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Grieg Piano Concerto

7-9 Nov 2024

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Grieg Piano Concerto

Kindly supported by Erik Lars Hansen and Vanessa C L Chang

Thursday 7 November, 7.30pm Usher Hall, Edinburgh

Friday 8 November, 7.30pm City Halls, Glasgow

Saturday 9 November, 7.30pm Aberdeen Music Hall

TARRODI Lucioles

GRIEG Piano Concerto

Interval of 20 minutes

SIBELIUS Symphony No 5

Ryan Bancroft Conductor

Eric Lu Piano



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CHAMBER
ORCHESTRA

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Marta Gómez

Piccolo

Marta Gómez

Oboe

Fraser Kelman
Katherine Bryer

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Maximiliano Martín
William Stafford

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Percussion

Louise Lewis Goodwin
Kate Openshaw

Jamie Kenny
Sub-Principal Bass



WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO HEAR

TARRODI (b.1981)

Lucioles (2011)

GRIEG (1843-1907)

Piano Concerto, Op 16 (1868)

Allegro molto moderato

Adagio

Allegro moderato molto e marcato

SIBELIUS (1809-1847)

Symphony No 5 in E-flat major, Op 82
(1915, revised 1916-19)

Tempo molto moderato

Andante mosso, quasi allegretto

Allegro molto

From the glittering magic of fireflies to the majestic movements of swans in flight: there's a definite sense of wonder at the riches of the natural world behind the music in tonight's all-Nordic concert. Even Grieg's timeless Piano Concerto, though not especially inspired by nature, draws on the composer's deep love for his Norwegian homeland, its landscapes and its traditions – even if he wasn't actually in Norway when he wrote it.

We begin, however, not in Norway but in Sweden, where Stockholm-born Andrea Tarrodi is one of the country's most exciting younger composers, and also gaining increasing international recognition. She's taken inspiration from nature across a number of pieces, and a sense of evocative awe and wonder provides an ideal match for her colourful, energetic, intricately crafted music.

Her *Lucioles* (or 'Fireflies'), written in 2011, fits that description perfectly. Tarrodi's particular inspiration for the piece, she's said, came from French writer and haiku specialist François JJ Ribes, and an evocative snapshot he offered of lakeside insect life:

*By the lily leaves
the fireflies anchor
the lake is illuminated*

Lucioles is a typically magical, iridescent piece that seems to evoke the lakeside environment before describing the arrival of the fireflies, and ultimately their inevitable departure. There's a sense of stillness but also expectation to the piece's hesitant opening, built around a cello solo, with distant flickers of light from a flute and solo violin. The music grows more strongly



Andrea Tarrodi

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defined over a timpani build-up, and it's as if the fireflies have arrived when the orchestra's strings, woodwind and gently clattering percussion begin otherworldly figurations. Tarrodi's music grows to a John Adams-like climax, only to slip away again into near silence, with just wisps of filigree melody left for flute and solo violin again. The piece's still opening music returns as – perhaps – the fireflies themselves slip away into the distance.

No less evocative in many ways, though perhaps slightly less pictorial, is Edvard Grieg's Piano Concerto, a piece so widely adored and known by listeners that it surely ranks alongside Beethoven's Fifth Symphony and Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* in terms of sheer popularity. Grieg's striking opening to the Concerto – a dramatic timpani crescendo, then crashing piano figures thundering from the top to the

bottom of the keyboard – was surely intended to make an impression, and it's done just that since the piece's premiere in 1869.

Grieg was just 24 when he wrote the Concerto during the summer of the previous year, but he'd recently married his beloved Nina, and their daughter Alexandra had been born in April 1868 (she'd die, tragically, from meningitis just the following year). It was a good time for the young composer, but also a hectic one, personally and professionally – so much so, in fact, that Grieg retired to a holiday cottage in the picturesque Danish village of Søllerød, north of Copenhagen, for some peace and quiet in which to work on the Concerto undisturbed. He even sent Nina and Alexandra to stay with his in-laws in Copenhagen. Grieg wasn't quite alone, however. A fellow guest was his compatriot

Edmund Neupert, one of Norway's finest pianists, who worked closely with Grieg on the new Concerto – so closely, in fact, that it's been rumoured that some of it was essentially Neupert's own work (it's unlikely that that was the case).

