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Barber's Adagio & Violin Concerto

29-30 October 2026

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Barber's Adagio & Violin Concerto

Thursday 29 October, 7.30pm The Queen's Hall, Edinburgh
Friday 30 October, 7.30pm City Halls, Glasgow

SCHULHOFF Suite for Chamber Orchestra
BARBER Violin Concerto
Interval of 20 minutes
BARBER Adagio
WEILL Symphony No.2

Ryan Bancroft conductor
Clara-Jumi Kang violin

SCOTTISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

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Louise Lewis Goodwin
Timpani / Percussion

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What You Are About To Hear

SCHULHOFF (1894-1942)

Suite for Chamber Orchestra, WV 58 **(1921)**

Ragtime
Valse Boston
Tango
Shimmy
Step
Jazz

BARBER (1910-1981)

Violin Concerto, Op.14 **(1939)**

Allegro
Andante
Presto in moto perpetuo

BARBER (1910-1981)

Adagio for Strings **(1936)**

KURT WEILL (1900-1950)

Symphony No.2 **(1933-34)**

Sostenuto - Allegro molto
Largo
Allegro vivace - Presto

Two distinct strands of music run across tonight's programme, and they intersect – in a manner of speaking – in America, the birthplace and part-time home of Samuel Barber, but also the new home for a whole cohort of central European composers fleeing Nazi persecution in the 1930s, including Kurt Weill.

Weill was successful in re-establishing his musical career in the US as an acclaimed composer of Broadway musicals, as we'll discover later. Tonight's first composer, however, has a far more tragic life story, and represents just one of many pioneering musical figures whose lives were cut short by the Third Reich. Born in Prague to a German-speaking family of Jewish ancestry, Erwin Schulhoff was initially encouraged to pursue music by none other than Antonín Dvořák. He studied at his home city's Conservatoire from the age of just ten, proving a prodigy as a composer and pianist, and later returning to teach at the same institution.

Schulhoff was a radical, pioneering figure, and a musician deeply proud of his own beliefs and tastes, no matter how idiosyncratic they were. He was one of the first composers to embrace the catchy rhythms and piquant harmonies of jazz in his music – as we'll hear in tonight's opening piece. But he was an equally ardent admirer of the extremities of expressionism, and of the freewheeling weirdness of Dada. He even wrote a 'silent' piece that predates John Cage's infamous *4'33"* by several decades: his *In futurum* for piano consists of nothing but intricately notated rests. Schulhoff held particularly strong and uncompromising opinions on the purpose and role of art. He wrote: 'absolute art is revolution, it requires additional facets for development, and

Erwin Schulhoff

Schulhoff was a radical, pioneering figure, and a musician deeply proud of his own beliefs and tastes, no matter how idiosyncratic they were.

leads to overthrow in order to open new paths.' With that in mind, it might come as no surprise that in the hot-headed political turmoil of the interwar years, Schulhoff's political persuasions veered strongly to the left: he even set Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* to music in 1932.

As a Jew, a communist and a lover (and creator) of dangerously 'degenerate' music, Schulhoff was particularly vulnerable to Nazi persecution, and following the German occupation of the Czech lands in 1939, he swiftly found he was banned from working. Exile in the Soviet Union was a possible escape, and Schulhoff was granted Soviet citizenship in 1941. It was ultimately that change in status that would lead to his death, however: Schulhoff was arrested as a national of a country with which Germany was at war, and interned at Wülzburg prison in Bavaria, where he died of tuberculosis in August 1942, aged 48.

But from the sombre end to Schulhoff's life, let's return to the composer amid the hotbed of new ideas and sounds in the 1920s. His love of jazz was deeply felt, as he admitted in a letter to fellow composer Alban Berg in 1921: 'I am boundlessly fond of nightclub dancing, so much so that I have periods during which I spend whole nights dancing with one hostess or another... out of pure enjoyment of the rhythm and with my subconscious filled with sensual delight. Thereby I acquire phenomenal inspiration for my work, as my conscious mind is incredibly earthly, even bestial, as it were.'

