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Schumann & Schubert


26-28 Mar 2025



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Schumann & Schubert

Wednesday 26 March, 7.30pm Holy Trinity Church, St Andrews

Thursday 27 March, 7.30pm The Queen's Hall, Edinburgh

Friday 28 March, 7.30pm City Halls, Glasgow

BEETHOVEN Coriolan Overture

SCHUMANN Violin Concerto

Interval of 20 minutes

JESSIE MONTGOMERY Starburst

SCHUBERT Symphony No 3

Isabelle van Keulen Director / Violin



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Afonso Fesch
Hatty Haynes
Kana Kawashima
Aisling O'Dea
Fiona Alexander
Amira Bedrush-McDonald
Sarah Bevan Baker

Second Violin

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Viola

Max Mandel
Francesca Gilbert
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Jamie Kenny

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Katherine Bryer

Clarinet

Maximiliano Martín
William Stafford

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Alison Green

Horn

Etienne Cutajar
Harry Johnstone

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Shaun Harrold

Timpani

Louise Lewis Goodwin

Michelle Dierx
Second Violin



WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO HEAR

BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Coriolan Overture, Op 62 (1807)

SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Violin Concerto in D minor, WoO 23
(1853)

In kräftigem, nicht zu schnellem Tempo
Langsam
Lebhaft, doch nicht schnell

JESSIE MONTGOMERY (b. 1981)

Starburst for string orchestra (2012)

SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

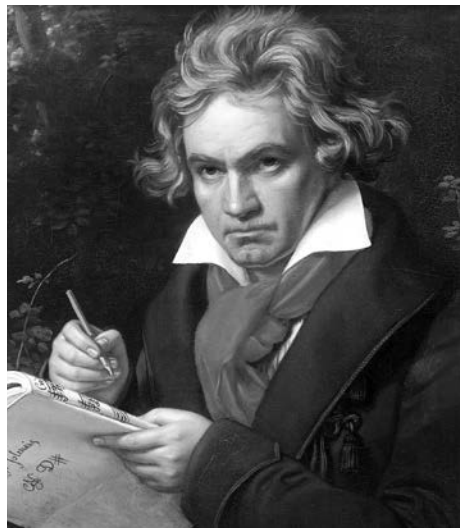
Symphony No 3 in D major, D 200
(1815)

Adagio maestoso – Allegro con brio
Allegretto
Menuetto: Vivace
Presto vivace

From a tragic Roman hero to a dazzling cosmic lightshow, by way of messages from the afterlife: there are some compelling stories behind the music in tonight's wide-ranging concert (even if we might take some of them with a pinch of salt).

There's nothing to disbelieve, however, in tonight's opening piece. Ludwig van Beethoven wrote his *Coriolan* Overture not for Shakespeare's great Roman drama *Coriolanus*, but for a lesser-known version of the same story by Austrian dramatist Heinrich Joseph von Collin. This later play was clearly a work Beethoven admired, though we don't know whether that's because he saw it during its successful but brief run in Vienna in 1802, or simply because he'd read the script. Doubtless there was an element of self-identification with the heroism and integrity – and, we should probably admit, obstinacy – of the legendary Roman general who, having defeated the Volsci tribe in battle, becomes so disillusioned with the Roman populace and Senate that he eventually switches sides, joining his erstwhile enemies and leading them in battle towards the Eternal City. Things can only end badly, for Coriolanus at least: his mother and wife persuade him to call off the attack but, having burnt his bridges with both camps, he takes his own life.

The 1802 performances of von Collin's *Coriolan* were given with music adapted from Mozart's opera *Idomeneo*. But, following successful performances of Beethoven's new Overture at two subscription concerts sponsored by the composer's patron Prince Franz Joseph von Lobkowitz, a one-off, full-length performance of the play was organised for 24 April 1807 at Vienna's Imperial Theatre, solely as a vehicle for Beethoven's Overture. (It can't have been a coincidence that Prince Lobkowitz was one of the Theatre's directors.)



Ludwig van Beethoven

It's not surprising that Beethoven's *Coriolan Overture* provoked such a response, however. It's a masterpiece of musical drama, encapsulating the play's essential ingredients in a mere eight or so minutes.

