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Thursday 5 December, 7.30pm Usher Hall, Edinburgh

Friday 6 December, 7.30pm City Halls, Glasgow*

Saturday 7 December, 7.30pm Aberdeen Music Hall

PROKOFIEV Symphony No 1 'Classical'

PROKOFIEV Violin Concerto No 2

Interval of 20 minutes

BRAHMS Symphony No 2

Maxim Emelyanychev Conductor

Aylen Pritchin Violin

BBC RADIO 3 *This performance will be recorded for the BBC 'Radio 3 In Concert' series, due for broadcast in January 2025.

Aylen Pritchin & Maxim Emelyanychev in March 2023



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YOUR ORCHESTRA TONIGHT

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Louise Lewis Goodwin

Percussion

Tom Hunter
Louise Lewis Goodwin

Aisling O'Dea
First Violin

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WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO HEAR

PROKOFIEV (1891–1953)

Symphony No 1 in D major, Op 25
(1916–17)

Allegro

Larghetto

Gavotta: Non troppo allegro

Finale: Molto vivace

PROKOFIEV (1891–1953)

Violin Concerto No 2, Op 63
(1935)

Allegro moderato

Andante assai

Allegro ben marcato

BRAHMS (1833–1897)

Symphony No 2, Op 73
(1877)

Allegro non troppo

Adagio non troppo

Allegretto grazioso (quasi andantino)

Allegro con spirito

Light and darkness hang in a precarious balance in tonight's rich programme, as they do throughout so much of the classical repertoire. But then again, can one really exist without the other? Surely the light needs the darkness to demonstrate just how – well, light it is. And vice versa.

Both composers in tonight's concert knew this well, from personal experience. Sergei Prokofiev raised the curtain on the dashing wit and high spirits of his 'Classical' Symphony just as Russia was descending into post-Revolutionary chaos, and he completed his Second Violin Concerto just before returning to the colder, bleaker, darker country in 1936. Might the Concerto's mood swings mirror the composer's own shifting thoughts about his imminent return? Johannes Brahms admitted there was a deeply melancholy side to his temperament, but it's a side that adds richness and poignancy to his joyfully warm-hearted, open-air Second Symphony.

Prokofiev was already something of an *enfant terrible* when he conducted the premiere of his First Symphony in St Petersburg (then called Petrograd) on 21 April 1918: his violent *Scythian Suite* and biting *Sarcasms*, not to mention his First and Second Piano Concertos, had all scandalised musical traditionalists. But he viewed the apparently tradition-cherishing nature of his first attempt at symphonic form as just the latest of his provocations, writing rather gleefully in his diary: 'when our Classically-minded musicians and professors hear this Symphony, they will be bound to scream in protest at this new example of Prokofiev's insolence. Look how he will not let even Mozart lie quiet in his grave, but must come prodding at him with his grubby hands, contaminating the pure



Sergei Prokofiev

Sergei Prokofiev raised the curtain on the dashing wit and high spirits of his 'Classical' Symphony just as Russia was descending into post-Revolutionary chaos, and he completed his Second Violin Concerto just before returning to the colder, bleaker, darker country in 1936.

Classical pearls with horrible, Prokofiev-ish dissonances!

The idea for a symphony that drew on the Classical styles of Mozart and especially Haydn had been born in the conducting classes that Prokofiev took with Nikolai Tcherepnin at the St Petersburg Conservatoire. Tcherepnin focused heavily on those Classical masters, and while Prokofiev was initially disinterested, he quickly found revelations in the Classical composers' clean lines and economical orchestration.

He headed to the countryside in the summer of 1917, with the aim of discovering 'some green spot where I could both work and walk', as well as setting himself the challenge of composing without a piano. By 10 September that year, the First Symphony was complete, and

Prokofiev himself supplied its 'Classical' title – 'first, because it was the simplest thing to call it; second, out of bravado, to stir up a hornet's nest; and finally, in the hope that should the Symphony prove itself in time to be truly "classic", it would benefit me considerably,' he explained in his 1946 Autobiography.