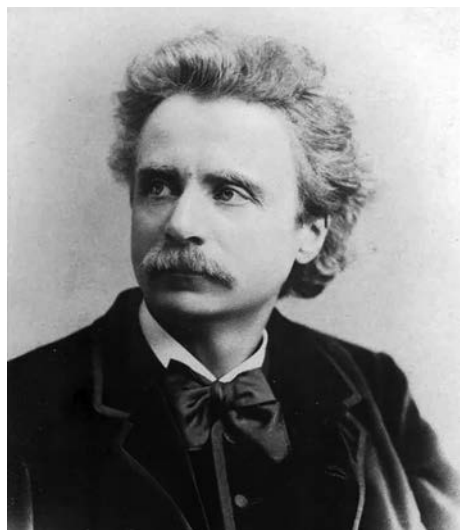
Grieg's strategy paid off, and after a summer of consultation and composing, Neupert gave the Concerto's premiere in Copenhagen in 1869, to enormous and immediate acclaim – a joyful reception to the music that's continued ever since. Ironically, Grieg wasn't even there to lap up the adulation, however: he'd been held in Norway by prior commitments.

But dig a little inside the Concerto's dramatic gestures and timeless melodies, and it's a fascinating piece in which to observe the young composer combining the rigours of classical convention with the distinctive flavours of Norwegian folk music. A few years earlier, he'd sought to immerse himself in European classical traditions through study at the illustrious Leipzig Conservatoire, though he remained nonetheless proud of his Norwegian homeland, and hoped to bring its distinctive rhythms and melodies to a broader audience through his music. He'd been particularly inspired to embrace Norwegian folk music through his friendships with the great Norwegian violinist Ole Bull – a fellow Bergen-ite and family friend – and also composer Rikard Nordraak, who wrote the Norwegian national anthem. Although he lived to the age of just 23, Nordraak proved a formative influence on the young Grieg. 'It was as if the scales fell from my eyes,' Grieg later wrote. 'From Nordraak I learned for the first time what the Norwegian folk song was, and learned to know my own nature.'

All this said, Grieg stopped short of actually quoting specific Norwegian folk tunes in his music. Instead, he let its distinctive melodic and rhythmic inflections work on a deeper level, permeating his music's essential ingredients. You can hear one of those melodic inflections right at the start of the Piano Concerto: the distinctive, three-note falling pattern that cascades all the way down the piano keyboard is a distinctively Nordic formula, and one that Grieg was especially fond of right across his music.

That dramatic call-to-attention is followed by the opening movement's first main theme from the orchestra – certainly serious-minded, if not downright tragic – which is quickly taken up by the piano. Scampering, more overtly virtuosic material serves as a transition to the movement's second main melody, a far more lyrical, even dreamy theme sung out between cellos and woodwind, and again taken up by the piano. A more outspoken, folk-like theme comes in across the full orchestra, before a solo flute returns with the dramatic first theme, marking the beginning of the movement's central development section, in which earlier themes return fragmented, developed and recombined. When the opening themes return, Grieg keeps things almost as they were earlier, save for a showy solo piano cadenza, and the return of the movement's cascading piano figures – now even grander – to close.

His hushed second movement begins with a hymn-like theme for strings alone, whose resolution is delayed and drawn out to heart-tugging effect. When the piano enters, there's a distinctly outdoor, airborne quality to its almost improvisatory music,



Edvard Grieg

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as if it's mulling over what it's just heard. Nonetheless, the music musters its strength and grows steadily in grandeur, only to slip away gently again, leading without a break into the finale.

And the slow movement's serene mood is brusquely expelled by the piano's exuberant entry, which leads almost immediately into a gently stomping traditional Norwegian halling dance, a fixture at countryside weddings at the time. The halling theme flickers perpetually between brighter major and darker minor – another distinctively Norwegian folk trait – but a far quieter, more ethereal theme comes in as if from nowhere, high on a solo flute, with gentle accompaniment from violins and violas. When that new theme is taken up by the pianist, it seems like the Concerto might be heading for a quiet conclusion. The woodwind have

other ideas, however, pitching us back into the earlier halling dance rhythms, which the pianist then takes up again. After an electrifying solo piano cadenza, the halling theme returns in a tripping three time, followed by a sumptuous return for the romantic flute tune – now sung out passionately across the full orchestra – which brings the Concerto to a deeply emotional close.

