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Bach's Brandenburg Concertos

9-11 Jan 2025

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Bach's Brandenburg Concertos

Thursday 9 January, 2pm The Queen's Hall, Edinburgh
Friday 10 January, 2pm City Halls, Glasgow
Saturday 11 January, 2pm Aberdeen Music Hall

BACH Brandenburg Concerto No 1
TELEMANN Sonata in E minor
BACH Sinfonia to Cantata 174
Interval of 20 minutes
BACH Brandenburg Concerto No 4
BACH Orchestral Suite No 3 in D major

Rachel Podger Director / Violin
André Cebrián Flute
Marta Gómez Flute

SCOTTISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

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Jan Waterfield

Lute
Toby Carr

Donald Gillan
Cello

WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO HEAR

BACH (1685–1750)

Brandenburg Concerto No 1 in F major, BWV 1046 **(1721)**

Allegro
Adagio
Allegro
Menuetto

TELEMANN (1681-1767)

Sonata in E minor TWV 50:4 **(c.1712-21)**

Gravement
Allabreve
Air
Tendrement
Gay

BACH (1685–1750)

Sinfonia to Cantata 174, BWV 174 **(1729)**

Brandenburg Concerto No 4 in G major, BWV 1049 **(1721)**

Allegro
Andante
Presto

Orchestral Suite No 3 in D major, BWV 1068 **(c.1724–1731)**

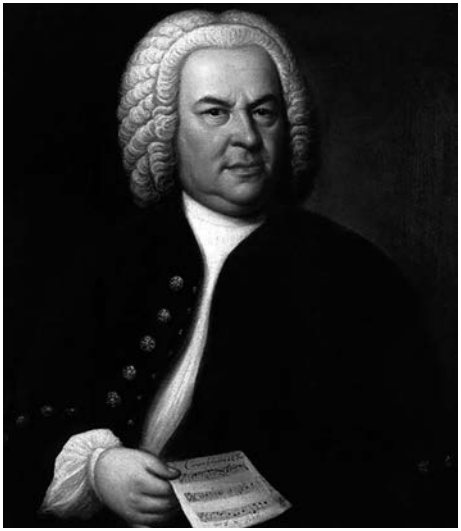
Ouverture
Air
Gavotte
Bourrée
Gigue

If you've ever applied for a new job and been asked to provide a sample of your work, you might know how JS Bach felt. Especially if you ended up not getting the job. The composer's six Brandenburg Concertos must surely count as classical music's most elaborate, ambitious, but ultimately unsuccessful attempt to gain employment.

He wrote the Concertos around 1721, when his employer, Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen, was reallocating funds from his court musicians to his palace guards, possibly because his second wife, whom he had married recently, was far from a music lover. Bach could see what was on the cards. He'd met Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg, two years earlier, on a visit to Berlin to source a new harpsichord for the Köthen court, and the nobleman had casually suggested that Bach might put together a few concertos for his own court orchestra. Sensing the possibility of jumping ship to a wealthier establishment, Bach assembled a beautifully printed score of these six sophisticated concertos, each one conceived for its own individually selected group of soloists, and duly sent them off. He never heard back.

Nonetheless, Bach's unsuccessful job application has left us with some of music's most distinctive and memorable pieces, in which the composer demonstrates not only his mastery of weaving together contrapuntal melodic lines, but also his expertise in spinning intense, emotional melodies. We'll hear three of the Brandenburg Concertos today – well, in a manner of speaking.

Bach created his First Concerto for the striking combination of two horns, three



Johann Sebastian Bach

Bach's unsuccessful job application has left us with some of music's most distinctive and memorable pieces, in which the composer demonstrates not only his mastery of weaving together contrapuntal melodic lines, but also his expertise in spinning intense, emotional melodies.

oboes, bassoon and strings, plus the addition of a 'violino piccolo' (a violin tuned slightly higher than usual, giving it a particularly prominent, penetrating sound – though it's usually played on a conventional violin nowadays). That instrumentation alone contained messages about how Bach saw the wealth and prominence of the Brandenburg court. Horns were invariably associated with hunting, an activity that stood as a metaphor for military might among the many smaller German states. The more hunting you did, therefore, the more you ought to be taken seriously, and having prominent 'hunting' horns in your court orchestra would only help to re-emphasise that image. In addition, horn players were usually the orchestra's highest-paid musicians: showing them off in a new piece of music would also draw attention to the court's wealth and power. With all that symbolism in mind, Bach had some ready-made music that might fit the bill perfectly: the Concerto's first movement draws heavily on the opening Sinfonia to his secular 'Hunt' Cantata, BWV 208, from eight years earlier.

