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# Schumann Cello Concerto

7-9 May 2026



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# Schumann Cello Concerto

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**Thursday 7 May, 7.30pm** The Queen's Hall, Edinburgh

**Friday 8 May, 7.30pm** City Halls, Glasgow

**Saturday 9 May, 7.30pm** Aberdeen Music Hall

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**MENDELSSOHN** Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage

**SCHUMANN** Cello Concerto\*

*Interval of 20 minutes*

**JÖRG WIDMANN** 5 Albumblätter (UK Premiere)\*

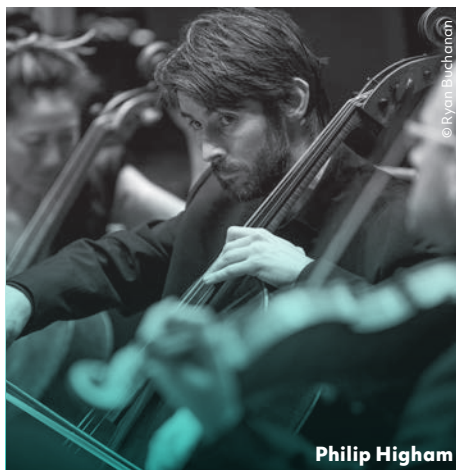
**DEBUSSY** Petite Suite

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**Maxim Emelyanychev** conductor

**Philip Higham** cello\*

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*Information correct at the time of going to print*

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

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# What You Are About To Hear

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## **MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)**

Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage, Op.27  
(1828, rev. 1833)

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## **SCHUMANN (1810-1856)**

Cello Concerto, Op.129 (1850)

**Nicht zu schnell**

**Langsam**

**Sehr lebhaft**

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## **JÖRG WIDMANN (b. 1973)**

5 Albumblätter (2022) (UK Premiere)

**I Adagio ohne Allegro**

**II Liebelei**

**III Lied im Volkston**

**IV Bossa nova für Clara und Robert**

**V Mit Humor**

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## **DEBUSSY (1862-1918)**

Petite Suite, L65 (1886-89)

**En bateau (Sailing): Andantino**

**Cortège (Retinue): Moderato**

**Menuet: Moderato**

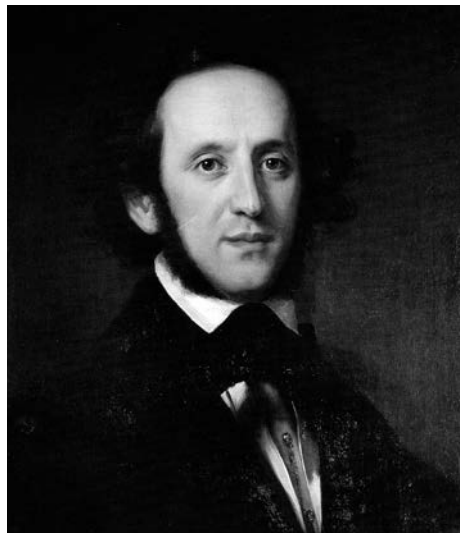
**Ballet: Allegro giusto**

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We begin and end tonight's concert by the sea – only briefly, admittedly, in Claude Debussy's *Petite Suite*, though we embark on a far more ambitious voyage in this evening's opening piece. If Debussy's maritime evocation is all gently lapping waves and serene calm, however, the quiet that opens Felix Mendelssohn's Overture is more about torpid stillness and frustration – as the two poems by revered German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe on which the piece is based make abundantly clear.

Indeed, despite a 60-year age difference, the elderly Goethe and the youthful Mendelssohn were firm friends. Mendelssohn grew up amid some of the 19th century's most privileged and culturally stimulating circumstances, the son of wealthy banker Abraham Mendelssohn, who'd made a fortune during the Napoleonic Wars, and grandson of prominent writer and philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. Their house – let's be honest, it was virtually a palace – on Berlin's Leipzigerstrasse served as a meeting place for the Prussian capital's political and cultural elite, and both Felix and his sister Fanny were immersed in the latest thinking across politics, literature, music, philosophy and plenty more.

Mendelssohn first met Goethe in 1821 as a precocious 12-year-old (by which age he was already an accomplished pianist and violinist, and an experienced composer). The boy's composition teacher, Carl Zelter, took him on a trip to Weimar specially to visit the legendary writer. Goethe was astonished by the youngster's talents, and for his part, young Felix seems to have adored the attention he received. 'Every afternoon Goethe opens the piano saying, "I haven't heard you at all today, give me a



*Felix Mendelssohn*

**Goethe was delighted with his young friend's musical response to his poetic creations, writing to him: 'sail well in your music – may the voyage always be as prosperous as this!'**

little noise", he wrote back to his family in Berlin. 'And then he will sit down beside me and when I am finished I ask for a kiss or take one. You cannot imagine his kindness and friendliness.'

