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Bohemian Rhapsodies

16-17 April 2026

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Bohemian Rhapsodies

A Celebration of Czech Music with Jonian Ilias Kadesha

Thursday 16 April, 7.30pm The Queen's Hall, Edinburgh
Friday 17 April, 7.30pm City Halls, Glasgow

KAPRÁLOVÁ Suite en miniature, Op.1
MARTINŮ Violin Concerto No.2

Interval of 20 minutes

MARTINŮ La revue de cuisine
DVOŘÁK Czech Suite

Jonian Ilias Kadesha director/violin

Jonian Ilias Kadesha

SCOTTISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

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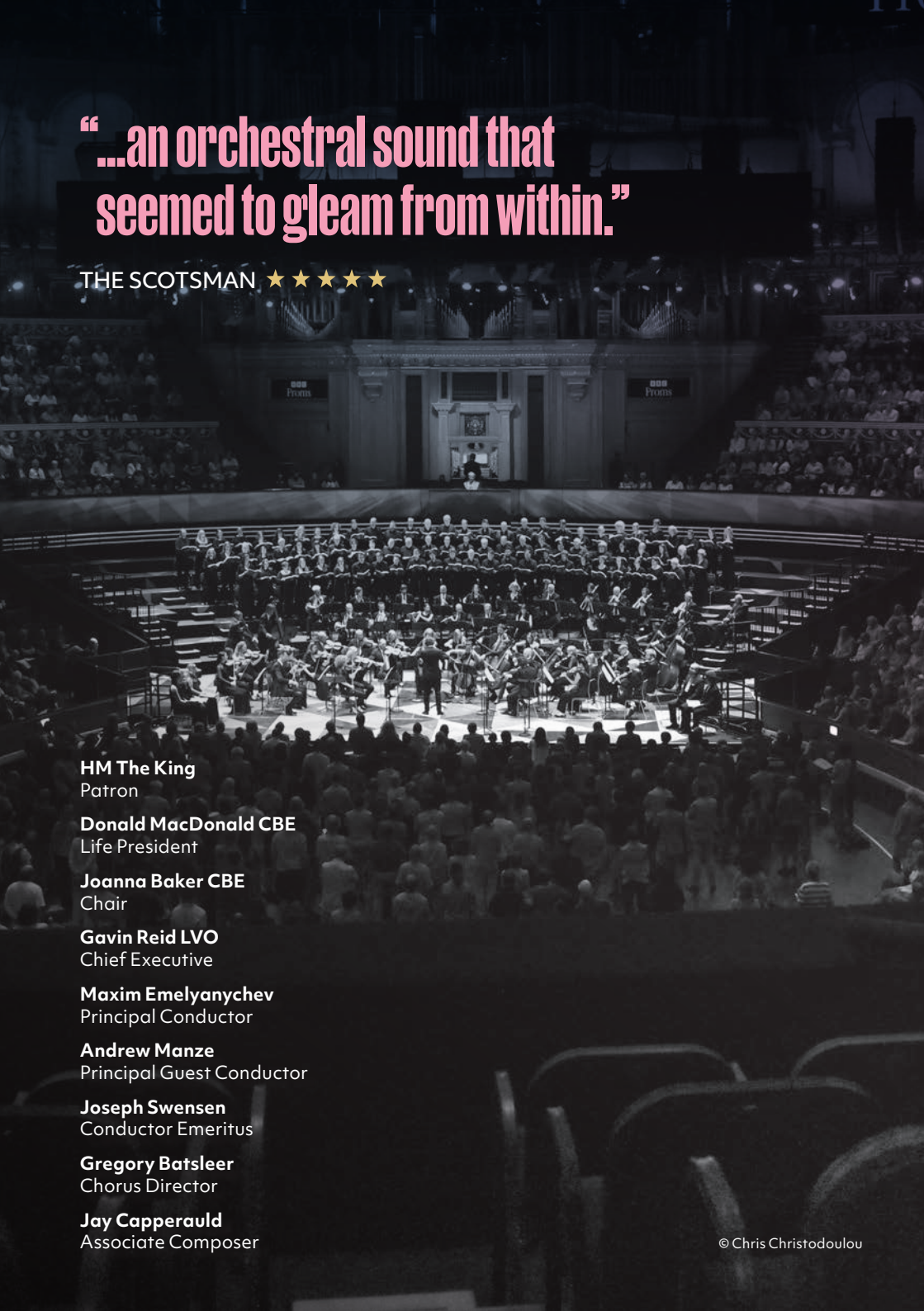

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What You Are About To Hear

KAPRÁLOVÁ (1915-1940)