It was in May and June of 1921 that Schulhoff composed the Suite for Chamber Orchestra that opens tonight's concert. His aim, he explained, was to look back with affection to the dance movements of a Baroque orchestral suite, but to update those dances to modern forms from the

1920s. And, fascinated as he was by the surreal nonsensicality of Dadaism, he prefaced the entire suite with a self-written Dadaist poem, which – roughly translated – goes something like this:

Beer house sickness is my soul
and my teeth are chattering in shimmy beat
Big city resonances swipe my brains and roar:
Hail to thee in victor's crown…
oh my dear, you can't go
in the corridor (the cold)
sleeping I am carried, to my home… to my home!
Because I'm drunk as a skunk and thinking German!
Do you know my colors? – ? !!! ? !!
I enjoy champagne and the woman enjoys sperm.
gramophones are sighing, sobbing patriotic songs – and,
where there is singing, you can safely stay, – because,
wicked people have no songs (you'll see)
sweet cacophonies are rippling in my guts…
screaming for life, … long for manoli [cigarettes] and absinthe.
Filthy gang!!!
Sh…heads!!!!! – grant me unheard-of-powers,
I want to eat you all,
into the sausage machine with you
wretched swine!!!
Then, – Then comes the cosmic moment,
then I will transform myself
into "BAYER Aspirin"! –

The crisp, nimble 'Ragtime' – led by a catchy trumpet tune – sets the light-hearted, bracing tone for the whole Suite, and it's followed by a sentimental but delicate 'Valse Boston', then a surprisingly restrained 'Tango' that merely hints at fiery passions. After the march-like 'Shimmy' and the intricate interlocking rhythms of the percussion-only 'Step', Schulhoff concludes with the foot-tapping, fast-paced 'Jazz'. The composer himself conducted the Suite's first performance – in Berlin in April 1922, with a chamber orchestra of musicians from the city's Staatsoper. Perhaps predictably, among such lofty company, it didn't go down well at all.

Wartime connections continue in tonight's second piece. US composer Samuel Barber was on a trip to Europe when he began work on his Violin Concerto in 1939, first amid the Alpine splendours of Switzerland, and later in Paris. But with war looming, and US citizens being warned to depart urgently from Europe, he made his way back across the Atlantic to complete the piece. But its stop-start genesis formed only one part of the Concerto's complicated creation.

Not without reason did Barber sarcastically refer to the piece as his 'concerto del sapone' (or 'soap concerto'). That disparaging nickname was a reference not only to the product that had made the piece's commissioner – tycoon Samuel S Fels, of Fels Naptha Soap fame – his fortune. It also referred to the piece's composition and premiere, which themselves became something of a soap opera.

Fels and his wife Jennie had acted as surrogate US parents to the remarkable Odessa-born violin prodigy Iso Briselli, who was studying at Philadelphia's Curtis School of Music – by chance, in the same year as Barber. By 1939, both Briselli and Barber had graduated, and were establishing themselves professionally – Barber had in fact returned to the school,

Samuel Barber

Despite the shenanigans over its creation, Barber's Violin Concerto quickly found a secure place in the violin repertoire.

as professor of composition. Fels was persuaded to ask the young composer to create a new concerto for Briselli, one that might showcase the violinist's dazzling technique and profound musical insights.

At first, things went well. Briselli loved the Concerto's first two movements when he received them. But his teacher, Albert Meiff, didn't, and took it upon himself to write to Fels, informing the businessman that the Concerto would need a wholesale overhaul by someone who really knew the violin (in other words, himself). Even Briselli wondered, in retrospect, if the opening movements were showy enough, and requested something more virtuosic for the finale.

Things got worse, however, when Barber sent Briselli the showy concluding movement he'd created. The violinist wasn't convinced, finding it too lightweight, and out of kilter with the earlier movements' tones. He requested a rewrite. Barber declined, explaining: 'I could not destroy a movement in which I have complete confidence, out of artistic sincerity to myself.' Briselli in turn declined to play the Concerto, and the premiere was given instead by established violinist Albert Spalding (who jumped at the opportunity) with the Philadelphia Orchestra in February 1941. Barber and Briselli remained friends, however, until the composer's death in 1981.

Despite the shenanigans over its creation, Barber's Violin Concerto quickly found a secure place in the violin repertoire. The soloist launches the richly Romantic opening movement with a deeply lyrical main melody, later contrasted by a spikier theme introduced by a solo clarinet (which the violinist manages to avoid until almost the end of the movement). An oboe keens

a long, chant-like melody above a cushion of string harmonies in the serene second movement, before the soloist leads us into stormier, more dissonant music. In the brief, breathless finale (about which you may feel Briselli had a point), the violinist skitters through an almost unstoppable melodic line, navigating Shostakovich-like grotesquerie to propel the piece to its dashing close.