Indeed, the work lives up to its 'Classical' title in its use of conventional four-movement form (with two fast outer movements, a slow movement, and a movement in the form of a dance – in this case a gavotte rather than the traditional minuet), as well as in its scoring for slimmed-down forces more usual for an 18th-century work.

The first movement deploys a miniature version of sonata form, opening with a conscious evocation of a well-known

Classical formula, the so-called 'Mannheim Rocket', an explosively ascending arpeggio made famous by the German city's crack court ensemble (it returns to close the movement). The second movement is a study in elegance and wit, its main theme a stratospheric melody in the violins, with a more animated central section. The third movement, a miniscule but stomping Gavotte, is thought to have been sketched as far back as 1913, and proved so popular that Prokofiev later recycled it in expanded version in his 1935 ballet *Romeo and Juliet* – indeed, some conductors import this longer version into the Symphony.

Prokofiev closes with what was his second attempt at a finale. The original, he wrote in his diary, 'seemed to me too ponderous and not characterful enough for a Classical symphony. I composed a new finale, lively and blithe enough for there to be a complete absence of minor triads in the whole movement, only major ones. I found the movement extraordinarily easy to write, and the only thing I was concerned with was that its gaiety might border on the indecently irresponsible. I was hugging myself with delight all the time I was composing it!'

The year of the 'Classical' Symphony's composition – 1917 – was, of course, a momentous one for Russia, though Prokofiev at first seemed relatively untroubled by the violence and instability of the coming Revolution. Following the successful October uprising, however, the 'Classical' Symphony's planned premiere for 4 November 1917 was postponed until the following spring, by which time Prokofiev had made his decision to leave the country. To say he fled, though, isn't quite right. It was more of a case of not quite understanding how, as a

pianist and composer, he might find a role in the newly emerging communist society. He felt a change of air, and a change of location, might do him good, and managed to convince the People's Commissar for Education, Anatoly Lunacharsky, to grant him the necessary papers to leave. He went on to invite Lunacharsky to the premiere of the 'Classical' Symphony (he was enraptured). On 7 May 1918, however, Prokofiev boarded the Trans-Siberian Express to Vladivostok, from where he would travel to Japan, then on to San Francisco.

In truth, however, Prokofiev never felt entirely at home away from his Russian roots. He based himself in the USA from 1918 to 1922, then left for Europe, eventually settling in Paris, where he remained until the mid-1930s. But wherever he was, he struggled with life in the West – with the wearying constant comparisons with other prominent Russian expats (chiefly Rachmaninov and Stravinsky), with the dog-eat-dog competitiveness of its classical music culture and its sometimes vapid commercialism and volatility. He began to suspect that there might be quite a close alignment between his own increasingly cherished musical values and the Soviet desire for music that was direct, clear and positive, and that spoke to its listeners. A clutch of new commissions from within the USSR drew him ever closer to the country, and he received lavish promises of artistic freedom and fulsome state support should he decide to return (which, of course, would provide Soviet authorities with quite a cultural coup).

On 23 May 1936, Prokofiev finally went back to the country of his birth, having convinced his Spanish-born wife Lina



Plaque commemorating the premiere of Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No 2 at the Teatro Monumental in Madrid

On 23 May 1936, Prokofiev finally went back to the country of his birth, having convinced his Spanish-born wife Lina Llubera to accompany him. Predictably, his return was hailed as a major artistic win by the communist authorities.

Llubera to accompany him. Predictably, his return was hailed as a major artistic win by the communist authorities. And ironically – or more accurately, tragically – Prokofiev's return also coincided with Stalin's ever more punitive ratcheting-up of oppression and restrictions for artists. Prokofiev's music would later be censored or even banned; he would be required to produce state-approved pieces; and he would endure official censure for the dreaded 'formalism', or simply not producing state-sanctioned socialist realism. His wife Lina would be arrested in 1948 and spend eight years in a forced labour camp (though she'd go on to live until as recently as 1989). In the cruellest of ironies, Prokofiev himself would die on precisely the same day as Stalin – 5 March 1953 – and thereby not live to experience the (very moderate) loosening of restrictions that followed.

