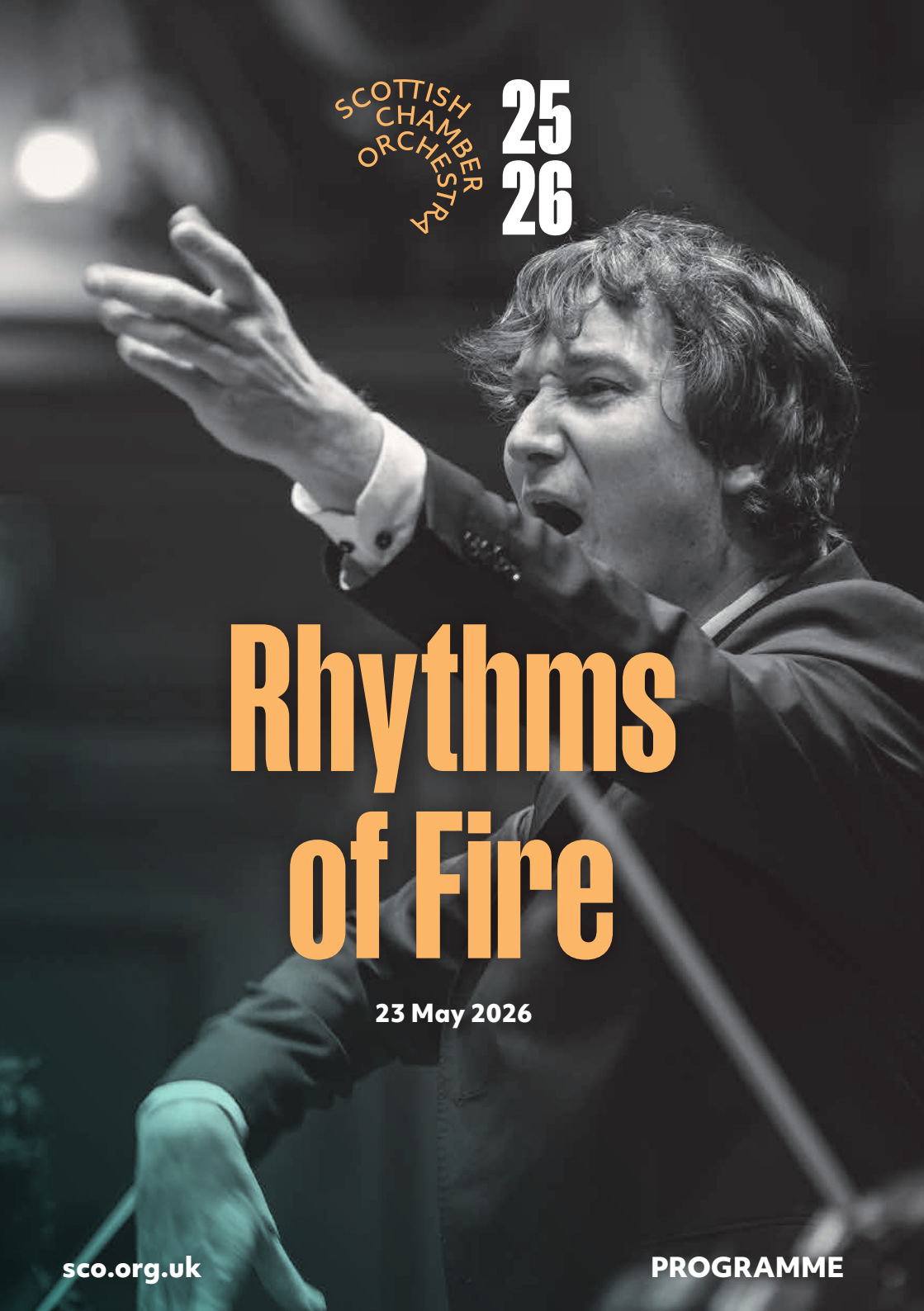
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Rhythms of Fire
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25/26 Concert Season

Rhythms of Fire

SCO at Dumfries & Galloway Arts Festival

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Saturday 23 May, 7.30pm The Bridge, Dumfries

MENDELSSOHN The Hebrides
SCHUMANN Cello Concerto*
Interval of 20 minutes
BEETHOVEN Symphony No.7