It was just seven years after their first meeting that the 19-year-old Mendelssohn set about producing tonight's opening piece. Perhaps inspired by his own first experience of the sea – on an 1824 family holiday in Bad Doberan on the north German coast – he looked to a pair of short poems by Goethe for direct inspiration. And it's here that our contemporary interpretation of the piece's title might jar somewhat with Goethe and Mendelssohn's original intentions. With propeller-powered ships in the 21st century, a 'calm sea and prosperous voyage' might seem like a single, attractive idea. With wind-blown vessels in the early 19th century, however,

a calm sea was no use to anybody: ships would remain stuck in port, and trade would come to a halt.

Accordingly, Mendelssohn's overture falls into two distinct halves. First comes the 'calm sea' in a somewhat sombre, slow section, richly scored but rather directionless (intentionally so) all the same. It's only when a solo flute heralds a gentle breeze picking up that things start to move. Excitement mounts in the horns and woodwind, and suddenly there's no holding back the music's propulsive rhythms and boundless energy. After dashing across the waves, however, the piece ends with a grand entrance into port, welcomed with trumpet fanfares. After all the excitement and celebration, however, Mendelssohn closes in gentle calmness, his ship safely moored. Goethe was delighted with his young friend's musical response to his



*Robert Schumann*

**Schumann makes extensive technical demands on his cello soloist, even if the music they're playing might not sound immediately showy.**

poetic creations, writing to him: 'sail well in your music – may the voyage always be as prosperous as this!'

From Mendelssohn's maritime evocations, we move inland for tonight's next piece – to Düsseldorf, in fact, where Robert Schumann moved with his wife Clara and their five children in 1850. Schumann and Mendelssohn had been friends and mutually admiring colleagues in Leipzig in the 1830s and 1840s, and both Robert and Clara were shocked by the early deaths of both Felix Mendelssohn and his beloved sister Fanny in 1847 (at the ages of just 38 and 41, respectively), as well as by the loss of their own infant son Emil, born in 1846. It seems fairly clear that the whole family saw a move to Düsseldorf as a fresh start, a chance for Robert to make his mark in the prestigious role of the city's Music Director, and also to focus his energies on

conducting and composing. Tragically, it didn't last: within just a couple of years, his new responsibilities began to overwhelm him, and his worsening mental health grew impossible to ignore.

If Schumann's Düsseldorf years follow a downward trajectory from hope and optimism to despair, then the Cello Concerto that he composed in a burst of creativity in just two weeks in October 1850 – only six months after arriving in Düsseldorf – sits firmly within the hopeful, optimistic period, even if its mood is somewhat inward-looking. Schumann had begun to learn the cello himself in the 1830s, after abandoning hopes of a career as a professional pianist following a self-inflicted finger injury. So it's perhaps understandable that he should create a rather melancholy concerto for the instrument he came to view so fondly, and

a work that places poetic expression above virtuosic display.

He wrote to a publisher that one of his motivations in writing the Concerto was simply that 'there are so few works for this lovely instrument'. He originally called it a Konzertstück ('Concert Piece'), rather than a full-blooded concerto, reflecting the piece's rather modest scale and length, and also to indicate his decision to run all three of its movements together in a unified whole (as his friend Mendelssohn had done with his Violin Concerto in 1844).

'Since there is a great dearth of such works,' Schumann continued in his letter, 'the Cello Concerto is something that will perhaps be welcomed by many.' In more recent times, the Concerto certainly has been welcomed, but it was never performed publicly in Schumann's own lifetime, and only found a secure place in the cello repertoire in the 20th century, after being championed by cello luminaries including Pablo Casals.

It is indeed a somewhat unconventional piece, one that delves into inner worlds rather than simply dazzling with virtuoso brilliance. That's not to imply it's an easy piece, though: ironically, Schumann makes extensive technical demands on his cello soloist, even if the music they're playing might not sound immediately showy.

The solo cello kicks off the dramatic first movement with a long, yearning melody. The drama winds down into the dreamy, lyrical slow movement, in which the solo cello sings a touching duet with one of its orchestral colleagues, against guitar-like strummings from the rest of the strings. Schumann closes with a forceful return from the full orchestra in a dark, spiky

finale, which suddenly swerves towards the light just before its conclusion.

We remain with Robert Schumann – in a manner of speaking – for tonight's next piece. Munich-born composer, clarinetist and conductor Jörg Widmann is one of today's most in-demand musicians, and he's created a large and very varied output of pieces across many different styles – sometimes focusing purely on sounds rather than conventional musical notes, sometimes going even further into gesture and movement. He's also written a substantial collection of works that represent a kind of dialogue with earlier composers, including Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Brahms and – in the case of tonight's *5 Albumblätter* – Schumann. Indeed, Widmann has expressed a particularly deep love and admiration for Schumann's works, calling the earlier composer 'the poet in the world of music'. Widmann's title is also a reference to Schumann, specifically to the earlier composer's wide-ranging collection of short piano pieces *Albumblätter* (or 'Album Leaves') published in 1853.