But we're jumping ahead. Tonight's next piece, Prokofiev's 1935 Second Violin Concerto, represents the final major work he created before his return to the USSR. And despite its undeniable optimism and energy, there's also a wavering, restless sense of flickering moods, perhaps reflecting the composer's own conflicted thoughts at the time.

Prokofiev wrote the Concerto for French violinist Robert Soëstens, who'd impressed the composer when he'd premiered his Sonata for Two Violins with Samuel Dushkin. Stravinsky had just written a concerto for Dushkin, and Prokofiev felt it was only fair that he should do the same for his colleague.

In fact, Soëstens proved a companion to Prokofiev during the Concerto's creation:

at least parts of it were written when the two men were on a concert tour of Europe and beyond. As Prokofiev later wrote: 'the number of places in which I wrote the Concerto shows the kind of nomadic concert-tour life I led then. The main theme of the first movement was written in Paris, the first theme of the second movement at Voronezh, the orchestration was finished in Baku and the premiere was given in Madrid.'

As for its style, there's debate about the extent to which Prokofiev was consciously attempting to produce a Soviet-friendly, socialist realist tone prior to a possible return to Russia. The new Concerto no doubt offered an opportunity to demonstrate to the authorities that he was happy to produce the kind of music they'd approve of – as he'd done with recent Soviet commissions for the *Lieutenant Kijé* film score in 1934, and the ballet *Romeo and Juliet* in 1935. But there's an underlying sense of worry to some of the Concerto's music, too, which seems at odds with its overall light-hearted, listener-friendly tone.

Just take the first entry from the solo violinist, who plays alone at the very start of the opening movement. It might seem like a quirky but lyrical melody, but its off-kilter, five-beat rhythm and its lack of harmonic support might also leave us slightly unsettled. As if to upset things even more, when the orchestra finally joins the party, it's in an entirely unrelated key. Nonetheless, a second main theme is far more overtly optimistic, though when it returns towards the end of the movement, it's been transformed into something more ghostly and lamenting, prompting a couple of hollow thuds to close the movement.

Prokofiev's slower second movement introduces a more relaxed mood: the soloist presents a long-breathed, serene melody against gently tick-tocking pizzicato accompaniment – though it's the soloist who takes on that distinctive accompaniment at the movement's close. The finale is a wild, exhilarating dance, complete with prominent castanets (Prokofiev was well aware of the intended location for the Concerto's premiere). His off-kilter, five-beat pattern returns to upset things towards the end, however, and a throbbing bass drum drives the soloist's increasingly wild playing as the Concerto approaches its delirious close.

From Prokofiev departing from and returning to the country of his birth, we leap back a bit more than five decades to discover Hamburg-born Johannes Brahms enjoying the good life in Austria, ensconced for the summer of 1877 in the tiny, picturesque lakeside village of Pörschach am Wörthersee. It had taken him around two decades to come up with a final, definitive version of his First Symphony, which he'd completed the previous year. He'd had a good excuse, however: fear of comparison with the revered figure of Beethoven. 'You have no idea what it's like to always hear such a giant marching behind you!' he wrote to a friend.

His Second Symphony, by contrast, took him around three months: he wrote the piece at his summer lakeside retreat between June and September 1877. And it seems he was fairly gleeful about the Symphony's cheerful, upbeat, generally optimistic mood. He even dared to tease his publisher by writing: 'The new Symphony is so melancholy that you won't



Johannes Brahms

**He'd had a good excuse,
however: fear of comparison
with the revered figure of
Beethoven.**

stand it. I have never written anything so sad, so minor-ish: the score must appear with a black border. I have given enough warning. Are you really still proposing to buy yourself such a thing? We can always alter the terms.'