Maxim Emelyanychev conductor
Philip Higham cello*


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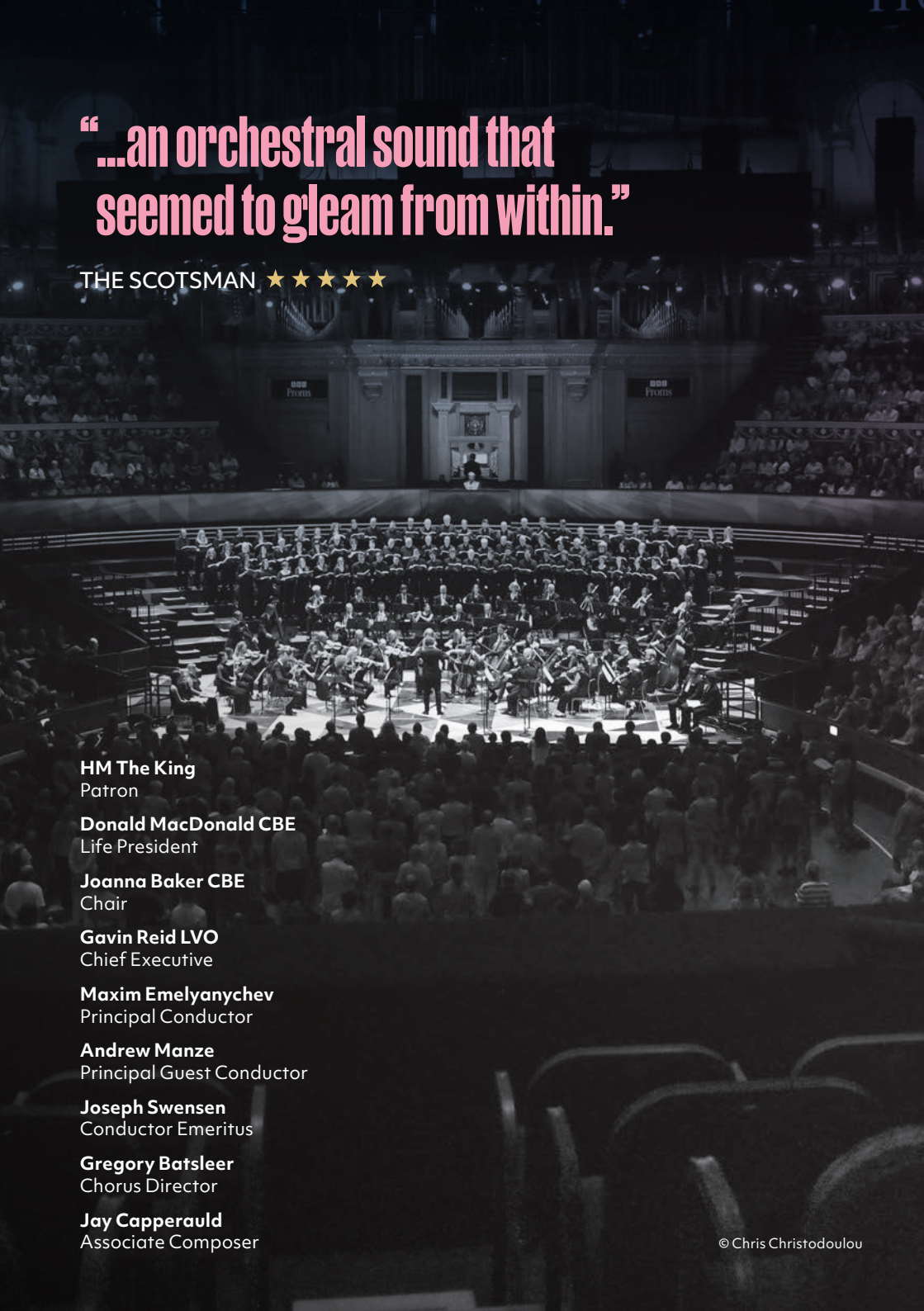

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Leader

What You Are About To Hear

MENDELSSOHN (1809-1847)

The Hebrides
(1830, rev. 1832)

SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Cello Concerto, Op.129 **(1850)**

Nicht zu schnell
Langsam
Sehr lebhaft

BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Symphony No.7 in A major, Op.92
(1811–12)

