in a 1999 interview: 'We seem to have lost our contact with the primordial, the idea of, call it divine revelation as opposed to something that's learnt by the human intellect, something that, if you lay yourself completely open and you



John Tavener

In some ways, what Tavener created represents a deeply personal response to death and mourning, although in others it transcends the personal as a hymn of supplication between humankind and its creator.

just open your heart completely, something will actually come into it.'

Laying yourself open to tonight's next piece might well be the most effective way of experiencing its remarkable power. Tavener wrote *Svyati* in 1995, shortly after learning that the father of his friend and publisher Jane Williams was seriously ill. In some ways, what Tavener created represents a deeply personal response to death and mourning, although in others it transcends the personal as a hymn of supplication between humankind and its creator.

In the piece, Tavener draws directly on the liturgical music of the Russian Orthodox Church, represented by the solemn text of the Trisagion: 'Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy upon us'. It's a text that recurs throughout Orthodox services, but is leant on most memorably during funeral rites, where the Trisagion is chanted as the coffin is finally closed and taken from the place of worship to its grave.

Tavener entrusts the Trisagion's text to the choir, which sometimes functions as an almost orchestral backdrop to his cello soloist – an unusual addition to an essentially choral piece, but one with a key role. As Tavener explains in his own programme note: 'the cello represents the Priest or Ikön of Christ, and should play at a distance from the choir, perhaps at the opposite end of the building. As in Greek drama, choir and priest are in dialogue with each other.' The cello also represents a very human expression of grief and hope, teetering perpetually between brighter major and darker minor as if it's experiencing both emotions at the same time.

Svyati unfolds as a series of exchanges between the cello and the chorus, with an undeniable sense of ritual to its slow unfolding and its unhurried repetitions of gestures we've heard many times before, as if the piece is opening up a space for contemplation. Cello and choir are more integrated in the impassioned central section, but the cello is left alone at the piece's quietly intense close, rising to ever greater heights.

From death, we move to birth. Ayrshire-born Jay Capperault is the SCO's Associate Composer', and has written several works for the Orchestra and Chorus. His concert-long theatrical work for youngsters *The Great Grumpy Gaboon* was unveiled earlier this year, while his *Death in a Nutshell* – premiered in 2021, and given repeat performances during the SCO's 2024-5 Season – ponders doll's house-sized murder scenes still used to train US detectives today.

He writes about *The Night Watch*:

"The Night Watch is inspired by a poem of the same name by Scottish poet Niall Campbell which expresses his personal experiences as a new father. This tender and heartfelt text captures a nocturnal dreamscape of half-sleep and earnest attempts to comfort and soothe 'this boy I love, calling for me to come out, into the buckthorn field of being awake.'

"This work attempts to capture the dream-like haze of Campbell's words which build into climactic moments of wakefulness, crying and soothing that leave us with the intimate, gentle musings between parent and child."

It might seem like there's little to say about tonight's next piece. The nostalgic and very English rural idyll of Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending* regularly tops polls as the UK's best-loved piece of classical music – but with its quiet introspection, and its complete absence of a 'big tune' to stir the spirits, it's an unusual work to receive such adulation.

It's perhaps surprising, too, that such a calm, serene piece can have been created during a time of war. Vaughan Williams completed *The Lark Ascending* in its original version for violin and piano in 1914, then set it aside for the duration of the First World War, during which time he served as an ambulance driver in

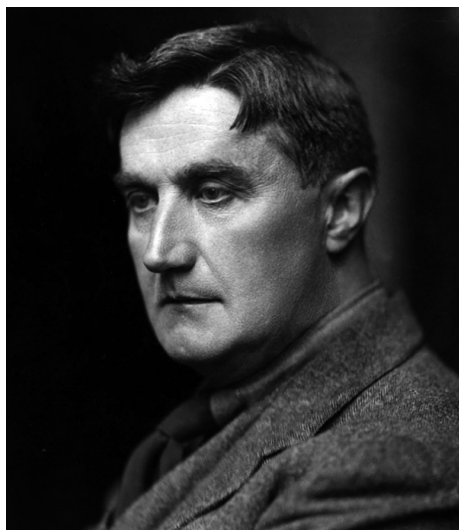
France and Greece. Upon his return to Britain, he finished the work's orchestration, and *The Lark Ascending* was premiered by its dedicatee Marie Hall in June 1921 at London's Queen's Hall.