At its premiere in Vienna's Musikverein – on 30 December 1877, by the Vienna Philharmonic conducted by Hans Richter – the Second Symphony drew a warm, appreciative welcome, and listeners even demanded an encore of its final movement. Theodor Billroth – surgeon, amateur musician and close friend to the composer – later described the piece as 'all blue sky, babbling of streams, sunshine and cool green shade'. It's often compared with Beethoven's 'Pastoral' Symphony for its easy-going evocations, its open-air freshness, its sunny disposition.

And yet – was Brahms really pulling his publisher's leg? There's an undeniably melancholy undercurrent running below the scintillating surface of the Second Symphony, one that conductor and friend of the composer Vinzenz Lachner identified, and asked Brahms about: 'Why do you throw into the idyllically serene atmosphere with which the first movement begins the rumbling kettledrum, the gloomy lugubrious tones of the trombones and tuba?'

Brahms's reply is revealing. 'I have to confess that I am a severely melancholic person, that black wings are constantly flapping above us, and that in my output – perhaps not entirely by chance – that Symphony is followed by a little essay about the great "Why". If you don't know this, I will send it to you. It casts the necessary shadow on the serene Symphony

Perhaps it's the contrast between light and dark – and the fact that both define themselves by the presence of the other – that gives the Symphony some of its particular power.

and perhaps accounts for those timpani and trombones.' The 'little essay' Brahms mentions is his choral work *Warum ist das Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen*, or 'Why is the light given to the wretched?', one of his darkest, most haunting pieces. Perhaps it's the contrast between light and dark – and the fact that both define themselves by the presence of the other – that gives the Symphony some of its particular power.

The three notes from the cellos and basses that open the Second Symphony's first movement also serve as a cell from which much of the rest of the piece grows – most immediately, the lyrical, pastoral melody that follows in the horns, winds and strings. But an ominous timpani roll and dirge-like trombones quickly follow – precisely the ones referred to by Lachner – although the sense of bucolic joy is quickly re-established

with a faster-moving theme for violins and flutes.

An overtly beautiful cello melody launches the slower second movement, though a solo horn later leads the music into darker, more troubled material, and the sense of serenity at the movement's conclusion feels somewhat hard-won. The happiness is more blithe, however, in the perky third movement, where an oboe pipes a country-style waltz in between more outspokenly rhythmic sections with a distinct flavour of Mendelssohn's fairy music. Despite its subdued opening, Brahms' finale quickly explodes into bold, confident life, and even the composer's trombones make a return – now high in their register, resplendent, and re-emphasising its exultant conclusion.

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Conductor

MAXIM EMELYANYCHEV



At the Scottish Chamber Orchestra Maxim Emelyanychev follows in the footsteps of just five previous Principal Conductors in the Orchestra's 49-year history; Roderick Brydon (1974-1983), Jukka-Pekka Saraste (1987-1991), Ivor Bolton (1994-1996), Joseph Swensen (1996-2005) and Robin Ticciati (2009-2018).

Recent highlights have included a US tour and a performance at the London Proms with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and his debuts with the Berliner Philharmoniker, New Japan Philharmonic, Osaka Kansai Philharmonic, Bergen Philharmonic, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre de Chambre de Paris.

In 2023/24 Maxim's highlights included the following debuts: Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln, SWR Symphonieorchester Stuttgart, Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio-France, Mozarteum Orchestra at the Salzburg Festival. He returns to the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

He regularly collaborates with renowned artists such as Max Emanuel Cenčić, Patrizia Ciofi, Joyce DiDonato, Franco Fagioli, Richard Goode, Sophie Karthäuser, Stephen Hough, Katia and Marielle Labèque, Marie-Nicole Lemieux, Julia Lezhneva, Alexei Lubimov, Riccardo Minasi, Xavier Sabata and Dmitry Sinkovsky.

