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# Benedetti plays Mendelssohn

28 February 2026



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# Benedetti plays Mendelssohn

The Quilter Cheviot Benedetti Series



QUILTER CHEVIOT

**Saturday 28 February, 7.30pm** Eden Court Theatre, Inverness



**MENDELSSOHN** Overture, The Hebrides

**MENDELSSOHN** Violin Concerto

*Interval of 20 minutes*

**MENDELSSOHN** Symphony No.3 'Scottish'

**Maxim Emelyanychev** conductor

**Nicola Benedetti** violin



© Andrei Grlic



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*This concert will be played on gut strings and natural brass/timpani throughout.*

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Principal Second Violin



# What You Are About To Hear

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## MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Overture, The Hebrides, Op.26  
(1830, revised 1832)

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## MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Violin Concerto in E minor, Op.64  
(1844)

**Allegro molto appassionato**

**Andante**

**Allegretto non troppo – Allegro molto vivace**

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## MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

Symphony No.3 in A minor, Op.56  
(1829-42)

**Andante con moto – Allegro un poco agitato**

**Vivace non troppo**

**Adagio**

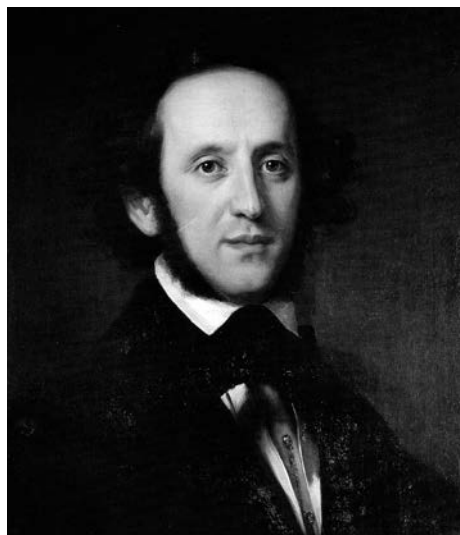
**Allegro vivacissimo – Allegro maestoso assai**

You could think of it as a 19th-century gap year – or, perhaps more accurately, an excursion in the tradition of a Grand Tour, in which a wealthy young man completes his education by popping into the cultural highlights of Europe. The 20-year-old Felix Mendelssohn, however, opted not for the traditional Grand Tour destinations of France and Italy, but instead for Scotland. His three-week trip in the summer of 1829 would produce two of his most renowned pieces of music, both of which you'll hear in tonight's concert.

Even at just 20, Mendelssohn was already a mature and respected musician, one whose upbringing in one of Berlin's most cultured, connected families brought him into close contact with many of the city's artistic, musical and scientific elite. He'd been performing publicly from the age of nine, and started composing two years later. His 12 string symphonies were produced between the ages of 12 and 14, and he wrote his Octet at 16 and his *Midsummer Night's Dream* Overture at 17.

It was Mendelssohn's parents who suggested he should travel, and Felix himself who decided he would begin in England and Scotland (though he toured France and Italy at later occasions in a three-year, stop-start, pan-European excursion). The whole Mendelssohn family were avid fans of the novels of Sir Walter Scott, and Mendelssohn hoped he might even meet the great novelist during his trip (an encounter that had disappointing results, as we'll discover). He enlisted the help of family friend Karl Klingemann, a diplomat living and working in London, to accompany him on his journey.

And even by today's standards, it was quite some journey, a tour that was remarkably well captured in Mendelssohn's letters home and



Felix Mendelssohn

**At one stage, Mendelssohn hesitated between a career as a visual artist or as a musician, and Scotland's famous landscapes no doubt formed part of the destination's appeal to the young man.**

also in his charming sketches of the places he visited. At one stage, Mendelssohn hesitated between a career as a visual artist or as a musician, and Scotland's famous landscapes no doubt formed part of the destination's appeal to the young man.

He arrived in London in April 1829, then travelled north with Klingemann by stagecoach via York and Durham, arriving in Edinburgh on 26 July. There, he lodged in Albany Street, climbed Salisbury Crags and Arthur's Seat, and contemplated the atmospheric ruins of Holyrood Chapel – more on which later. The two men's travels then took them south to Melrose and Abbotsford, home of Sir Walter Scott, where they arrived just as the great writer was about to leave, spending barely half an hour with him and finding little to talk about in a rather awkward exchange. Mendelssohn later described it as 'a bad day'. Disappointments aside, however,

they continued north to Stirling, Perth and Dunkeld (where Mendelssohn risked a treacherous climb down the slippery rocks at the Hermitage to sketch the thunderous Black Linn Falls), then on further to Killiecrankie, Aberfeldy, Kenmore, Criarlairich, Glencoe, Ballachulish and Fort William. From there they took a steamer down Loch Linnhe to Oban, and they continued by water to Tobermory on Mull.