The composer had been inspired by the 1881 poem by George Meredith of the same name, and included these lines from it in his score:

*He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound,
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake.
For singing till his heaven fills,
'Tis love of earth that he instils,
And ever winging up and up,
Our valley is his golden cup
And he the wine which overflows
to lift us with him as he goes.
Till lost on his aerial rings
In light, and then the fancy sings.*

Meredith's imagery, and the natural wonders of England that he evokes, are a world away from the brutal reality of conflict into which Vaughan Williams found himself thrown. We can only wonder at the ways in which the bloody destruction of the battlefield that the composer witnessed might have set his nostalgic idyll into stark relief – or, indeed, served to re-emphasise its vision and values in the composer's mind.

As his violin soloist takes on the role of the eponymous lark, easing us gently into the piece's subtly perfumed harmonies, and soaring ever higher at the work's conclusion to sing its bewitching song, what Vaughan Williams offers us is a space for reflection. There's a gentle sense of spirituality, too, even a feeling of mysticism, and an underlying sense of sadness – perhaps for the rural world that Vaughan Williams loved so much, and which even in 1914 he could see disappearing.



Ralph Vaughan Williams

There's a gentle sense of spirituality, too, even a feeling of mysticism, and an underlying sense of sadness – perhaps for the rural world that Vaughan Williams loved so much, and which even in 1914 he could see disappearing.

British choral composer and conductor Paul Drayton made his choral arrangement of the piece in 2019, with an ingenious idea. The original violin line remains intact, and the chorus – largely wordless – takes over the gently supportive role of the instrumental version's orchestra, though Drayton also incorporates Meredith's verse lines into his choral writing. The result is a reimagining of Vaughan Williams' piece that, while staying almost entirely faithful to the original, also serves to re-emphasise and refocus its profound spiritual insights.

We return to Tavener for our next piece, but we move away from choral music. The cello featured prominently in the composer's later creations, most famously in his deeply spiritual *The Protecting Veil*, which even made the shortlist for the 1992 Mercury Prize. *Chant* comes from 1995, the same year as *Svyati* heard earlier, and marks another deeply personal response to death, as Tavener explained in his own programme note: "*Chant* for solo cello was a response to the death of a very dear friend,

Philip Sherrard. The music seemed to come from nowhere and is a tribute to an uncompromising, prophetic and brilliant man."

The piece is essentially a long, winding melody, set entirely in the cello's upper register, that has the distinct quality of a lament. There are some particularly Eastern-sounding melodic shapes, and as in *Svyati*, Tavener seems to consider the same restricted collection of musical ideas from many different perspectives. The result is music that, like Vaughan Williams' *The Lark Ascending*, opens a space for spiritual contemplation and reflection.

More spiritual insights – both ancient and resoundingly modern – resonate around tonight's next piece. Roxanna Panufnik is a British composer of Polish descent, daughter of fellow composer Andrzej Panufnik, who defected from communist Poland in 1954 and lived for the rest of his life in Britain. Roxanna Panufnik, has written widely across opera and ballet, film and TV scores, orchestral and chamber works,

as well as a wealth of choral music – including a Coronation Sanctus, composed for the 2023 Coronation of King Charles III.

