



SCOTTISH
CHAMBER
ORCHESTRA

**VIENNESE
HOTHOUSE**

25 – 26 Nov 2021

SCO.ORG.UK

PROGRAMME

Season 2021/22

VIENNESE HOTHOUSE

Thursday 25 November, 7.30pm The Queen's Hall, Edinburgh
Friday 26 November, 7.30pm City Halls, Glasgow

Mahler Blumine, from Symphony No 1
Mahler (arr. Britten) What The Wild Flowers Tell Me
Berg Chamber Concerto, Op 8

Joseph Swensen Conductor
Kolja Blacher Violin
Roman Rabinovich Piano

Please note there will be no interval.



SCOTTISH
CHAMBER
ORCHESTRA

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The Scottish Chamber Orchestra is a charity registered in Scotland No. SC015039.
Company registration No. SC075079.

Our Musicians

YOUR ORCHESTRA

*The orchestra list is correct
at time of publication*

FIRST VIOLIN

Sarah Kapustin
Ruth Crouch
Kana Kawashima
Aisling O'Dea
Siún Milne
Fiona Alexander
Amira Bedrush-McDonald
Sarah Bevan-Baker

SECOND VIOLIN

Marcus Barcham Stevens
Gordon Bragg
Wen Wang
Rachel Spencer
Niamh Lyons
Rachel Smith

VIOLA

Fiona Winning
Felix Tanner
Brian Schiele
Steve King

CELLO

Philip Higham
Su-a Lee
Donald Gillan
Eric de Wit

BASS

Adrian Borne
Sophie Butler

FLUTE

André Cebrián
Lee Holland

PICCOLO

Lee Holland

OBOE

Robin Williams
Rachel Harwood-White

Cor Anglais

Rachel Harwood-White

CLARINET

Maximiliano Martín
William Stafford

E FLAT CLARINET

Calum Robertson

BASS CLARINET

William Stafford

BASSOON

Cerys Ambrose-Evans
Alison Green

CONTRABASSOON

Alison Green

HORN

Huw Evans
Jamie Shield
Andy Saunders
Harry Johnstone

TRUMPET

Peter Franks
Shaun Harrold
Simon Bird

TROMBONE

Cillian Ó'Ceallacháin

TIMPANI

Louise Goodwin

PERCUSSION

Louise Goodwin
Paul Stoneman

HARP

Sharron Griffiths

WHAT YOU ARE ABOUT TO HEAR

Mahler (1860-1911)

Blumine, from Symphony No 1
(1887–1888)

Mahler (1860-1911) arr. Britten (1893-96)

What The Wild Flowers Tell Me

BERG (1885-1935)

Chamber Concerto, Op 8 (1923–25)

Thema scherzoso con variazioni

Adagio

Rondo ritmico con introduzione

Benjamin Britten was about three decades ahead of the game in appreciating the music of Gustav Mahler. Though the earlier composer's music didn't take off in Britain until the 1960s, Britten had been passionate about it since the 1930s, gaining his initial inspiration at a rare performance of Mahler's Fourth Symphony, a work that Britten himself brought to his Aldeburgh Festival in 1961.

Today's concert begins with two short pieces by Mahler that Britten had a strong hand in championing (or even, to some extent, creating). The first of them, *Blumine*, had a problematic genesis, and probably wouldn't have made it to modern concert stages at all had Mahler had his way.

Blumine (an archaic German word meaning something akin to 'floral') formed the second movement in the original version of Mahler's First Symphony of 1889, but survived just three performances before the composer jettisoned it. His official explanation was that *Blumine* was too close in key to its neighbouring movements. In reality, however, he was no doubt stung by the harsh criticism that this sweet, somewhat sentimental music had been singled out at the Symphony's earliest performances (one reviewer dismissed it as 'trivial').

But *Blumine* goes back further than that. It began life as one of seven pieces that Mahler wrote as incidental music to a verse play by Joseph Victor von Scheffel, *The Trumpeter of Säckingen*, where it accompanied a scene in which the trumpeter hero Werner serenades his



Gustav Mahler

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beloved Maria across the Rhine. Mahler was reportedly proud of the music that he'd put together at breakneck speed in a mere two days, and clearly believed there was more life in this particular piece within a grander context (even if his critics would later disagree).

Once he removed it from the First Symphony, however, *Blumine* seemed to disappear entirely – until British musicologist Donald Mitchell, carrying out research at Yale University in 1966 for his Mahler biography, stumbled upon a manuscript used in the First Symphony's second performance, in Hamburg in 1893, complete with *Blumine* forming its second movement. The movement – or, by now, the stand-alone piece – received its modern-day premiere in a performance conducted by Benjamin Britten, a close friend of Mitchell's, at the 1967 Aldeburgh Festival.

Knowing *Blumine*'s origins in von Scheffel's play provides an illuminating context for the work's sentimental opening trumpet melody, set above delicate, shimmering strings, and soon shared with the strings and woodwind. Following a more melancholy middle section led by the woodwind, the trumpet reappears to lead the piece to its restful, ecstatic conclusion.