It was from Tobermory that Mendelssohn sent his famous letter home with 21 bars of what would become the opening of *The Hebrides Overture*, writing before the musical passage: 'in order to make you understand how extraordinarily the Hebrides affected me, the following came into my mind there.' The music that has become indelibly associated with Fingal's Cave on the isle of Staffa, therefore, was actually begun before Mendelssohn had even set eyes on the place. Perhaps he had

another location in mind all along: Mull, after all, is a Hebridean island. But that confusion is mostly down to Mendelssohn's German publishers, Breitkopf & Härtel, who took it into their heads to publish the finished Overture – four years later, in 1833 – with the title *Fingal's Cave*, despite retaining *The Hebrides* for the orchestral parts. That surreptitious renaming was probably a selling ploy, since Fingal's Cave was already a well-known location through its mythological associations and its mentions in literature. None other than Scott described it as 'one of the most extraordinary places I ever beheld'.

Mendelssohn himself struggled over his *Hebrides* Overture upon his return to Berlin, and indeed originally named it *Die einsame Insel* ('The Lonely Island'), arguably referring to any number of islands he and Klingemann would have spotted during their journey. But there can be no question that his visit to Staffa lodged firmly in Mendelssohn's memory, for all the wrong reasons. Rather than taking the road to Fionnphort, a ferry to Iona, then a smaller boat for the short hop north to Staffa – as today's travellers do – he and Klingemann departed for Staffa from Tobermory, heading north then west straight into the worst the Atlantic could throw at them. As a result, Mendelssohn was horribly seasick, a state not helped by the stench of oil generated by the steamer on which he and Klingemann travelled. No wonder that, struggling with the Overture, he later wrote to his sister Fanny: 'I still do not consider it finished. The middle part, forte in D major, is very stupid, and savours more of counterpoint than of oil and seagulls and dead fish, and it ought to be the very reverse.'

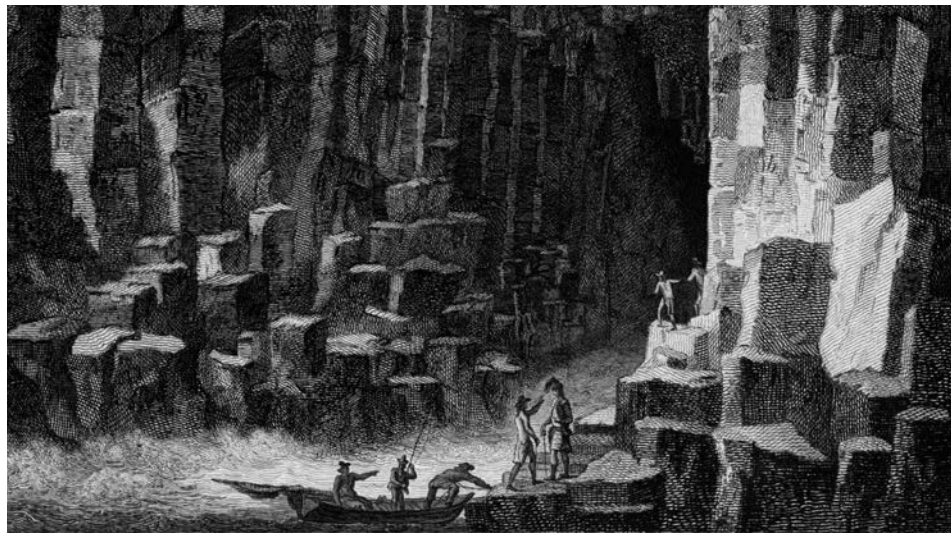
Indeed, the rocking rhythms of the sea – for better or worse – can be felt from start to finish of *The Hebrides Overture*, beginning with the opening's repeating figures in the low

strings, with rising harmonies above hinting at some coming revelation. The broader, more expansive and more obviously lyrical second theme begins similarly in the cellos and bassoons, but, following a development section that builds to what surely represents Mendelssohn's memories of the stormy seas, returns in a beautiful moment of true calm on a solo clarinet, before the storm whips up again to finish the Overture.