The First Concerto's confidently striding opening movement makes great play of its horns, although the soloists' prominence seems perpetually to shift, as though elements of the music are somehow going in and out of focus. An oboe and violin share the long, slowly unfolding melody in the lamenting second movement, set in a darker minor key, while Bach sends his horns right to the top of their ranges in his jolly third movement, which prominently features the solo violin. It feels like this might have counted as the Concerto's finale, but Bach can't resist adding a fourth movement, which is effectively a miniature suite of Baroque dances separated by a recurring, bouncing

Georg Philipp Telemann

If anything, Telemann had the more forward-looking musical style, mixing ideas from German, French, Italian and even Polish music, and clearly emphasising melodic invention, simplicity, directness and emotional power.

minuet, complete with another celebratory interlude showing off his horns and oboes. We'll return to the idea of a dance suite, though on a more ambitious scale, at the end of today's programme.

Georg Philipp Telemann was an almost exact contemporary of JS Bach: he was born just four years before him, though he died at the remarkable age of 86 in 1767, 17 years after Bach's own death. Telemann was astonishingly prolific, too – it's estimated that he created around 3,000 musical works during his long career, though only around half survive – and he was also an immensely popular and well-regarded figure, far more so than Bach during their lifetimes.

It might seem natural to assume that the two men would be bitter rivals. In fact, they were great friends and respectful, appreciative colleagues, to the extent that Bach made Telemann godfather to his second eldest son, Carl Philipp Emanuel. If anything, Telemann had the more forward-looking musical style, mixing ideas from German, French, Italian and even Polish music, and clearly emphasising melodic invention, simplicity, directness and emotional power. His ideas would eventually coalesce in the so-called 'empfindsamer Stil' (sensitive style) that composers such as CPE Bach would explore more fully, and later still in the Classical world of Haydn and Mozart.

Perhaps that fresh, forward-looking perspective came from the fact that Telemann had essentially taught himself music, though he went on to hold major musical positions in Leipzig, Sorau, Eisenach and Frankfurt before taking the role of music director to the five biggest

churches in Hamburg in 1721, where he remained for the rest of his long life.

Not much is known, however, about the ensemble Sonata in E minor that we hear next, though it's thought to date from the years Telemann spent in Frankfurt, between 1712 and 1721. It opens with a slow, lamenting 'Gravement' which wrings maximum emotional power from simple rising and falling scales. A far sprightlier, almost Handelian 'Allabreve' pits a slow-moving melody against a prancing bassline, then proceeds to swap those parts back and forth between instruments. Telemann specifically marks his brief 'Air' as being for 'two oboes without accompaniment', save a bassline, while the gently swaying 'Tendrement' explores several adventurous harmonies. The closing 'Gay' is the Sonata's most Bachian movement, with its intricate counterpoint, and brings the Sonata to a busy, bustling close.

If Bach reworked a cantata movement in his Brandenburg Concerto No 1, in today's next piece – well, he did the opposite. Looking at just the list of pieces in today's concert, you might not have expected to hear three of Bach's six Brandenburg Concertos. Nonetheless, the opening Sinfonia to Bach's Cantata 174, 'Ich liebe den Höchsten von ganzem Gemüte' (I love the Highest with my whole being), may sound strangely familiar. There's a simple reason for that: it's the first movement of his Brandenburg Concerto No 3, but with added, newly composed parts for horns and oboes.

Bach wrote the Cantata in 1729, eight years after he'd put together his Brandenburg Concertos. By that time, he was living and working in Leipzig, where he'd remain until his death in 1750, and where he wrote a new cantata for every Sunday and feast day in the church calendar, eventually producing one every week (sometimes more) over a period of around three years. With that in mind, it's perhaps understandable that he might surreptitiously steal from his own earlier music when he felt it was appropriate. And although we might frown upon musical plagiarism – whether of oneself or of someone else – in the 21st century, things were very different 300 years ago, when it was not just tolerated as an unavoidable evil, but happily accepted as part and parcel of creativity. (Just think of Handel's shameless pilfering of his own music, some of which crops up again and again across concertos, operas, oratorios and more.)

Nevertheless, it remains something of a mystery as to why Bach specifically chose to reuse the first movement of his Third Brandenburg Concerto in this way. It may have been a short-cut to save himself some time – but if that was really the case, why bother to elaborate the existing music for strings with freshly composed parts for horns and oboes? Maybe it was simply because he felt the music was right for the cantata's, celebratory tone – but using it also somewhat skews the cantata's overall balance with an unusually long opening movement.