We stay with Barber for tonight's next piece, which must surely count as one of classical music's all-time best-known works. Barber's Adagio has been dubbed the 'world's saddest music', and is indeed indelibly associated with moments of great emotion and upheaval. It was played at the funerals of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Albert Einstein and Grace Kelly (among many others), and Jackie Kennedy arranged for Washington's National Symphony Orchestra to play it to an empty hall following the assassination of her husband JFK in 1963, a recording of which became the unofficial anthem of the nation's grief during the following weeks.

It began, however, and of course still exists as the slow movement of Barber's Op.11 String Quartet, where it separates two outer movements of great energy and complexity. It was conductor Arturo Toscanini who thought the Adagio would make a fine orchestral work, requesting one from the 28-year-old composer, and premiering it with the NBC Symphony Orchestra on a radio broadcast in November 1938. In an America still reeling from the Great Depression, and with Europe hurtling ever closer to war, the heart-on-sleeve emotion of Barber's Adagio – which unfolds as a series of slow, winding, chant-like melodies, rising to an impassioned climax – came at just the right moment to capture and console the public consciousness.

We return to Europe, however, to close tonight's concert. Kurt Weill might be a somewhat more familiar figure to us than Schulhoff, mostly through his pioneering collaborations with dramatist Bertolt Brecht – among them *The Threepenny Opera*, the musical *Happy End* and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*.

There are important similarities, in fact, between Weill and Schulhoff. Both were Jewish, taking a bracingly radical approach to music (in Weill's case, straddling classical and popular forms), and both had clear left-wing political views. Weill's broadly left-wing sympathies, however, would ultimately put him at odds with his more hardline communist collaborator Brecht, who insisted on Weill's music functioning to convey their works' explicitly Marxist messages. Weill wasn't happy, even commenting to his wife, singer Lotte Lenya, that he'd never be able to 'set *The Communist Manifesto* to music' (unlike his Czech colleague Schulhoff).

For all his prominence and popularity, Weill – as a Jew, a 'radical', and a left-wing sympathiser – found himself persecuted in Germany even before the Nazis came to power in 1933. Nazi agitators invaded the premiere of his and Brecht's *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* in 1930, disrupting the performance with shouts of 'degenerate art', and Weill fled Germany in March 1933, shortly after Hitler came to power. He headed first for Paris, before continuing to America, where he later established almost an entirely new career as a successful composer of Broadway

Kurt Weill

For all his prominence and popularity, Weill – as a Jew, a 'radical', and a left-wing sympathiser – found himself persecuted in Germany even before the Nazis came to power in 1933.

musicals (including *Street Scene*, *Lady in the Dark* and *One Touch of Venus*).

It was just before fleeing Germany, however, that Weill received a request for what would become his Symphony No.2. The commission came from Paris, specifically from the Princesse de Polignac, a renowned philanthropist and supporter of many forward-looking composers (also known as Winnaretta Singer, fabulously wealthy heiress to the US Singer sewing machine fortune). Weill wrote the piece – the very last orchestral work he'd ever compose – primarily during his brief stay in the French capital. It got its premiere in Amsterdam in 1934, with the Concertgebouw Orchestra conducted by Bruno Walter. Audiences loved it, but critics tore it to pieces – possibly one of the reasons that Weill turned his back on the concert hall and focused his talents on the theatre from that point on.

Almost a century later, however, it's hard to see what all the fuss was about. It's a Symphony that's full of energy, colour and determination, and its musical language will be very familiar to anyone who's encountered any of Weill's collaborations with Brecht. A noble trumpet tune emerges from the first movement's slow introduction, before the mood changes entirely with rushing strings propelling the movement's faster music along breathlessly. The slow second movement is a funeral march in all but name, beginning in declamatory mode before a more intimate, heartfelt cello solo leads us into quieter, more contemplative music. The energetic final movement scurries almost furtively into our awareness, but when it finally breaks into louder assertiveness, it's with an adapted theme taken from the opening movement, later galloping to an exuberant, even delirious close.

© David Kettle

Conductor

Ryan Bancroft

Renowned for his electric performances and generous musicianship, conductor Ryan Bancroft is highly sought after across the globe, performing with many of the world's leading orchestras. In September 2023, he was appointed Chief Conductor of the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra. His position in Stockholm has recently been extended and will run until spring 2030. He also holds the position of Artist-in-Association with the Tapiola Sinfonietta in Finland. Bancroft previously served as Principal Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales from 2021-summer 2026.