She wrote her *Kyrie after Byrd* in 2015, taking inspiration from the opening section in the Mass for Five Voices by English Renaissance composer William Byrd. A revered figure in early English music, he was also a controversial one in his day. Byrd converted from Protestantism to Catholicism in the 1570s, at a time of open mistrust, hostility and serious persecution for Catholics. His Mass for Five Voices probably dates from around 1594, around two decades after his conversion, and its opening Kyrie represents a plea for mercy from God and Christ.

Panufnik wrote her piece for the ORA Singers, led by conductor Suzy Digby. 'My son had just become a Westminster Abbey chorister so Byrd's extraordinarily beautiful music was only just really becoming known to me,' she remembers in her own note to the piece. She retained Byrd's original music as her starting point, but added more complex harmonies and even an extra bass line. 'I've kept the *Christe eleison* as a calmer and more ethereal section, floating gently back into the chromatic Kyrie, which almost forgets itself in harmonic and dramatic propriety but suddenly takes stock of itself and ends with quiet reverence. I also hugely admire Byrd's courage at sticking to his Catholic guns despite living in a time of brutal persecution for being of the "wrong" faith. It's a mark of an extremely fine composer to still be inspiring composers and performers today.'

Panufnik's piece indeed retains the polyphonic complexity and subtlety of Byrd's original, but retells that centuries-old music using distinctively 21st-century harmonies. The result is music with a profound sense of spiritual insight, in a work that draws on centuries of musical history, but sounds bracingly of our own time too.

Andrew Carvel is an Edinburgh-based composer, teacher and conductor – and he also happens to sing in the tenor section of the SCO Chorus. He writes about tonight's next piece:

"My setting of Psalm 150 was written in May 2017 to be performed for a Sunday Worship broadcast on BBC Radio 4 from St Andrew's and St George's West Church, Edinburgh.

"The setting features frequent changes in metre and texture, which are driven by the text and reflect the many facets of praise across the six verses of the Psalm. The music crescendos as it portrays the imagery of the various instruments, building to a climax with the 'clashing cymbals'. It finishes with the opening motif, sung antiphonally between the upper and lower voices to create a suitable conclusion of this joyful text".

Today's final composer – London-born, now San Francisco-based Tarik O'Regan – was also involved in creating music for last year's Coronation: he wrote the *Agnus Dei* for King Charles III's Coronation Service. He has dual Irish and Arab heritages, and has drawn on both in his music: for example, he's written a concerto for oud (a Middle Eastern/north African lute) and Western orchestra. Among his other diverse inspirations, he's said, are Renaissance choral music, classic British rock, jazz and minimalism: all blend together in an eclectic but deeply expressive musical language that he's employed widely across operas, ballets, many orchestral works and a large body of choral music.

His 2006 choral work *The Ecstasies Above* continues our spiritual theme in its evocations of supernatural angelic entities. O'Regan writes about the piece:

*"The Ecstasies Above takes for its title a phrase found in the lyric poem *Israfel* by Edgar Allan Poe (1809–49) which was first published in 1831*



Tarik O'Regan

Musically the score makes much use of textural variation between the three groups (full chorus, solo octet and string quartet). The tug of war between material that is almost childlike in its playfulness and sections that seem more sombre reflect my own thoughts on Poe's œuvre.

in The Southern Messenger. The poem is set in entirety with the exception of one stanza.

"Through his creative description of the angel, Israfel, and the heavens, Poe creates a virtuous image of the supernatural. Poe compares this heavenly vision to the harsh reality of human existence. Whilst the beauty of Israfel's voice and lyre can silence even the moon and the stars in the heavens, Poe suggests that if Israfel were placed in an earthly environment, he would not sing with such zest. From the Koranic source of the name for the protagonist, the story is refashioned by Poe into an homage of ecumenicity to an all-encompassing angel of music.

"Musically, the score makes much use of textural variation between the three groups (full chorus, solo octet and string quartet). The tug of war between material that is almost childlike in its playfulness and sections that seem more sombre reflect my own thoughts on Poe's œuvre. As a European transplanted to North America, I am intrigued in the seeming disparity between the

quasi-adulation of Poe's poetry in Europe and the much cooler reaction he has always encountered in his native environs.