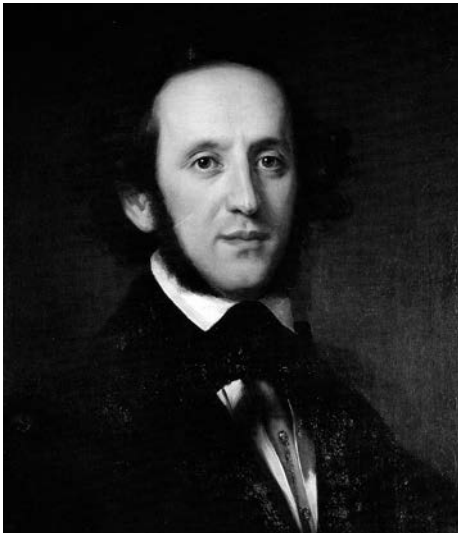
Poco sostenuto – Vivace
Allegretto
Presto – Assai meno presto
Allegro con brio

'There is music wherever there is rhythm, as there is life wherever there beats a pulse.' So scribbled composer Igor Stravinsky in the sketchbooks for what would become his revolutionary ballet score *The Rite of Spring* – a piece of music whose brutal rhythms famously appalled the audience at its 1913 premiere, and have shocked and inspired listeners in equal measure ever since.

No, you won't be encountering Stravinsky's ferocious creation this evening. But there's no shortage of energetic, driving, compelling rhythms among tonight's three pieces. Indeed, for later composer Richard Wagner, Ludwig van Beethoven's Seventh Symphony was 'the apotheosis of the dance': in it, rhythm becomes a relentless, almost obsessive force. But it's not all fiery momentum: there are far more graceful, elegant rhythms in Robert Schumann's introspective Cello Concerto. And it's the gentle, lapping rhythms of the waves and the swelling surges of the sea that inspired tonight's opening piece.

It was during the summer of 1829 that the 20-year-old Felix Mendelssohn undertook a three-week tour of Scotland. 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 completed his education by sampling the cultural highlights of Europe. While France and Italy provided more traditional Grand Tour destinations, Mendelssohn chose to travel further north. And it was a formative excursion to Scotland that would produce two of his most renowned pieces of music: his 'Scottish' Symphony, and tonight's overture, *The Hebrides*.

Even at just 20, Mendelssohn was already a mature and respected musician, one whose upbringing in one of Berlin's most



Felix Mendelssohn

Mendelssohn chose to travel further north. And it was a formative excursion to Scotland that would produce two of his most renowned pieces of music

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 had composed from the age of 11: his 12 string symphonies were produced between the ages of 12 and 14, and he wrote his Octet at 16 and his *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Overture at 17.

It was Mendelssohn's parents who suggested he should travel, but it was young Felix who decided he would begin in England and Scotland (though he toured France and Italy at later occasions in his 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). He enlisted the help of family friend Karl Klingemann, a diplomat living and working in London, to accompany him on his journey.

He arrived in London in April 1829, then travelled north with Klingemann by stagecoach via York and Durham, arriving in Edinburgh on 26 July, where he climbed Arthur's Seat, and contemplated the atmospheric ruins of Holyrood Chapel (which would later inspire his 'Scottish' Symphony). The two men travelled 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, then on further to Killiecrankie, Aberfeldy, Kenmore, Crianlarich, 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.

And it was from Tobermory that Mendelssohn sent his famous letter home

with 21 bars of what would become the opening of *The Hebrides*, 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.

Mendelssohn himself struggled over *The 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 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*, 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 overtly 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.

From Mendelssohn's Hebridean 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

Robert Schumann

So it's perhaps understandable that he [Schumann] 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.

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 the city – 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 rhythms of tonight's first two pieces might have seemed somewhat gentle and restrained, evocative but generally calm. In his Seventh Symphony, by contrast, Beethoven seems to focus on rhythm as pure energy, an unstoppable force, something from which all else flows.

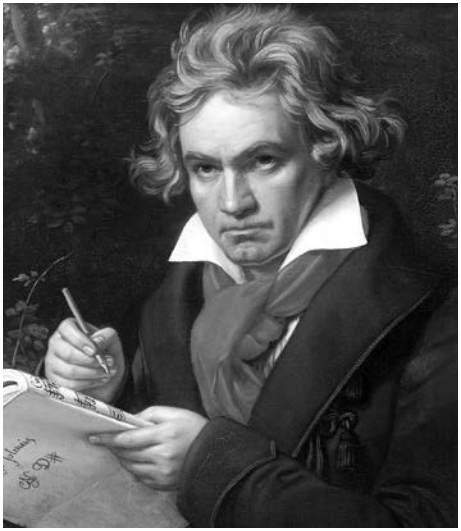
The solo cello kicks off the dramatic first movement with a long, yearning melody. The drama winds down into the dreamy, lyrical slow movement, in which the solo cello sings a touching duet with one of its orchestral colleagues, against guitar-like strummings from the rest of the strings. Schumann closes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

The rhythms of tonight's first two pieces might have seemed somewhat gentle and restrained, evocative but generally calm. In his Seventh Symphony, by contrast, Beethoven seems to focus on rhythm as pure energy, an unstoppable force, something from which all else flows.