Widmann wrote his *5 Albumblätter* for the 2022 Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels, as the compulsory contemporary piece to be performed by all cello finalists (which might give some indication as to its technical challenges). He writes about the piece:

*My 5 Albumblätter are, as the title of each piece indicates, in homage to Robert Schumann. The most obvious reference is probably in the opening piece 'Adagio ohne Allegro', which alludes to a Schumann composition that is particularly close to my heart, the Adagio und Allegro for cello*



Jörg Widmann

Widmann has expressed a particularly deep love and admiration for Schumann's works, calling the earlier composer 'the poet in the world of music'.

and piano. The same is true of the last work of the album, which is entitled 'Mit Humor' ('With humour'), just like the first of Schumann's Fünf Stücke im Volkston.

The second piece, 'Liebelej', is characterised by an obsessive staccato rhythm. The piece becomes freer and freer until it resembles a folk song, before returning playfully to the rapid staccato beat. Like a slowed-down melancholic yodel, the short central movement 'Lied im Volkston' is based on a recurring descending minor third motive. In the fourth piece, a bossa nova, Clara and Robert dance on an imaginary dance floor.

Aside from its dreamlike lyrical quality, what particularly fascinates me about Schumann's music is its exaltation, incandescence and youthfulness, especially in the music he wrote for cello. It was a joy to transpose that enthusiasm to the present, in

my own musical language, in the knowledge that the music would be performed by young musicians, and that the pages would come to life through their fingers and in their hearts.

We bid farewell to Robert Schumann (and Jörg Widmann) for tonight's final piece, and move back towards the water again – at least for the opening movement in Debussy's *Petite Suite*. The Suite began life as a work for piano duet (and remains popular among pianists in that form) bringing together four short pieces that Debussy wrote between 1886 and 1889, when he was in his mid-20s. As such, it's a relatively early work in his output, and far simpler and more direct in its music than the more sensual, perfumed sounds of some of his later music. It's also been speculated, however, that his publisher Auguste Durand may have specifically requested a piece that could be played by



Claude Debussy

Auguste Durand may have specifically requested a piece that could be played by talented amateurs, to stand apart from the more complex music that Debussy was moving towards at the time.

talented amateurs, to stand apart from the more complex music that Debussy was moving towards at the time.

The *Petite Suite* was premiered – in its original piano duet version – by Debussy and Durand at a Parisian salon on 2 February 1889, just a few months before the composer's encounter with Javanese gamelan at the city's Exposition Universelle that would prove such a profound influence on his later music. The *Suite*'s immediacy and its glowing lyricism made it immediately popular, and Durand sensed another opportunity. He asked Debussy for an orchestral version, but the composer was already occupied with music in a new style of suggestiveness and sensuality. Debussy handed the task on to younger French composer Henri Büsser, whose sensitive but colourful orchestration from 1907 has become well established.

The *Suite*'s first two movements draw on poems by Paul Verlaine, one of Debussy's most beloved writers, that conjure lavish images of aristocratic parties, country estates, costumed balls and suggestive liaisons. That said, the moonlit boat ride of 'En bateau' is one of exquisite calm, with a floating flute melody spun above an accompaniment of rippling harmonies. There's nothing funereal about the second movement 'Cortège', which instead depicts a marching band on a day of festivities, building to a surprisingly grandiose close. Debussy closes with two dances: the gentle, dreamy 'Menuet' is followed by the far more energetic 'Ballet', perhaps a tribute to Emmanuel Chabrier (whose music Debussy greatly admired), which builds to a whirling, exuberant close.

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)**

Cello

## Philip Higham



Born in Edinburgh, Philip studied with Ruth Beauchamp at St Mary's Music School and subsequently at the RNCM with Emma Ferrand and Ralph Kirshbaum. He also enjoyed mentoring from Steven Isserlis. In 2008 he became the first UK cellist to win 1st Prize in the Bach Leipzig competition, and followed it with major prizes in 2009 Lutoslawski Competition, and the 2010 Grand Prix Emmanuel Feuermann in Berlin. He was selected for representation by Young Classical Artist Trust between 2009 and 2014.

He has appeared as soloist with the Philharmonia Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra (broadcast by BBC Radio 3), the Royal Northern Sinfonia and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. He has given recitals at the Wigmore Hall, Brighton Festival and Lichfield Festival, and further afield in Germany, Istanbul and Washington DC. In 2014 he performed the complete Bach Suites in Tokyo at the Musashino Cultural Foundation, and again at Wigmore Hall in 2017.

Philip has been described as 'possessing that rare combination of refined technique with subtle and expressive musicianship... all the qualities of a world-class artist' (The Strad), and has been praised for his 'expansive but tender playing' (Gramophone). His debut recording of the Britten Solo Suites (Delphian, 2013) was named instrumental disc of the month in both Gramophone and BBC Music magazines. He has also released the complete Bach Suites, to critical acclaim.

Philip was appointed Principal Cello of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra in 2016. He plays a fine Milanese cello by Carlo Giuseppe Testore, made in 1697, and is grateful for continued support from Harriet's Trust.

*Philip's Chair is kindly supported by The Thomas Family*

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

Biography

# 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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*Photo: Stuart Armitt*