Maxim is also a highly respected chamber musician. His most recent recording (on Aparté), of Brahms Violin Sonatas with long-time collaborator and friend Aylen Pritchen has attracted outstanding reviews internationally. With the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Maxim has made critically-acclaimed recordings of Schubert Symphony No 9 – the symphony with which he made his debut with the orchestra – and Mendelssohn Symphonies Nos 3 'Scottish' and 5 'Reformation' both on Linn Records. Their latest recording, of Schubert Symphonies Nos 5 and 8, was released in November.

For full biography please visit sco.org.uk

Violin

AYLEN PRITCHIN



Aylen Pritchín is one of the most sought-after and versatile artists today. He performs repertoire spanning from early music to contemporary, playing on period and modern instruments.

Pritchín received numerous awards, including First Grand prize at the Long-Thibaud International Competition in Paris (2014).

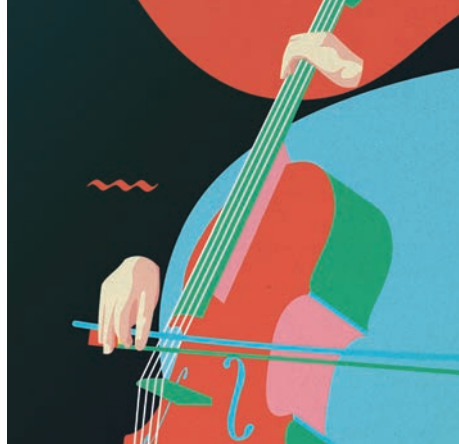
Highlights of recent seasons include successful collaborations with major European orchestras: Scottish Chamber Orchestra (Brahms; Prokofiev 2), Orchestre national du Capitole de Toulouse (Prokofiev 2; Bruch 1), Orchestre de Chambre de Paris (Saint-Saëns 3), WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln (Beethoven), Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra (Saint-Saëns 3 ; Prokofiev 2), Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra (Brahms), Orquesta Filarmonica de Gran Canaria (Schnittke 2), Il Pomo d'Oro (Mozart 3), Camerata Nordica (Mendelssohn, Vaughan Williams, Desyatnikov, Beethoven), Sinfonia Varsovia (Mendelssohn).

Pritchín regularly works with conductors such as Maxim Emelyanychev, Teodor Currentzis, Christian Arming, Kiril Karabits, Barbara Dragan, Yip Wing-sie, Shao-Chia Lü, Michiyoshi Inoue, Cornelius Meister, Yuri Simonov, Dorian Wilson, Mikhail Gerts, Shlomo Mintz, Olivier Ochanine and Valentin Uryupin.

A keen chamber musician, his invitations include recitals at renowned festivals and venues: Wiener Konzerthaus, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Stockholm Musikaliska, Salzburg Mozarteum, Tchaikovsky Conservatory Hall in Moscow, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, Toppán Hall in Tokyo, Dubrovnik Summer Festival, SoNoRo Festival, La Folle Journée de Nantes, the Lockenhaus Kammermusikfest, collaborating with such artists as Maxim Emelyanychev, Tanja Tetzlaff, Tomori Kitamura, Lawrence Power, Nicolas Altstaedt and Olli Mustonen among others.

In June 2025 he will make his debut at the Bechstein Hall in London with pianist Rémi Geniet and will return at the Würzburg MozartFest for a chamber music programme (Mozart, Fauré, Dvorak) with cellist Florian Bartha and pianist Severin von Eckardstein.

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. 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.

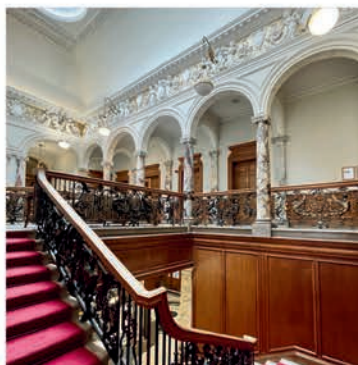
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