Compared with his earlier symphonies – certainly the bucolic picture-painting of the Pastoral, No.6 – it's one of Beethoven's most abstract and story-less symphonies, unless that 'story' is about the inner workings of music itself. And it's in those terms that Beethoven focuses so decisively on rhythm, deriving from that fundamental musical element a work that feels like a celebration of energy and positivity.

It's ironic, then, that Beethoven wrote it during one of the most difficult periods in his life. His deafness was growing steadily worse, and in 1811 he came down with a serious fever, as a cure for which his doctor sent him to the Bohemian spa town of Teplice for several stays. It was during these visits that he worked seriously on his new symphony.

Beethoven himself conducted its first performance, on 8 December 1813 in Vienna, at a benefit concert for Austrian and Bavarian troops wounded in the Battle of Hanau, an encounter that forced Napoleon's retreat. The concert was one of the high points of the composer's career –



Ludwig van Beethoven

The concert was one of the high points of the composer's career – the event proved so popular, in fact, that it was repeated the following January, and again in February.

the event proved so popular, in fact, that it was repeated the following January, and again in February. The Seventh Symphony went down well – the audience demanded an encore of the second movement – but the concert's wild acclaim really came for another piece. The anti-Napoleon *Wellington's Victory* clearly captured the mood of the moment, but its popularity hasn't survived changes in taste.

Nonetheless, the Symphony's energy and positivity must have matched the celebratory mood, too. As must the propulsive rhythmic drive that pushes its music ever onward, even in its not-very-slow 'slow' movement. The Symphony's slowest music, in fact, comes right at the start, in the introduction to its first movement, although the loud chords that interrupt that opening hint at the energy about to be unleashed. The repeated long-short-long rhythm that leads into the movement's main, faster section quickly comes to dominate, as Beethoven plays inventive games with its perky main theme.

The second movement's persistent long-short-short rhythm provides an implacable tread that's too quick to be a funeral march or dirge, even if the music has something of that character. The movement has maintained a remarkable life ever since its premiere, cropping up in movies as diverse as *X Men: Apocalypse* and *The King's Speech*, often symbolising a strange mix of nobility and dread, an inescapable unfolding of events.

The third movement is a bright and bouncing scherzo whose unstoppable rhythm is simply a barrage of notes in three time. And if you felt there was any restraint holding back the Symphony's first three movements, Beethoven lets rip entirely in the blazing energy and wild, whirling motion of his finale.

Conductor

Maxim Emelyanychev


© Andrej Grilc

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; the relationship has been extended three times, to 2025, 2028 and most recently to 2031. 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 Entführing 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.

Maxim's Chair is kindly supported by Donald and Louise MacDonald

Cello

Philip Higham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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.

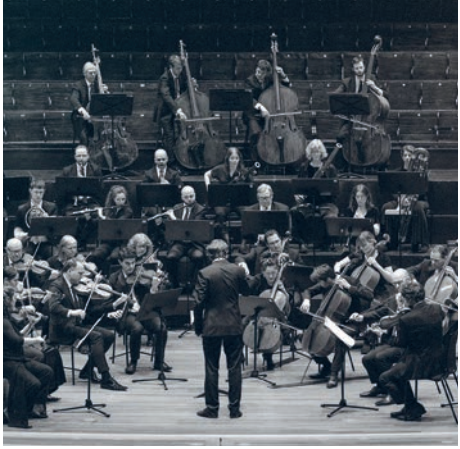
Philip has been described as 'possessing that rare combination of refined technique with subtle and expressive musicianship… all the qualities of a world-class artist' (The Strad), and has been praised for his 'expansive but tender playing' (Gramophone). His debut recording of the Britten Solo Suites (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

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 at least 2031. 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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Each year, the SCO must fundraise around £1.2 million to bring extraordinary musical performances to the stage and support groundbreaking education and community initiatives beyond it.

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To learn more and support the SCO from as little as £5 per month, please contact **Hannah** at **hannah.wilkinson@sco.org.uk** or call **0131 478 8364**.

The SCO is a charity registered in Scotland No SC015039.

Photo: Stuart Armitt