Since beginning his tenure as Chief Conductor in Stockholm, Bancroft has led the orchestra on a major European tour in spring 2026 and given performances at the Schleswig Holstein Festival, the Elbphlharmonie in Hamburg and Lübeck. In Spring 2027, they will embark on another European tour performing in Vienna, Amsterdam, Cologne, Antwerp, and Munich. During his time as Chief Conductor, Bancroft has conducted the world premieres of a number of works by composers such as Anders Hillborg, Chrichan Larson and Đuro Živković, whilst collaborating with renowned soloists including Emmanuel Ax, Leif Ove Andsnes, Maxim Vengerov and Víkingur Ólafsson. In 26/27, Bancroft will continue to feature works by Swedish composers such as Anders Hillborg, Britta Byström and Benjamin Staern. Highlights of the 26/27 season include, in addition to concerts with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, debuts with the Munich Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Sydney Symphony and Queensland Symphony orchestras. He will also return to orchestras including San Francisco Symphony, Finnish Radio Symphony, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, Scottish Chamber and appears twice with the Philharmonia in London and on tour to Mauritius. He will also make his return to the Colorado Music Festival. Throughout the season, Bancroft collaborates with soloists including Emmanuel Ax, Seong-Jin Cho, Bruce Liu, Vilde Frang, Clara-Jumi Kang, Renaud Capuçon and Kian Soltani.

In recent seasons, Bancroft has conducted leading international orchestras, such as the London Symphony, London Philharmonic, Rotterdam Philharmonic, NDR Elbphilharmonie, WDR Cologne, NHK Symphony, Swedish Radio Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Cleveland Orchestra.

For full biography please visit sco.org.uk

Violin

Clara-Jumi Kang

Clara-Jumi Kang is celebrated internationally for her exceptional musicality, technical mastery and artistic depth. In demand with the world's top orchestras and conductors, The Strad has praised her "constant poise" and her performances have been described as "nothing short of staggering, in terms of intensity, technique and passion" *Seen and Heard International*.

Kang regularly performs with leading orchestras including the London Symphony Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Seoul Philharmonic, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, the Budapest Festival Orchestra, and NHK Symphony Orchestra, and with conductors such as Daniel Harding, Lahav Shani, Myung Whun Chung, Charles Dutoit, Gianandrea Noseda, Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Ryan Bancroft, Mark Wigglesworth and Jaap van Zweden. In 2025, she was the soloist for the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra's major tour to China and Europe with Zubin Mehta, and returned to work with the orchestra in summer 2026 with Maestro Barenboim at the Rheingau Musik Festival.

Highlights of the 26/27 include debuts with the Orchestre de Paris, London Philharmonic, Frankfurt Radio Symphony, and the Estonian Festival Orchestra under Paavo Järvi. Kang also returns to the Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Singapore Symphony, Philharmonia, Vancouver Symphony, Netherlands Philharmonic, Orquesta Sinfonica de Galicia, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, and Royal Liverpool Philharmonic.

Kang was selected as one of the top 100 Most promising and influential people of Korea' in 2012 by Dong-A Times and was awarded the Daewon Music Award (2012). She has made two recordings for Decca: Modern Solo, featuring works by Schubert and Ysaÿe, and a Brahms-Schumann album with Yeol Eum Son. In 2021, she released a cycle of Beethoven's Violin Sonatas with pianist Sunwook Kim.

Clara-Jumi Kang plays on the "Thunis" Stradivarius from 1702, on generous loan by KIA.

For full biography please visit sco.org.uk

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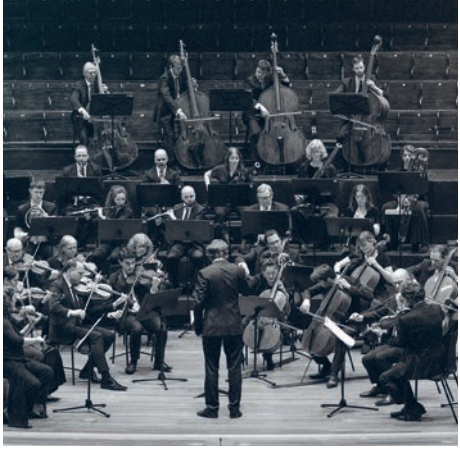
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Equally at home on and off the concert stage, each one of the SCO's highly talented and creative musicians and staff is passionate about transforming and enhancing lives through the power of music. The SCO's Creative Learning programme engages people 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 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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The SCO is a charity registered in Scotland No SC015039.

Photo: Christopher Bowen