While Bach's motivations might not be immediately clear, hearing the Cantata's Sinfonia is nonetheless a fascinating experience for anyone familiar with the Brandenburg Concerto No 3, as the piece's horns and oboes bring a new richness and sonic splendour to the existing music for

Bach created a particularly bright sound world for his Brandenburg Concerto No 4, with its single violin and pair of flutes or recorders as soloists. That choice of soloists, however, also makes for a fascinating two-level conception of solo and accompaniment: not only is the trio as a unit 'accompanied' by the larger orchestra, but there's also a fair bit of accompaniment going on within the soloist threesome itself.

violins, violas, cellos and continuo, which remains intact and unchanged.

From an adapted Brandenburg Concerto, we return to the real thing in its original form with today's next piece. Bach created a particularly bright sound world for his Brandenburg Concerto No 4, with its single violin and pair of flutes or recorders as soloists. That choice of soloists, however, also makes for a fascinating two-level conception of solo and accompaniment: not only is the trio as a unit 'accompanied' by the larger orchestra, but there's also a fair bit of accompaniment going on within the soloist threesome itself. That's especially evident in the Concerto's mournful but lyrical second movement, where the flutes quietly echo phrases just heard from the full ensemble over an equally quiet accompanying bassline supplied by the solo violin. Bach opens with jaunty good humour in his elegant first movement, which first places the two flautists very much in the spotlight: it's not until quite a way into the movement that the solo violinist feels comfortable enough to take on their opening melody. Bach closes with a jolly, good-natured fugue in his final movement, first introduced by the orchestral strings. The solo violin moves into increasingly fiery, virtuosic material about halfway through the movement, until a passage in rhythmic unison suddenly heralds the Concerto's conclusion.

Today's concert closes, not with another Brandenburg Concerto, but with a different example of Bach's orchestral music. What we might call an Orchestral Suite, however, Bach would probably have called an 'Ouverture' – somewhat

confusingly, given the common usage of a very similar word in classical music today.

If you're thinking that the word 'ouverture' sounds French rather than German, you're not wrong. It was the name given to a collection of dance numbers excised from French operas – for example those written by Jean-Baptiste Lully for the court of Louis XIV – in which ballet formed a crucial and much-loved element. In 17th-century France, it was common to collect those dance sections together and perform them one after another as purely instrumental music, divorced from its original operatic context. Hence the Baroque suite was born, gaining its 'Ouverture' name from its opening movement, the opera's original overture. This opening movement would itself follow a fairly standard pattern of a stately, somewhat pompous slow introduction, followed by a scampering, faster section – still known today as a French overture.

Bach's Orchestral Suite No 3 does indeed begin with a typical French overture, which leads into a succession of characterful dances. But as with so much of the composer's music, not a great deal is known about the piece's origins. First of all, it's a bit of a mystery why Bach wrote so few orchestral suites – only four survive – when other composers of the time penned dozens. Their numbering doesn't reflect their dates of composition, nor indicate whether Bach considered them as a set – as he definitely did with the six Brandenburg Concertos. It's not even entirely clear when he wrote the Suites: No 3 may come from around the same time as the Brandenburg Concertos, or it may date from his later years in Leipzig. It's known to have existed by Bach's Leipzig years, at least, when all four Suites were performed by the Collegium Musicum that he directed, one of music's earliest independent 'orchestras'.

The Third Orchestral Suite brings today's concert to a particularly bright, celebratory conclusion with its ensemble of trumpets, timpani, oboes and strings. Those trumpets and timpani are prominent in the slow opening to the initial 'Overture', whose violin writing is so demanding and virtuosic in its subsequent faster section that the movement almost transforms into a violin concerto. The 'Air' is possibly Bach's most famous musical creation, known forever as the music to a famous advert from a time when cigars could still be promoted on British television (in a jazz version by the Jacques Loussier Trio). It's hardly surprising that the 'Air' was used to evoke a sense of calm and serenity, with its long, slowly unfolding violin melody against what jazz musicians might call a walking bassline. The movement gets its famous 'Air on the G string' nickname from an arrangement by violinist August Wilhelmj, which made it playable on just the lowest of the violin's four strings.

Bach follows his famous 'Air' with two gavottes, the first prancing and quick, the second with a more rustic flavour, and with prominent trumpets that might take you back to the hunt-themed music heard earlier in today's concert. After a dashing 'Bourrée', Bach ends with a swaying, tripping 'Gigue', which again showcases the skills of his trumpeters, and brings the Suite to a suitably celebratory close.