Suite en miniature, Op.1 **(1935)**

Praeludium
Pastorale
Ukolébavka
Menuetto

MARTINŮ (1890-1959)

Violin Concerto No.2 in G minor, H 293 **(1943)**

Andante – Poco allegro
Andante moderato
Poco allegro

MARTINŮ (1890-1959)

La revue de cuisine, H 161 **(1927)**

Prologue
Tango
Charleston
Final

DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)

Czech Suite in D major, Op.39 **(1879)**

Preludium (Pastorale): Allegro moderato
Polka: Allegretto grazioso
Sousedská (Minuet): Allegro giusto
Romance: Andante con moto
Finale (Furiant): Presto

Thinking in terms of national stereotypes can, it has to be said, quickly lead to quite contentious and not entirely palatable ideas. That said, it's hard to deny that there's something distinctive and richly flavoured about Czech music, in its dancing, driving rhythms, its songful, sometimes folksy melodies and its bright, open-air harmonies. A lot of that character was consciously self-generated: being subsumed for more than four centuries into the Habsburg Empire, and sitting somewhat uncomfortably between the cultural powerhouses of Germany and Russia, Czech artists felt it was only their duty to define and express their nation's own, individual voice.

It's somewhat ironic, then, that all three of tonight's composers spent significant periods of time abroad – through a mix of choice and circumstances – and that two of tonight's four pieces were written far from their composers' original homeland. But perhaps that very distance only served to strengthen and concentrate the music's distinctively Czech essence.

The lives and careers of our first two composers, in fact, are intimately linked. Vítězslava Kaprálová was actually born in Moravia – in Brno, the region's capital – into a strongly musical family in 1915, and quickly showed exceptional musical talents. She started composing aged nine, began studies at the Brno Conservatoire aged 15, and later continued her musical immersion at the Prague Conservatoire and then in Paris, where one of her teachers was none other than Bohuslav Martinů.

We'll come to Martinů's own story shortly. He quickly became deeply besotted with his immensely talented young student

Vítězslava Kaprálová

It's only in the 21st century that the remarkable richess of Kaprálová's music has begun to be unearthed.

during their lessons in 1938-9, writing her passionate love letters as well as setting about promoting her music and encouraging her burgeoning career. It would prove an extremely short career, however: as the French capital grew increasingly threatened by advancing Nazi forces, Kaprálová was evacuated from Paris in May 1940 and died just a month later in Montpellier, possibly from typhoid fever, at the tragically young age of just 25.

During her nine brief years of serious composing, Kaprálová had nonetheless produced a substantial collection of works – from songs to chamber music, choral pieces, concertos and orchestral suites – as well as conducting the Czech Philharmonic and BBC Orchestra (forerunner of today's BBC Symphony Orchestra). Her music, however, slipped quietly from view – a situation not helped when the later Czech communist authorities labelled it 'decadent' and actively suppressed it. It's only in the 21st century that the remarkable richess of Kaprálová's music has begun to be unearthed.

Though numbered as her Op.1, tonight's *Suite en miniature* is actually Kaprálová's second orchestral work (the first was her Piano Concerto, now numbered Op.7). She opted for Op.1, however, because the Suite represents a 1935 orchestration of one of her very earliest pieces, a Suite for piano that she wrote in 1931, aged just 16, during her first year at the Brno Conservatoire. She returned to the piano original during her first months at the

Prague Conservatoire, not only casting its music across the broader, more colourful orchestral palette, but also making a few judicious adjustments to the piece in the process.

Kaprálová opens with a dark, somewhat mystical 'Praeludium', for just the orchestra's strings, which might at times prefigure Shostakovich in is brooding intensity. The gentle, folksy 'Pastorale', by contrast, is for winds only, and the two ensembles come together – with an additional harp – for the impressionistic 'Lullaby'. Kaprálová enriches her orchestra still further, adding trumpet and percussion to the gently bouncing, fresh and breezy concluding 'Menuetto'.

After music by one of Martinů's students, let us now turn to Martinů himself – though by the time he wrote tonight's Violin Concerto No.2, he'd fled Paris for the relative safety of America. But let's step back a bit before we travel across the Atlantic. Unlike Brno-born Kaprálová, Martinů was thoroughly Bohemian, though the town where he was born – Polička, in the tower of the St Jakub Church, where his father was sexton – lies pretty close to the Moravian border. Like Kaprálová, he studied at the Prague Conservatoire, but he was never a strong (nor particularly interested) student. Nonetheless, he later found jobs as a violinist with Prague's National Theatre Orchestra and the Czech Philharmonic – whose eminent conductor, Václav Talich, ended up one of the first major figures to encourage and promote Martinů's music.