Let's leave Mendelssohn (and Klingemann) on their turbulent journeys among the Scottish islands for now. For tonight's next piece, we leap from Mendelssohn the 20-year-old travelling musician to Mendelssohn the 36-year-old established composer, conductor and teacher. The Violin Concerto was the last major orchestral piece that Mendelssohn produced before his tragic death at the tender age of just 38. And unlike the childhood music he wrote at a rate of knots, it took him a while – six years, in fact, though Mendelssohn had the excuse of directing Leipzig's Gewandhaus Orchestra and founding the city's Music Conservatoire during that time.

The Concerto is rooted in friendship, that between Mendelssohn and violinist Ferdinand David, who first became friends and chamber music partners as far back as 1825, when they were both in their teens. When Mendelssohn founded the Leipzig Conservatoire, he soon enlisted David as its inaugural violin professor, and when he took on the directorship of the Gewandhaus Orchestra, no prizes for guessing who he hurried to appoint as its concertmaster.

The first inklings of a Violin Concerto came in 1838, when Mendelssohn wrote to David: 'I should like to write a violin concerto for you next winter. One in E minor runs through my head, the beginning of which gives me



*Engraving of Fingal's Cave by James Fittler in Scotia Depicta, 1804.*

no peace.' In the end, Mendelssohn only completed the work on 16 September 1844, and worked closely with his friend on it. One of David's specific requests was that the Concerto should avoid virtuoso display for its own sake, with the result that, though the piece is hardly without its difficulties, it remains relatively playable, and a favourite for younger violinists (incidentally, tonight's soloist, Nicola Benedetti, recorded it as her second CD release, at the age of 18). David – who else? – premiered the Concerto in Leipzig on 13 March 1845. It was an immediate hit, and has remained popular ever since.

Nonetheless, it's a quietly innovative piece. Mendelssohn the conductor wasn't fond of applause between movements of a longer work, so composed links joining the Concerto's three movements: a solo bassoon that refuses to be quiet once the haunting first movement has ended, then a more elaborate dialogue

between the soloist and orchestra to launch the playful finale. Furthermore, Mendelssohn breaks Classical convention by placing the violinist's showy solo cadenza not towards the end of the first movement, but at the climax of its central development section, an innovation that was picked up and copied by composers including Tchaikovsky and Sibelius.

From Mendelssohn's timeless Violin Concerto, we close tonight's concert with one of his most vivid symphonies, which brings us back to his travels across Scotland. From Mull, Mendelssohn and Klingemann concluded their Scottish journey with a return to Oban, continuing to Glasgow, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, before finally returning to London. Though his Hebrides Overture was his immediate response to his Caledonian visit, Mendelssohn also planned a longer work inspired by Scotland, though it took him 13 years to finish it. He completed his Scottish

Symphony on 20 January 1842 in Berlin, and though it's numbered as his Third, it actually forms the last of his five symphonies: their conventional numbering refers to their publication rather than composition dates.

Mendelssohn worked on his Scottish Symphony during the 1830s, but admitted that he was struggling to rediscover the particular mood he'd experienced in Scotland. He aimed to devote time to it during his stay in Italy in 1830, but found little to remind him of Scotland in the warmth and sun of the Mediterranean, writing home: 'the loveliest time of the year in Italy is the period from 15 April to 15 May. Who then can blame me for not being able to return to the mists of Scotland? I have therefore laid aside the symphony for the present.'

The Symphony was finally premiered in Leipzig in 1842, and later the same year received its UK premiere in London, to an audience that included Queen Victoria, the work's dedicatee. But while the Hebrides Overture is a work of immediate impressions and evocations, the Scottish Symphony is about memories, moods and enduring influences. Mendelssohn made clear, however, that his initial inspiration for the Symphony came from the visit he'd made with Klingemann to ruined Holyrood Chapel in Edinburgh, on 31 July 1829, writing: 'in the evening twilight we went today to the palace where Queen Mary lived and loved; a little room is shown there with a winding staircase leading up to the door: up this way they came and found Rizzio in that dark corner, where they pulled him out, and three rooms off there is a dark corner, where they murdered him. The chapel close to it is now roofless, grass and ivy grow there, and at that broken altar Mary was crowned Queen of Scotland. Everything round is broken and mouldering

**While the Hebrides Overture is a work of immediate impressions and evocations, the Scottish Symphony is about memories, moods and enduring influences.**

and the bright sky shines in. I believe I have found today in that old chapel the beginning of my Scottish Symphony.'