'Today I saw 16 swans. One of my greatest experiences. Lord God, that beauty! They circled over me for a long time. Disappeared into the solar haze like a gleaming silver ribbon.' That's Jean Sibelius, writing in his diary on 21 April 1915. And it was precisely this moment that the composer sought to evoke in the joyful finale of his Fifth Symphony, one of the most euphoric moments in all classical music, from the rush of anticipation in

As well as the pressure of being a national cultural hero celebrating an important anniversary, he'd long felt an additional burden to prove himself as a significant, 'modern' European composer.

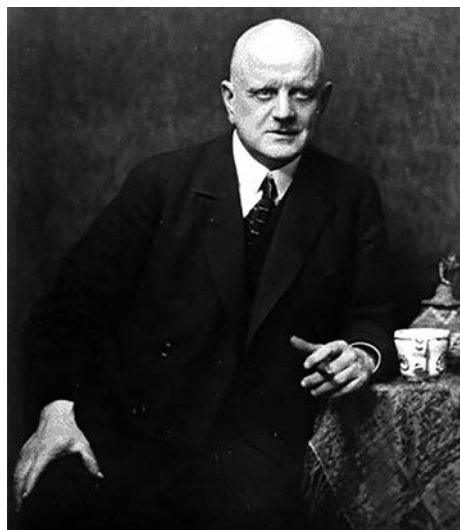
the strings' scurrying figurations, to the ecstatic arrival of the swans themselves in the horns' rocking melody (dubbed the 'Swan Hymn'), and a distant glimpse or memory of them later in the movement.

But it had been a long road to reach that point. And it didn't help that the Fifth Symphony had originally been commissioned for Sibelius's own 50th birthday by the Finnish government, with a national holiday declared in celebration. The piece was duly unveiled in Helsinki on 8 December 1915, to a rapturous reaction from the Finnish audience.

But Sibelius wasn't convinced. As well as the pressure of being a national cultural hero celebrating an important anniversary, he'd long felt an additional burden to prove himself as a significant, 'modern' European composer. He'd set out his modernist

credentials in his austere, challenging, somewhat dissonant Fourth Symphony four years earlier, but he wondered if he'd gone too far. What really drove him was cultivating a sense of organic growth and unity in his music. When he'd met Gustav Mahler in Helsinki in 1907, not for nothing did Sibelius explain that what he most admired in a symphony were 'strictness and style and deep logic, which requires that all its motifs must be linked to each other'. (Mahler's famous reply took a very different perspective: 'No, the symphony must be like the world. It must encompass everything!')

With this in mind, Sibelius put his Fifth Symphony through two rounds of substantial revisions, concerned not about his music's quality, but about the unity, coherence and sense of organic development across what were currently



Jean Sibelius

Did Sibelius mark himself out as a true ‘modernist’ with his Fifth Symphony? If anything, it’s probably a step back from the rigour and austerity of the Fourth.

four movements. In the process, it shrank down to three movements: Sibelius cunningly combined his original introduction and playful scherzo into a single span of music (though their separate characters remain evident). The first four notes of this new movement’s opening horn call plant the seeds that will later bloom into much of the rest of the Symphony’s material, and a constant but almost imperceptible acceleration not only drives us via a smooth gear change from introduction to scherzo, but also continues once we’ve arrived, propelling the movement to a frenetic conclusion.

Sibelius’s slow second movement begins almost as if we’re already partway through, and its charming main theme feels like it might circle round and round forever in contrasting instrumental combinations. And to crown his swan-inspired finale,

Sibelius devised some of the most distinctive, memorable closing chords in all classical music.

Did Sibelius mark himself out as a true ‘modernist’ with his Fifth Symphony? If anything, it’s probably a step back from the rigour and austerity of the Fourth. But to call it more conservative is to ignore its remarkable sense of unstoppable organic growth, and its ability to cultivate towering textures from the tiniest musical cells. They’re all things Sibelius would push even further in the remarkable, four-movements-in-one concentration of his Symphony No. 7. And they’re ideas, too, that connect the musical substance of what’s undeniably his most famous and best-loved Symphony to those very natural forces that first inspired it.