We jump back in time two decades for *What the Wild Flowers Tell Me*, Britten's own chamber orchestra arrangement of the second movement from Mahler's gargantuan Third Symphony. At more than 90 minutes, and involving a huge orchestra, choirs and a solo contralto, the Symphony is one of the repertoire's longest, grandest utterances, an all-consuming hymn of praise to nature, childhood and love – not that you'd know it from Britten's slimmed-down, intimate arrangement for chamber orchestra,



Alban Berg

Also requiring some close attention are the secret codes and hidden stories that Berg embedded in the work's melodies, harmonies and structures, ciphers that paint a vivid picture of the composer's life and loves in Vienna at the time.

made in 1941 expressly to bring Mahler's music to wider audiences. Its title is one of the headings that Mahler gave to all of the Symphony's six movements, though they were dropped before publication.

Its opening oboe melody seems to inhabit a similarly sentimental world to the opening of *Blumine*, though Mahler offsets his delicate evocation with contrasting scurrying passages that are rather more sinister, switching mood and material quite abruptly as though capturing the flickering thoughts of a restless mind.

There's plenty of Viennese sentimentality, too, in today's final piece, though you have to look quite hard for it in Alban Berg's Chamber Concerto, which he wrote between 1923 and 1925 for the unusual combination of piano and violin soloists, plus a 13-piece wind orchestra. Also requiring some close attention are

the secret codes and hidden stories that Berg embedded in the work's melodies, harmonies and structures, ciphers that paint a vivid picture of the composer's life and loves in Vienna at the time.

Berg was born in the city, studying there with the radical modernist Arnold Schoenberg, as did his friend and colleague Anton Webern: the three men together gained the somewhat infamous moniker of the 'Second Viennese School'. Berg dedicated the Chamber Concerto to his teacher Schoenberg, and offered it to him as a (belated) 50th birthday present, having completed it on his own 40th birthday, 9 February 1925. In doing so, he also wrote Schoenberg an 'open letter' in which he hinted at the work's meanings:

"I can tell you, dearest friend, that if it were known how much friendship, love and a world of human and spiritual

It was only after the death of Berg's widow Helene in 1976, however, and the availability of the composer's sketches and correspondence, that the full extent of the Chamber Concerto's secret ciphers became apparent – as did similar schemes behind works including his Lyric Suite and Violin Concerto.

references I have smuggled into these three movements, the adherents of programme music [or storytelling music] – should there be any left – would go mad with joy.”

Berg launches his ‘human and spiritual references’ even before the first movement proper begins, writing a few bars of music that he calls a ‘motto’. In them, he transforms the three composers’ names into musical notes (using the German system whose B is our B-flat, whose H is our B natural, and whose Es, representing S, is our E-flat). The piano thus intones Arnold SCHOENBERG, the violin Anton WEBERn, and the orchestra’s horn ALBAN BERG. Berg thereby sets the stage for his playful musical interplay of codes and references, and also draws attention the Concerto’s three main themes right at the start. (Significantly, his melodies representing himself and Webern the

pupils will change and develop throughout the piece, whereas that of the teacher Schoenberg will remain resolutely the same).

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First of all, the ‘friendship’, ‘love’ and ‘world’ that Berg referred to in his letter to Schoenberg are nothing less than his own secret titles for the Concerto’s three movements. Following its motto opening, Berg’s first, ‘friendship’ movement – which showcases the piano soloist – is a theme and five contrasting variations, each of them a musical portrait of one of the three

But the love that Berg is focusing on here has a far darker hue than marital affection. Mathilde was notorious for taking younger lovers, aided and abetted by her friend Helene. One of her trysts, however, had particularly tragic consequences: after Schoenberg discovered his wife's affair with his 25-year-old pupil Richard Gerstl in 1908, Gerstl took his own life.

men's Viennese colleagues, and in which, not surprisingly, the three composers' names make frequent reappearances.

The violin takes over as soloist in Berg's slow, far more sombre second movement ('love'), which turns its attention – appropriately – to two of the composers' wives: Mathilde Schoenberg and Helene Berg. But the love that Berg is focusing on here has a far darker hue than marital affection. Mathilde was notorious for taking younger lovers, aided and abetted by her friend Helene. One of her trysts, however, had particularly tragic consequences: after Schoenberg discovered his wife's affair with his 25-year-old pupil Richard Gerstl in 1908, Gerstl took his own life. Berg makes reference to the affair in his music, using quotations from Schoenberg's tone poem *Pelleas und Melisande*, which he'd written shortly before the incident. The

movement also acts as an enormous palindrome, turning back on itself at its halfway point and replaying all of its music in reverse – perhaps to symbolise Mathilde's return to her husband, or perhaps to indicate Berg's desire to reverse time so that none of these events would ever have taken place. Listen out for its turning point, indicated by the ominous, midnight tolling of 12 low notes in the piano, making an unexpected appearance.

Piano and violin soloists come together properly for the first time in the elaborate dual cadenza that introduces the vibrant third movement ('world'), which wittily and appropriately combines music from the two preceding movements, even including a return for the piano's midnight tolling about halfway through.

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