But it was a scholarship from the Czech Ministry of Education in 1923 that really changed Martinů's life, sending him to study in Paris with composer Albert Roussel. And Martinů threw himself into the vibrant cultural maelstrom of Paris in the 1920s, embracing the latest trends (from jazz to surrealism to neo-Classicism) and idolising Igor Stravinsky. We'll hear one particularly vibrant fruit of his Parisian years – his ballet score *La revue de cuisine* – after the interval.

He met, taught and (probably) fell deeply in love with Kaprálová. But like her, Martinů was forced to flee France as the impending Nazi threat grew stronger. After leaving Paris for the south of France, he struggled to persuade the Vichy authorities to allow him to depart the country entirely. Once the US ambassador stepped in to help, however, Martinů was finally permitted to leave, arriving in the USA on 30 March 1941.

At first, he struggled to adapt to American life – patchy English language skills didn't help – but with the help of fellow émigrés he quickly established himself in the US classical music world. It was just as well: even after the War, he was unable to return to what was now communist Czechoslovakia, and took US citizenship in 1952. He would finally return to Europe four years later, and lived in Switzerland until his death in 1959.

For tonight's next piece, however, we return to Martinů just two years after he'd arrived in America. His First Symphony – premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Serge Koussevitzy on 13 November 1942 – had been a towering success. In the audience was Russian-born Mischa Elman, one of the 20th century's greatest violinists, though Martinů seemed to have little knowledge of him when Elman visited to request a new violin concerto. Elman

Bohuslav Martinů

It was a scholarship from the Czech Ministry of Education in 1923 that really changed Martinů's life, sending him to study in Paris with composer Albert Roussel.

later invited Martinů to visit, and gave him a private half-hour performance, after which the composer left without a word. It was a thoroughly disconcerting genesis for what would become Martinů's Second Violin Concerto, though the composer later explained he'd been meticulously planning the work while listening to Elman's playing, and didn't want his thinking distracted by social niceties.

What emerged was a new Concerto entirely tailored to Elman's specific playing style, in particular a strong focus on noble melodies and richly expressive writing that harnessed the violin's specific sonic capabilities. Martinů was also aware of Elman's love for the iconic concertos of Beethoven, Brahms and others, and indicated that he'd consciously modelled the piece on those classic pieces from the past.

And so it unfolds, with a serious-minded first movement followed by a lyrical slow movement, and a sprightly dance finale. Imposing orchestral chords launch the opening movement, leading to the violinist's impassioned first entry, though there's an undeniable hint of jazz to their line as it gradually unfolds. After a surprisingly introspective solo cadenza, the movement ends quietly but uneasily.

The solo violinist plays against a slimmed-down orchestra of just strings, woodwind and horns in the gentle, sunlit second movement, spinning melodies of a distinctive folk-like simplicity. After another inward-looking solo cadenza –

this time rather melancholy – rising figures allow the movement to drift upwards to its airborne conclusion.

Martinů's finale, however, is an earthy Czech polka that puts the Concerto's soloist through their paces with elaborate, rousingly rhythmic writing. The piece's third solo cadenza is far more outspoken and assertive, and prompts a glittering dash to the finish.

From Martinů's many years in America, we hop back in time a couple of decades for tonight's next piece, to discover a very different composer. *La revue de cuisine* comes from Martinů's madcap time in Paris, and is one of three ballets (plus an opera, piano pieces and chamber music) that he wrote in 1927. His music brings to colourful, witty life a bizarre scenario by choreographer Jarmila Kröschlová that whimsically recounts the private lives of kitchen utensils. Pot and Lid's marriage is floundering; Dishcloth ends up duelling with Broom; and the suave Whisk is stirring things up for the lot of them. The day is saved when a Monty Python-style giant foot kicks some sense into them all.

The ballet was premiered in Prague in November 1927, and it went down a treat – not surprisingly, with its absurdist humour, Stravinskian rhythmic wit and gushing admiration for jazz. A trumpet fanfare kicks off the Prologue's off-kilter march, which quickly seems to lose its way, while the melodramatic 'Tango' transports us to a more seductive, sultry world. The 'Charleston' breaks into a foot-tapping dance, and the Finale – in which Pot and Lid are finally reunited – brings together snippets of earlier movements with unabashed wit and sparkle.

Like Martinů, Bohemian-born Antonín Dvořák also spent a number of years in America, though more through choice than circumstance. In 1892, he was invited to become Director of New York's recently-established National Conservatory of Music, a role and location that would inspire his best-loved musical creation, the 'New World' Symphony (which, incidentally, forms the climax of the SCO's current Season in May). But despite a sky-high salary and his fascination with the American music he discovered, he also felt a deep longing for his Bohemian homeland and returned in 1895.