It's not surprising that Beethoven's *Coriolan Overture* provoked such a response, however. It's a masterpiece of musical drama, encapsulating the play's essential ingredients in a mere eight or so minutes. Following an orchestral call to attention, its stormy main theme serves to represent Coriolan's resolve and belligerence, while the tender theme that follows surely represents his mother and wife's pleadings. In the central development section, the *Coriolan* theme gradually loses its bite as the Roman commander works through his inner struggles, until he seems to simply fade away at the piece's tragic close.

If high tragedy lies behind Beethoven's *Coriolan Overture*, then there's more than a little intrigue and drama behind tonight's next piece. Indeed, Schumann's sole Violin Concerto has one of the strangest backstories in all of classical music, one that brings together madness and messages from the afterlife, Nazis and venomous music critics,

and esoteric manuscripts hidden in dusty archives. Whether the tale behind the piece even overshadows the fragile lyricism and delicate virtuosity of the Concerto itself – well, we'll come to that.

Composer Robert Schumann had been notoriously fragile in his mental health for years before he composed the Violin Concerto in 1853. But that particular period would prove something of a turning point for Schumann and his family: following increasingly worrying auditory hallucinations, he'd attempt suicide in 1854 by throwing himself in the Rhine, and he'd end his days in 1856 in the small sanatorium of Endenich, near Bonn, aged just 46. It's now speculated that he may have suffered from bipolar disorder or even schizophrenia – about which little was understood, of course, in the middle of the 19th century.

Schumann had, however, completed the Violin Concerto before his mental collapse, and



Robert Schumann

Schumann's sole Violin Concerto has one of the strangest backstories in all of classical music, one that brings together madness and messages from the afterlife, Nazis and venomous music critics, and esoteric manuscripts hidden in dusty archives.

had presented it to its dedicatee, the eminent violinist and family friend Joseph Joachim. The violinist had even arranged a private play-through with the Hanover Court Orchestra (which he led), so that Schumann could hear his music, but had stopped short of performing the piece publicly.

After the composer's death, however, the question arose as to the unperformed Concerto's future. Joachim offered his opinion that the piece might have been a product of Schumann's declining mental state, and admitted that he felt uncomfortable about performing it – and, indeed, about the piece being performed at all. Robert's widow Clara was inclined to agree, as was close family friend Johannes Brahms. As a result, the Violin Concerto was omitted from a complete edition of Schumann's music compiled after his death, and its manuscript was deposited in Berlin's State Library, with the stipulation that the music should not be played or published until at least

a century after Schumann's death. Which, theoretically, would take us to 1956.

More than two decades earlier than that 'release' year, however, things took a decidedly spooky turn. Jelly d'Arányi was an internationally admired violinist at the time, born in Hungary but resident in London, and great-niece of Joachim. She was also a passionate devotee of spiritualism, and at a séance in 1933 she was apparently contacted by the spirit of none other than Robert Schumann. Through a 'glass game' that was essentially what we'd call a ouija board, d'Arányi was told to seek out an unpublished work – and later directed to a Berlin library, where it was held.

The Concerto manuscript was duly found, and, despite protestations from Robert and Clara's youngest daughter Eugenie (who was still alive) that her mother had not wanted it to be played, d'Arányi convinced Mainz music publishers

Schott to look into its authenticity, in the hope that they might eventually publish it. D'Arányi herself was keen to give its premiere, and when Schott contacted none other than Yehudi Menuhin for his views on the manuscript, he was equally enthusiastic about being the first to perform the Concerto.

In the end, however, neither d'Arányi nor Menuhin would be given that honour. In 1930s Berlin, the Nazi authorities kept a keen eye on cultural comings and goings. When Joseph Goebbels' Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda got wind of a major rediscovered Concerto by an unquestionably German, Aryan composer, they considered it theirs. In the end, the Concerto's first ever performance was given by violinist Georg Kulenkampff and the Berlin Philharmonic in Berlin in November 1937, in the presence of Adolf Hitler himself.