And accordingly, the first movement's dark, brooding introduction seems to capture the atmosphere of the Holyrood ruins to a tee. In the playful, featherweight scherzo that follows, Mendelssohn synthesises Scottish folk music into his own unmistakable idiom, most clearly in the clarinet's folk-like tune with its distinctive 'Scotch snap' rhythms. After the wistful song of the slow third movement, Mendelssohn closes with a stirring finale marked 'Allegro guerriero', or 'fast and warlike', no doubt a reference to the battles whose sites he'd seen at Killiecrankie and Glencoe, though if his Symphony ends in triumph, it's a victory that sounds German through and through.

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Conductor

## Maxim Emelyanychev



Maxim Emelyanychev has been Principal Conductor of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra since 2019. He is also Chief Conductor of period-instrument orchestra Il Pomo d'Oro, and became Principal Guest Conductor of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra from the 2025/26 Season.

Born in Nizhny Novgorod, Emelyanychev made his conducting debut at the age of 12, and later joined the class of eminent conductor Gennady Rozhdestvensky at the Moscow Conservatoire.

Emelyanychev was initially appointed as the SCO's Principal Conductor until 2022, and the relationship was later extended until 2025 and then until 2028. He has conducted the SCO at the Edinburgh International Festival and the BBC Proms, as well as on several European tours and in concerts right across Scotland. He has also made three recordings with the SCO, of symphonies by Schubert and Mendelssohn (Linn Records).

Emelyanychev has also conducted many international ensembles including the Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. In the opera house, Emelyanychev has conducted Handel's *Rinaldo* at Glyndebourne, the same composer's *Agrippina* as well as Mozart's *The Magic Flute* at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* at the Opernhaus Zürich. He has also conducted Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, *Così fan tutte* and *La clemenza di Tito* with the SCO at the Edinburgh International Festival. He has collaborated closely with US soprano Joyce DiDonato, including international touring and several recordings.

Among his other recordings are keyboard sonatas by Mozart, and violin sonatas by Brahms with violinist Aylen Pritchin. He has also launched a project to record Mozart's complete symphonies with Il Pomo d'Oro. In 2019, he won the Critics' Circle Young Talent Award and an International Opera Award in the newcomer category. He received the 2025 Herbert von Karajan Award at the Salzburg Easter Festival.

**For full biography please visit [sco.org.uk](http://sco.org.uk)**

Violin

# Nicola Benedetti



Nicola Benedetti is one of the most sought-after violinists of her generation. Her ability to captivate audiences and her wide appeal as an advocate for classical music has made her one of the most influential artists of today.

Nicola opens her 2025-26 season with a unique and personal solo tour of pre-eminent stages across the UK and Ireland including the Usher Hall, Edinburgh, Royal Concert Hall, Glasgow, Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, National Concert Hall Dublin, and the Royal Albert Hall. Coinciding with the release of her new album *Violin Café*, this marks Nicola's first solo tour in over a decade, combining popular virtuosic and seductive romantic works, arranged for violin, guitar, accordion and cello.

Elsewhere in the season Nicola returns to the New York and Czech Philharmonic Orchestras with the Marsalis Violin Concerto, to the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Royal Scottish National, Philharmonia and London Philharmonic Orchestras with the Elgar Violin Concerto, and to the Scottish Chamber Orchestra with Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E minor.

Nicola Benedetti is a GRAMMY Award winner (Best Classical Instrumental Solo, 2020), two-time winner of Best Female Artist at the Classical BRIT Awards, and in 2021 was recognised as BBC Music Magazine's 'Personality of the Year' for her online support of young musicians during the pandemic. A long-time leader in music education, she established the Benedetti Foundation in 2019, delivering transformative experiences through mass music events. Nicola was appointed a CBE in 2019, awarded the Queen's Medal for Music (2017), and an MBE in 2013.

In October 2022, Nicola became the Festival Director of the Edinburgh International Festival. In taking the role she became both the first Scottish and the first female Festival Director since the Festival began in 1947.

**For full biography please visit [sco.org.uk](https://sco.org.uk)**

# Scottish Chamber Orchestra



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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.

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 2019 to widespread critical acclaim. Their second recording together, of Mendelssohn symphonies, was released in 2023, with Schubert Symphonies Nos 5 and 8 following in 2024.

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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we can help you:

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