© David Kettle

Conductor

RYAN BANCROFT



© Benjamin Edlovega

Ryan Bancroft first came to international attention in 2018 when he won First Prize and Audience Prize at the Malko Competition for Young Conductors in Copenhagen. Since 2021, Bancroft has been Principal Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. Bancroft was invited to become the Tapiola Sinfonietta's Artist in Association from 2021/22 onwards. In 2021, Bancroft was announced as Chief Conductor Designate of the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, and took up the Chief Conductor position in September 2023.

Bancroft has conducted European orchestras including the Philharmonia, London Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, Orchestre Nationale du Capitole de Toulouse, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Danish National Symphony, Rotterdam Philharmonic, and Ensemble Intercontemporain. In North America Bancroft returned to Los Angeles to make his debut at the Hollywood Bowl Festival in August 2023, and in the 24/25 season he appears with the Los Angeles Philharmonic in Hollywood again as well as in the Walt Disney Hall in subscription series. Previously he has worked with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Toronto Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Dallas Symphony and Minnesota Symphony.

Bancroft has a passion for contemporary music and has performed with Amsterdam's acclaimed Nieuw Ensemble, assisted Pierre Boulez in a performance of his *Sur Incises* in Los Angeles, premiered works by Sofia Gubaidulina, John Cage, James Tenney, Anne LeBaron, and has worked closely with improvisers such as Wadada Leo Smith and Charlie Haden.

For full biography please visit sco.org.uk

Piano

ERIC LU



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Eric Lu won First Prize at The Leeds International Piano Competition in 2018 at the age of 20. The following year, he signed an exclusive contract with Warner Classics, and has since collaborated with some of the world's most prestigious orchestras, and presented in major recital venues.

Recent and forthcoming orchestral collaborations include the London Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Boston Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Oslo Philharmonic, Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Orchestre National de Lille, Finnish Radio Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Helsinki Philharmonic, Shanghai Symphony at the Proms, amongst others. Conductors he collaborates with include Riccardo Muti, Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, Ryan Bancroft, Marin Alsop, Duncan Ward, Vasily Petrenko, Edward Gardner, Sir Mark Elder, Thomas Dausgaard, Ruth Reinhardt, Earl Lee, Nuno Coehlo, and Martin Fröst.

Active as a recitalist, he is presented on stages including the Cologne Philharmonie, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Queen Elizabeth Hall London, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, San Francisco Davies Hall, BOZAR Brussels, Fondation Louis Vuitton Paris, 92nd St Y, Seoul Arts Centre, Warsaw Philharmonic, and Sala São Paulo. In 2025, he is appearing for the 7th consecutive year in recital at Wigmore Hall London.

Born in Massachusetts in 1997, Eric Lu first came to international attention as a Laureate of the 2015 Chopin International Competition in Warsaw aged just 17. He was also awarded the International German Piano Award in 2017, and Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2021. Eric was a BBC New Generation Artist from 2019-22. He is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, studying with Robert McDonald and Jonathan Biss. He was also a pupil of Dang Thai Son, and has been mentored by Mitsuko Uchida and Imogen Cooper. He is now based in Berlin and Boston.

For full biography please visit sco.org.uk

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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.

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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. Their latest recording, of Schubert Symphonies Nos 5 and 8, was released on 1 November.

The SCO also has long-standing associations with many eminent guest conductors and directors including Principal Guest Conductor 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 Peter Maxwell Davies.

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Sun 10 Nov, 7.30pm

Mozart meets Miles Davis in this kaleidoscopic showpiece from contemporary Swedish composer Andrea Tarrodi. She draws influences from both iconic musicians in this sparkling piece, devised according to Tarrodi's own unique colour palette: *Serenade in Seven Colours* transports you through purples to reds to yellows – via tendrils of melody and shimmering textures. Alongside Tarrodi's *Lucioles*, inspired by the flight of fireflies, performed live in November, discover a magical and deeply moving sound world of sonorous wind and glittering percussion.



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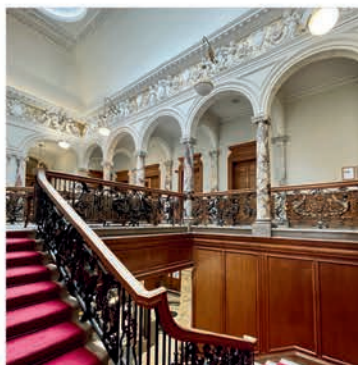
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An SCO Academy participant performs on Glasgow City Halls' stage with the full Orchestra, May 2024 © Christopher Bowen.

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