If only the story ended there. D'Arányi did end up giving the Concerto its British premiere – at the Queen's Hall in London, in February 1938 – but the previous autumn, a book had been published detailing the strange circumstances of the piece's rediscovery. The reaction from critics and commentators was one of disbelief, derision and outrage. And the central accusation was simple: the Concerto had never been 'lost', since a handful of people did know of its existence and its location (including the Schumanns' surviving daughter Eugenie, for example), and that the whole incident had been engineered to revive d'Arányi's flagging career. It took an intervention from Sir Donald Francis Tovey – then Reid Professor of Music at the University of Edinburgh, and a much-loved musical scholar – to step in, defend d'Arányi, and effectively rehabilitate her reputation.

Perhaps not surprisingly, it's taken a while for Schumann's Violin Concerto to establish itself in the repertoire. Reactions at its premiere

were not generally favourable. One British critic, for example, wrote: 'of this dismal fiasco, the less said the better.' But it's hard, too, to deny the impact of its bizarre, unfortunate origin story, and the fact that details about its creation and 'rediscovery' might have simply overshadowed the music itself. After all, we've just spent several paragraphs mulling over those very details.

Is the Concerto the product of a declining mind? Ultimately, it's up to the listener to decide. It's not without its rather baffling aspects. The solo part, for example, is extremely challenging for the violinist, but doesn't sound terribly virtuosic to the listener. The finale has to be kept at a slower tempo than might perhaps be expected, or else certain solo passages would become unplayable. It's also, maybe, conceived on more of a symphonic scale than the more modest, soloist-centric proportions of a more conventional concerto.

But it's perhaps elements such as its symphonic ambitions that make Schumann's Violin Concerto such a fascinating, compelling piece, as well as the composer's linking of its movements through recurring but transformed themes. If its backstory threatens to overshadow the piece in our own times, then perhaps the same was true for Clara Schumann, Joachim and Brahms. Did their decision to suppress the piece have more to do with its painful associations with Schumann's mental decline than concerns that were purely musical? Again, it's up to the listener to decide.

In any case, Schumann's Violin Concerto is anything but bland or forgettable. It opens with a powerful, muscular theme for the orchestra, followed by a far gentler, more lyrical second main theme, shared between violins and flutes. The soloist takes a slightly more introspective view on the bold opening



Jessie Montgomery

Jessie Montgomery is one of America's most performed composers, and also a respected violinist. Her music collides together highbrow and lowbrow, bright colours and propulsive rhythms, in a style that's attractive and immediate, but never lacking in craft or insight.

theme when they enter, though they stress the Concerto's symphonic credentials by foregoing a traditionally showy solo cadenza.

After the hushed warmth of the slower, second movement *Intermezzo*, Schumann leads without a break into the strutting rhythms of the concluding polonaise, which makes for a surprisingly gentle but nonetheless characterful close to the Concerto.

From the dramas and intrigues of a 'lost' and 'rediscovered' Concerto, we jump to as recently as 2012 for tonight's next piece. Born in New York, Jessie Montgomery is one of America's most performed composers, as well as a respected violinist. Her music collides together highbrow and lowbrow, bright colours and propulsive rhythms, in a style that's attractive and immediate, but never lacking in craft or insight. She was connected for several years with the Detroit-based Sphinx Organization, which supports young African-American

and Latino string players, in roles including Composer in Residence with the Sphinx Virtuosi, the organisation's professional performance ensemble. Montgomery writes about her *Starburst*:

"This brief one-movement work for string orchestra is a play on imagery of rapidly changing musical colours. Exploding gestures are juxtaposed with gentle fleeting melodies in an attempt to create a multidimensional soundscape. A common definition of a starburst – 'the rapid formation of large numbers of new stars in a galaxy at a rate high enough to alter the structure of the galaxy significantly' – lends itself almost literally to the nature of the performing ensemble who premiered the work, the Sphinx Virtuosi, and I wrote the piece with their dynamic in mind!"

To close tonight's concert, we head back to the beginning of the 19th century, where the 18-year-old Franz Schubert wrote his Third



Franz Peter Schubert

The young Schubert was hardly happy in his father's employment, and – judging by his sheer output of music alone – clearly felt more inspired by a musical career.

Symphony between 24 May and 19 July 1815. It was a remarkably productive time for the young composer, and it's even been dubbed his 'miracle year': he managed to compose (deep breath) over 140 songs (including the infamous four-minute horror story 'Erlkönig'), four operas, two mass settings, a string quartet, two piano sonatas, and several other works besides. It's all the more remarkable since he was still employed as effectively a trainee teacher at his father's school in the Viennese suburbs, while taking private composition lessons with Antonio Salieri, who'd earlier taught him as a pupil at the city's prestigious Stadtkonvikt school.