"I wrote The Ecstasies Above at Yaddo, a mansion now used as an artists' retreat in Saratoga Springs, New York. Before Yaddo took its present form, it was an area of land first settled in the late 18th century by Jacobus Barhyte, a soldier in the American Revolution. Visitors to Barhyte's estate included John Quincy Adams and Martin Van Buren, Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper and, most importantly in the context of my work, Edgar Allan Poe. He visited in the early 1840s where he scripted part of an early version of his most famous poem, The Raven.

"The Ecstasies Above was commissioned from the Robert Baker Commissioning Fund for Sacred Music by Yale Institute of Sacred Music for Yale Schola Cantorum, Simon Carrington, Conductor".

© David Kettle

TEXTS

JAMES MACMILLAN (b. 1959)

Data est mihi omnis potestas

Matthew 28: vv 18, 19

Data est mihi omnis potestas in caelo et in terra, alleluia. Euntes, docete omnes gentes, baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, alleluia, alleluia.

All power has been given to me in heaven and on earth, alleluia; go therefore and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, alleluia, alleluia.

JOHN TAVENER (1944 – 2013)

Svyati

Text: The Trisagion, a prayer from the Orthodox Liturgy

Svjatyj Bozhe
Svjatyj Krepkij
Svjatyj Bezsmertnyj
Pomiluj nas.

*Holy God,
Holy and Mighty,
Holy and Immortal,
Have mercy on us.*

JAY CAPPERAULD (b. 1989)
The Night Watch (*SCO Chorus commission*)
Text: Niall Campbell

It's 1 a.m. and someone's knocking
at sleep's old, battered door – and who
could it be but this boy I love,
calling for me to come out, into
the buckthorn field of being awake –
and so I go, finding him there
no longer talking – but now crying
and crying, wanting to be held;
but shhh, what did you want to show
that couldn't wait until the morning?
Was it the moon – because I see it:
the first good bead on a one-bead string;
was it the quiet – because I owned it,
once – but found I wanted more.

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS (1872 – 1958)

The Lark Ascending (*arranged for choir and solo violin by Paul Drayton (b. 1944)*)

Text: from The Lark Ascending by George Meredith

He rises and begins to round,
He drops the silver chain of sound
Of many links without a break,
In chirrup, whistle, slur and shake,
For singing till his heaven fills,
'Tis love of earth that he instils,
And ever winging up and up,
Our valley is his golden cup,
And he the wine which overflows
Till lost on his aërial rings
In light, and then the fancy sings.

ROXANNA PANUFNIK (b. 1968)

Kyrie after Byrd

Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison,
Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy, Christ, have mercy,
Lord, have mercy.

ANDREW CARVEL (b. 1989)
Psalm 150

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Praise God in his sanctuary
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Praise him in his mighty firmament
Praise him for his mighty acts;
Praise him with the sound of the trumpet
Praise him with the lute and with the harp
Praise him with the timbrels and dance
Praise him with the stringed instruments, and with flutes
Praise him with the loud cymbals; and praise him with the clashing cymbals!
Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

TARIK O'REGAN (b. 1978)

The Ecstasies Above

Text: Israfel by Edgar Allan Poe

*"And the angel Israfel, whose heart-strings are a lute,
and who has the sweetest voice of all God's creatures" — The Koran*

In Heaven a spirit doth dwell
"Whose heart-strings are a lute";
None sing so wildly well
As the angel Israfel,
And the giddy stars (so legends tell),
Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell
Of his voice, all mute.

Tottering above
In her highest noon,
The enamoured moon
Blushes with love,
While, to listen, the red levin
(With the rapid Pleiads, even,
Which were seven,)
Pauses in Heaven.

And they say (the starry choir
And the other listening things)
That Israfeli's fire
Is owing to that lyre
By which he sits and sings—
The trembling living wire
Of those unusual strings.