For tonight's final piece, however, we meet Dvořák more than a decade before his American adventures. He wrote the *Czech Suite* in 1879, when his fame was just beginning to grow. In the wake of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsodies* and Brahms' *Hungarian Dances*, character pieces in a colourful, nationalistic style were all the rage. It was on the recommendation of fellow composer Brahms, in fact, that publisher Friedrich August Simrock approached Dvořák to compose something along similar lines. The resulting *Slavonic Dances*, originally written for piano duet and intended for domestic consumption, were an enormous success, but the composer nonetheless received a pitifully small fee. (It was only when he orchestrated them the following year that he negotiated a more reasonable sum for himself.)

This, however, was just one of many disagreements between composer and publisher. Dvořák disliked, too, his first name being Germanicised to Anton as if to indicate he wasn't simply a Czech country bumpkin, and was far from happy with

Antonín Leopold Dvořák

What Dvořák created in his Suite falls somewhere between a set of dances and a serenade.

Simrock's insistence that he should get first refusal on any future compositions. So much so that when it came to the *Czech Suite* – composed the year following the *Slavonic Dances* and intended as a kind of follow-up – Dvořák gave it a low opus number of 39, implying it was an older work from his back catalogue to evade the disputed agreement.

What Dvořák created in his Suite falls somewhere between a set of dances and a serenade. The work opens with a lyrical, scene-setting 'Pastoral', which evokes the work's bucolic atmosphere with the distant hum of Czech bagpipes ever present behind a smoothly flowing melodic line. The second movement is a stylised polka, one of the most popular Bohemian dance forms, which found its way into many other composers' works (not least the finale of Martinů's Concerto we heard earlier). It begins with a wistful, somewhat understated melody in the minor, but becomes far more confident and rambunctious when it shifts to the brighter major. The third movement is a 'Sousedská', a Czech folk equivalent of a minuet, though with an accent on the second beat of the bar. Next comes a lyrical nocture in the form of a 'Romance', which opens with a flute melody against a gently pulsing accompaniment, and a dazzling, dashing, boisterious 'Furiant' brings the Suite to an exuberant conclusion – and may well recall some of the wilder moments in Dvořák's earlier *Slavonic Dances*.

Director/violin

Jonian Ilias Kadesha

Jonian Ilias Kadesha is a Renaissance musician in the diversity and creativity of his intellectual interests and music-making. His studies in philosophy and rhetoric influence the stylistic accuracy of his interpretations, whether of early or contemporary music, and his rich imagination is clear both in the sound worlds he creates and the projects he curates as concerto soloist, soloist–director and chamber musician.

He has performed widely as soloist throughout Europe in concertos including Sibelius, Mozart, Shostakovich, Bartók, Stravinsky, Mendelssohn and Beethoven, among others. His accomplishments as a soloist-director are increasingly recognised and he collaborates frequently with leading chamber orchestras. His approach to the classical orchestral canon is informed by his chamber music playing and he often improvises his own cadenzas and ornamentation.

Kadesha's flair for programming is evident in his chamber music projects. He curated a six-concert series for the Leeds International Concert Season (2024–25). He is co-founder of the award-winning Trio Gaspard, he appears regularly with the group at festivals and venues around the world, and is also a member of the Kelemen Quartet.

His curiosity for repertoire is wide-ranging, as demonstrated by recordings he has made for Linn Records, to which he signed in 2021. His debut solo album featured Bach's Partita in D minor alongside Helena Winkelman's Ciaccona and works by Biber, Schnittke, Kurtág and Auerbach. His follow-up 'Suite Italienne' with CHAARTS Chamber Orchestra, featuring Giovanni Sollima's violin concerto TYCHE along with works by Vivaldi and Stravinsky, received outstanding five-star reviews.

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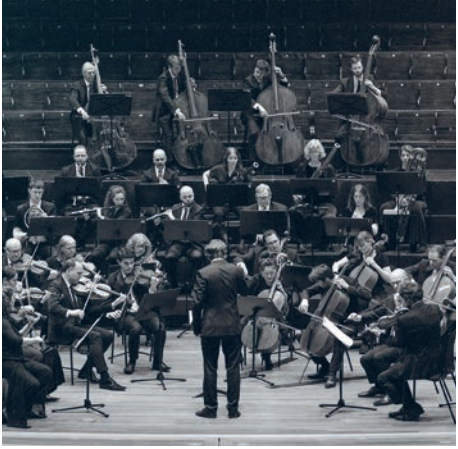
Scottish Chamber Orchestra



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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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