Director / Violin

RACHEL PODGER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"Rachel Podger, the unsurpassed British glory of the baroque violin," (The Times) has established herself as a leading interpreter of the Baroque and Classical. She was the first woman to be awarded the prestigious Royal Academy of Music/Kohn Foundation Bach Prize in October 2015, Gramophone Artist of the Year 2018, and the Ambassador for REMA's Early Music Day 2020. A creative programmer, Rachel is the founder and Artistic Director of Brecon Baroque Festival and her ensemble Brecon Baroque; is Principal Guest Director for Tafelmusik; Patron for The Continuo Foundation and an Ambassador for the Learned Society of Wales. Rachel was awarded BBC Music Magazine Recording of the Year and Instrumental Award 2023 for her solo album *Tutta Sola*.

Rachel continues to broaden her relationships with orchestras, ensembles and venues worldwide. Upcoming highlights include her inaugural performance with Tafelmusik as Principal Guest Director and a tour of Asia, her debut directing Scottish Chamber Orchestra, a long-awaited return to the Netherlands Bach Society and tours of *Biber 1681* Sonatas and *The Muses Restor'd* with her ensemble Brecon Baroque.

As a soloist and chamber musician, recent collaborations have included the Austrian premiere of *A Guardian Angel* with VOCES8 at Vienna Konserthaus, a tour of *Angels and Demons* with I Fagiolini, a Vivaldi tour with Arte dei Suonatori, Bach *Goldberg Variations* Reimagined and Vivaldi *The Four Seasons* with Brecon Baroque, and tours of new programme, 'Duologue', with recorder player Lucie Horsch.

Rachel is a sought-after classical music media personality, appearing on and presenting/ performing for many significant media platforms around the world including BBC Radio 3, BBC Proms, Classic FM, Scala Radio, Apple Music, ABC Classics, Radio France, WDR, CNC, CBC and many more.

For full biography please visit sco.org.uk

Flute

ANDRÉ CEBRIÁN

Spanish flautist André Cebrián is in demand as an orchestral and chamber musician throughout Scotland and abroad. He was appointed Principal Flute of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra in 2020 and appears regularly as Guest Principal Flute with orchestras around the world (Sinfónica de Castilla-León, Liceu Opera, Filármonica de Gran Canaria, Sinfónica de Barcelona, RSNO, BBCSSO, Philharmonia Zürich, Malaysian Philharmonic and Spira Mirabilis).

As a chamber musician, André has played in hundreds of chamber music festivals around Europe, performing with the Azahar Ensemble, the Natalia Ensemble or with one of his duo projects with guitarist Pedro Mateo González, pianist Irene Alfageme, or harpist Bleuenn Le Friec.

He also enjoys a busy solo career and has appeared as soloist with orchestras including Sinfónica de Galicia, Real Filharmonía de Galicia, Sinfónica de Castilla y León, Orquesta de la Comunidad de Madrid, Dresden Staatskapelle, Georgian Sinfonietta and Filharmonia Zabrzańska as well as the SCO.

A dedicated teacher, André loves to share his passion for music with his students at The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the Barenboim-Said Academy and the youth orchestras that he coaches each season.

André studied in his hometown Santiago de Compostela with Luis Soto and Laurent Blaiteau. He then went on to study in Paris, Salamanca, Madrid, Detmold and Geneva with teachers Pablo Sagredo, János Bálint and Jacques Zoon.

André's Chair is kindly supported by Claire and Mark Urquhart

Flute

MARTA GÓMEZ

Spanish flutist Marta Gómez Alonso grew up in Asturias in northern Spain, where she started playing the flute. She studied with Antonio Nuez, Fernando Gómez and André Cebrián in Zaragoza, Spain, continuing her education with Juliette Hurel, Julie Moulin and Wim Steinmann in Rotterdam. While starting a freelance career she also completed a postgraduate course in orchestral studies with Laurent Blaiteau.

She developed her orchestral skills through several youth orchestras: JONDE, Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival, Pacific Music Festival or Verbier Festival Orchestra. As a freelance, she has worked with different orchestras in Spain, the Netherlands and Sweden, such as Rotterdam Philharmonic Orkest, Camerata Royal Concertgebouw Orkest, Swedish Chamber Orchestra and Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León.

From 2020 until 2023 she was Orchestral Repertoire Professor at Conservatorio Superior de Castilla-La Mancha, Albacete. She has also given orchestral coaching in youth orchestras in Galicia and Canary Islands.

Passionate about contemporary music, Marta has also performed at the Lucerne Festival under the baton of Heinz Holliger and with various ensembles in the Netherlands and Spain. She took part in the Holland's Festival's 2019 production of Stockhausen's opera *Aus Licht*, where she played a main role that was highly acclaimed by the critics.

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

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