But the skies that angel trod,
Where deep thoughts are a duty,
Where Love's a grown-up God,
Where the Houri glances are
Imbued with all the beauty
Which we worship in a star.

The ecstasies above
With thy burning measures suit—
Thy grief, thy joy, thy hate, thy love,
With the fervour of thy lute—
Well may the stars be mute!

Yes, Heaven is thine; but this
Is a world of sweets and sour;
Our flowers are merely—flowers,
And the shadow of thy perfect bliss
Is the sunshine of ours.

If I could dwell
Where Israfel
Hath dwelt, and he where I,
He might not sing so wildly well
A mortal melody,
While a bolder note than this might swell
From my lyre within the sky.

Conductor

GREGORY BATSLEER



Gregory Batsleer is acknowledged as one of the leading choral conductors of his generation, winning widespread recognition for his creativity and vision. Since taking on the role of SCO Chorus Director in 2009 he has led the development of the Chorus, overseeing vocal coaching, the SCO Young Singers' Programme and the emergence of regular a capella concerts. As well as preparing the Chorus for regular performances with the Orchestra, he has directed their successful appearances at the Edinburgh International Jazz, East Neuk, Glasgow Cathedral and St Andrews Voices Festivals, at Greyfriars Kirk and on the SCO Summer Tour.

Gregory has been Festival Director for the London Handel Festival since 2021. He leads on programming and development, fulfilling the Festival's mission to bring Handel's music to the widest possible audiences. Since 2017 he has been Artistic Director of Huddersfield Choral Society and was Chorus Director with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra from 2015 - 2021.

As guest conductor, Gregory has worked with many of the UK's leading orchestras and ensembles. Recent highlights include performances with the Royal Northern Sinfonia, RSNO, Hallé Orchestra, Black Dyke Band, National Youth Choir of Great Britain, Orchestra of Opera North, Manchester Camerata, SCO and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic.

From 2012 to 2017, he was Artistic Director of the National Portrait Gallery's Choir in Residence programme, the first ever in-house music programme of any gallery or museum in the world. He has curated and devised performances for the Southbank Centre, Wilderness Festival and Latitude and collaborated with leading cultural figures across a variety of different art forms. Gregory is the co-founder and conductor of Festival Voices, a versatile ensemble dedicated to cross-art collaboration.

Gregory sits on the board of Manchester Camerata as a non-executive director. His outstanding work as a choral director was recognised with the 2015 Arts Foundation's first-ever Fellowship in Choral Conducting.

Gregory's Chair is kindly supported by Anne McFarlane

SCO CHORUS



The Scottish Chamber Orchestra Chorus, under the direction of Gregory Batsleer since 2009, has built a reputation as one of Scotland's most vibrant and versatile choirs. Widely regarded as one of the finest orchestral choruses in the UK, it celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2021.

Members enjoy the unique opportunity of performing with one of the world's leading chamber orchestras, working with international conductors including Maxim Emelyanychev, Andrew Manze, Harry Christophers, Richard Egarr, Vaclav Luks and Sir James MacMillan.

The Chorus appears regularly with the Orchestra in Scotland's major cities. Recent concerts have covered a wide range of music including Bach Mass in B minor, Brahms Requiem, Stravinsky Mass, Haydn *Creation*, a rare performance of Vaughan Williams *Flos Campi* and the premiere of *The Years* by Anna Clyne, SCO Associate Composer 2019-2022. The world premiere of Sir James MacMillan's *Composed in August* was a highlight of the 2023-24 Season.

The SCO Chorus also performs a capella, both digital and live, in music ranging from Thomas Tallis to new work by Anna Clyne and Jay Capperauld. Its annual Christmas concerts have established themselves as a Season highlight; the Chorus also enjoys appearing on the SCO's Summer Tour.