The young Schubert was hardly happy in his father's employment, and – judging by his sheer output of music alone – clearly felt more inspired by a musical career. He composed no fewer than six symphonies as a young man, and even if they display the clear influence of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and even Rossini –

all composers Schubert much admired – they also demonstrate his effortless ability with memorable melody, and his love for drama.

After a serious-minded call to attention, a slow introduction kicks off the Third Symphony's opening movement, before its faster main section pits a perky clarinet tune against string accompaniment, with some distinctively Rossinian flavours to its charm and humour.

The slower (but hardly slow) second movement opens with one of Schubert's disarmingly simple but memorable tunes, with the clarinet returning to lead its very Viennese central section. The third movement is an energetic, high-spirited minuet, full of unusual rhythmic surprises, while the finale – a frantic, dashing tarantella dance – teems with witty details amid its ever-changing, imaginative scoring.

© David Kettle

Director / Violin

ISABELLE VAN KEULEN



Isabelle van Keulen is one of the few musicians who has been able to establish herself as both a violinist and violist on the major concert stages. As a soloist, she regularly works with major orchestras from all over the world under leading conductors.

She was artistic director of the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra for three years, has held a professorship for violin, viola and chamber music at the Lucerne University of Music since 2012 and has been artistic director of the Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss am Rhein since 2017. In the field of chamber music, she was artistic director of the Delft Chamber Music Festival between 1997 and 2006.

Numerous recordings reflect the breadth of her activities: her recordings span works from the Baroque and Classical periods to the 20th and 21st centuries, tango music and the Violin Concerto by Erkki-Sven Tüür dedicated to her. Most recently, she released the CD *Variations on Buenos Aires* in 2022.

Concerts in 2024 took her to the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, the Konzerthaus Vienna and Wigmore Hall London, among others.

For full biography please visit sco.org.uk

Biography

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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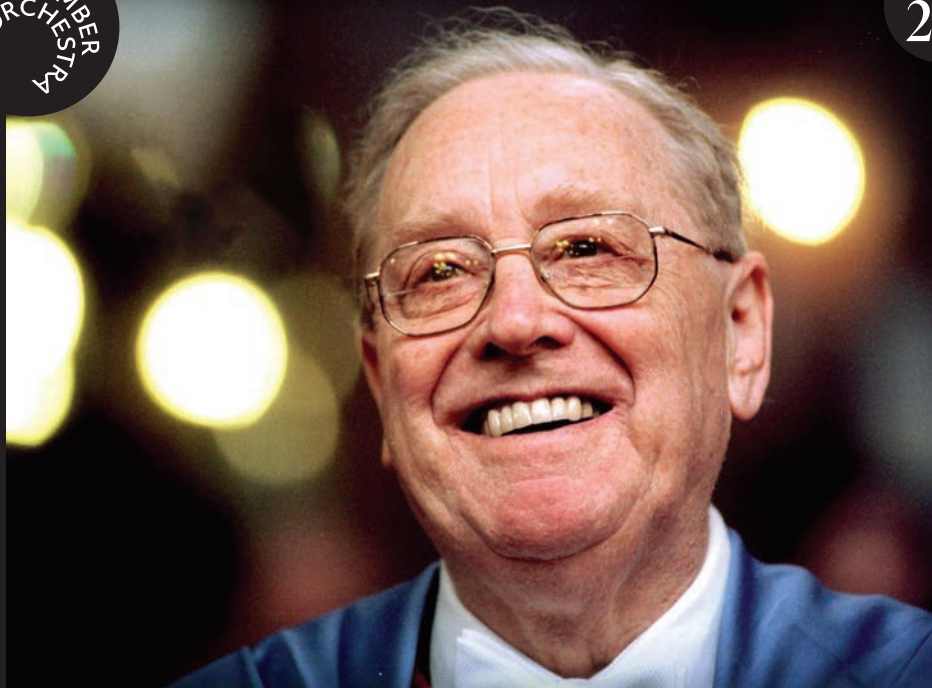
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To learn more, contact Mary at mary.clayton@sco.org.uk or call **0131 478 8369**.

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