Other notable out-of-Season appearances have included critically-acclaimed performances with the SCO at the BBC Proms in Handel's *Jephtha* in 2019 and in Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in 2023. The Chorus appeared in a semi-staged performance of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* at the 2023 Edinburgh International Festival, resulting in an immediate re-invitation for *Così fan tutte* in 2024.

Our Young Singers' Programme was established in 2015 to nurture and develop aspiring young singers. It is designed for young people with a high level of choral experience and ambitions to further their singing with a world-class ensemble.

Further information at sco.org.uk

The SCO Chorus Young Singers' Programme is kindly supported by the Baird Educational Trust.

Violin

GORDON BRAGG



Gordon Bragg has an extremely diverse musical life as a violinist, conductor and pianist, performing regularly throughout Scotland and the UK. He is Sub-principal Second Violin of the SCO, performing across the UK and touring worldwide. Highlights with the orchestra include touring with Maria João Pires, performances with Emmanuel Krivine, and working with current Principal Conductor, Maxim Emelyanichev.

Gordon also a passionate chamber musician, working with groups such as Hebrides Ensemble and Mr McFall's Chamber, and was a member of the Edinburgh Quartet, one of Britain's foremost chamber ensembles, from 2012-2017. Whilst a member of the quartet Gordon performed throughout the UK, regularly broadcasting live on BBC Radio and playing on recordings such as the "outstanding" (*International Record Review*) recording of James MacMillan's string quartets on the Delphian label. In recent years Gordon has developed a relationship with Drake Music Scotland, in particular a duo with composer and musician Chris Jacquin.

Gordon is also in demand as a conductor. Following studies in Manchester and Zürich, he has conducted the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, Bayerische Kammerphilharmonie and Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and led a critically-acclaimed performance of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* with Scottish Ballet at the Edinburgh International Festival. With SCO, Gordon has conducted at the St Magnus Festival, various works for the SCO's digital seasons and the premiere performances of Jay Capperauld's *The Great Grumpy Gaboon* for the 2024 Family Festival.

Gordon's first formal musical education was at the Junior Department of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland where he won the Conservatoire prizes for violin and piano. He graduated in violin performance from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with first class honours and participated in masterclasses with members of the Amadeus and Takacs quartets, as well as taking part in an Erasmus exchange to the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. He was invited to participate in the International Musicians' Seminar, Prussia Cove, where he performed in the class of Gerhard Schulz. Gordon was Concertmaster of the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland and member of the European Union Youth Orchestra, as well as playing with the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester under Claudio Abbado.

Violin

AMIRA BEDRUSH-MACDONALD



Amira is of Libyan, Italian and Scottish heritage and was raised in Glasgow by her grandmother. Her introduction to music was through free violin lessons at school.

Amira studied at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland under Jerre Gibson and Simon Fischer, winning numerous prizes and awards including the Governors' Recital Prize for Strings. After gaining a 1st class B.Mus with honours and a M.Mus with distinction, Amira took up a scholarship to study at the Butler School of Music at the University of Texas, Austin where she studied with Professor Brian Lewis and subsequently won the Outstanding Master of Music Recital prize. Her studies were kindly supported by the Dewar Arts Awards.

During her college years, Amira played and recorded with various folk bands, appearing at festivals and events including New York Tartan Week, the Caledonian Society of Oman, T in the Park, WOMAD and Celtic Connections and she continues to perform as a member of the Grit Orchestra. On returning to Scotland, Amira freelanced with the RSNO, Scottish Ensemble, Scottish Opera and BBCSSO before taking up a position in the SCO.

Amira's openness to collaboration has since led to co-writing and performing two albums ('Stately, melancholic, quietly gorgeous' *The Herald*) with Glasgow-based composer Richard Luke, featuring on BAFTA winning films, TV and games.

Viola

BRIAN SCHIELE



Brian Schiele may seem to be entirely British but was in fact born in Argentina, where he spent his formative years. There are clues to his origins: a passion for the music of Piazzolla and a permanent need for more space (as his desk partner will confirm).

Having not become a farmer in the vast flatness of the South American prairie, Brian opted for a very different life somewhat further north as a viola player. He enjoys a varied musical life as a member of the SCO, Mr McFall's Chamber ('the jewel in the Scottish musical crown' – *The Scotsman*) and the Tagore String Trio.

He is a committed teacher and is enthusiastic about music of all styles. He also enjoys composition and his arrangements have been performed by both McFall's Chamber and the SCO amongst others.

Cello

PHILIP HIGHAM



Philip Higham enjoys a richly varied musical life: a passionate chamber musician, equally at home in concerto, duo and unaccompanied repertoire, he especially relishes Classical and German Romantic music, in which he is frequently and happily immersed as principal cellist of the SCO. He has appeared frequently in recital at Wigmore Hall and at other prominent venues and festivals both at home and abroad and is regularly broadcast on BBC Radio 3. His two solo recordings of Britten and Bach Suites (Delphian Records) have received considerable praise, the Britten chosen as Instrumental Disc of the Month in *Gramophone* Magazine during 2013.

Born in Edinburgh, Philip studied at St Mary's Music School with Ruth Beauchamp and subsequently at the RNCM with Emma Ferrand and Ralph Kirshbaum. He also enjoyed mentoring from Steven Isserlis and was represented by YCAT between 2009 and 2014. In 2008 he became the first UK cellist to win 1st prize at the International Bach Competition in Leipzig, following this with major prizes in the 2009 Lutoslawski Competition and the Grand Prix Emmanuel Feuermann 2010.

Philip plays a cello by Carlo Giuseppe Testore, made in 1697. He is grateful for continued support from Harriet's Trust.

Philip's Chair is kindly supported by The Thomas Family

SCOTTISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA



The Scottish Chamber Orchestra (SCO) is one of Scotland's five National Performing Companies and has been a galvanizing force in Scotland's music scene since its inception in 1974. The SCO believes that access to world-class music is not a luxury but something that everyone should have the opportunity to participate in, helping individuals and communities everywhere to thrive. Funded by the Scottish Government, City of Edinburgh Council and a community of philanthropic supporters, the SCO has an international reputation for exceptional, idiomatic performances: from mainstream classical music to newly commissioned works, each year its wide-ranging programme of work is presented across the length and breadth of Scotland, overseas and increasingly online.

Equally at home on and off the concert stage, each one of the SCO's highly talented and creative musicians and staff is passionate about transforming and enhancing lives through the power of music. The SCO's Creative Learning programme engages people of all ages and backgrounds with a diverse range of projects, concerts, participatory workshops and resources. The SCO's current five-year Residency in Edinburgh's Craigmillar builds on the area's extraordinary history of Community Arts, connecting the local community with a national cultural resource.

An exciting new chapter for the SCO began in September 2019 with the arrival of dynamic young conductor Maxim Emelyanychev as the Orchestra's Principal Conductor. His tenure has recently been extended until 2028. The SCO and Emelyanychev released their first album together (Linn Records) in November 2019 to widespread critical acclaim. Their second recording together, of Mendelssohn symphonies, was released in November 2023.

The SCO also has long-standing associations with many eminent guest conductors and directors including Andrew Manze, Pekka Kuusisto, François Leleux, Nicola Benedetti, Isabelle van Keulen, Anthony Marwood, Richard Egarr, Mark Wigglesworth, Lorenza Borrani and Conductor Emeritus Joseph Swensen.

The Orchestra's current Associate Composer is Jay Capperauld. The SCO enjoys close relationships with numerous leading composers and has commissioned around 200 new works, including pieces by Sir James MacMillan, Anna Clyne, Sally Beamish, Martin Suckling, Einojuhani Rautavaara, Karin Rehnqvist, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Nico Muhly and the late Sir Peter Maxwell Davies.

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