

scottish
ensemble

Scottish Creations



19 - 29 May 2022

Programme

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 **Creative
Lives**

Welcome to Scottish Creations

Stories are such a key part of how we share ideas, history, personality and humanity with each other. In this Year of Scotland's Stories, we wanted to create a project celebrating storytelling from the places of the places we perform in, and making our audiences' stories part of the project itself.

So Scottish Creations explores a whole range of stories – musical, visual, literal and digital.

We'll be led through the performance element – which comes in two parts – by two wonderful musicians: Kate Suthers, a regular face in the Scottish Ensemble violins, directs with us for the first time in the opening 'concert' half; while Alastair Savage, a familiar face to both classical and traditional music audiences across Scotland, leads our 'session' after the interval. In both contexts, we hope you enjoy exploring works by Scottish composers, including the wonderful Ailie Robertson's new work, *Archetypes*, which we are honoured to premiere.

Of course, as well as enjoying musical story-telling tonight, you can explore the collaborative exhibition we've put together with Creative Lives. It features curated works of art – from poetry, to weaving, to printing – that were submitted by members of the local communities this project will be performed in; pieces which tell moving individual stories within which we hope you find resonance, fun, and solace.

This project will also go on to have a digital life – you can explore a full online exhibition later this summer at scottishensemble.co.uk, featuring all the artworks submitted from across the country, and we'll then be releasing a series of short films capturing the stories (and personalities!) of some of the people who contributed to this project – composers, musicians, community artists, stage crew and audience members.

We hope you enjoy the diversity and volume of stories shared today and that you feel they capture some of Scotland's bold personality. As ever, we'd love to hear from you during or after the performances, and in particular this time, of any stories that captured your own imagination...

Enjoy the evening!



Jenny Jamison

Chief Executive
Scottish Ensemble

Programme Notes

Programme

Part 1 (45 Minutes)

Ailie Robertson

Archetypes
(World Premiere)

James MacMillan

Memento

Sally Beamish

Partita for String Octet
(first movement)

Anna Meredith

Variation on
Tullochgorum

John McEwen

Quartet No 15:
(first movement)

Interval (45 Minutes)

Please take the opportunity to enjoy our special pop-up exhibition of art, curated by Creative Lives

Part 2 (60 Minutes)

Scottish traditional
music session

Ailie Robertson

Archetypes

Stories and myths are an intrinsic part of human communication. They are a teaching tool, a way to warn each other of dangers and the simplest method to better understand one another.

For thousands of years, narrative artforms have featured archetypes: characters built on a specific, identifiable set of traits that are recurrent across the human experience. Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung suggested that these archetypes were archaic forms of innate human knowledge passed down from our ancestors. He believed that these recurring figures are part of the mythmaking fabric that is common to all humans. This may explain how stories that originate from vastly different cultures across the globe can, at their core, so closely resemble one another.

The five movements of this suite are each inspired by a universal archetype that appears in numerous stories and myths across cultures: the sage, the shapeshifter, the caregiver, the villain and the everyman. Each musical portrait draws upon classical and folk idioms to cast a vivid impression of their respective theme and convey the traits underlying these ancient, eternal ideas.

Programme note by Ailie Robertson

James MacMillan

Memento

As well as propping up the leisure and tourism industry, mementoes hold a gentle social power. And understanding mementoes as modest artefacts capable of prompting mighty tales of people, places and times is a useful way to approach James MacMillan's short composition for string quartet from 1994.

Written in memory of friend and colleague David Huntley (music publisher Boosey & Hawkes' former representative in America), it's a model in dedicatory music: a touching tribute that MacMillan puts a great deal of himself into, he delicately weaves the emotions of Gaelic lament music with textures informed by the internal dynamics of Hebridean psalm singing.

A chant-like opening sets the scene, to which MacMillan adds icy stanzas of string sound flanked by silence. Yearning slides introduce a passionate impulse into the mix, peaking in a fervent unison statement in the ensemble's earthy middle register. Fragility soon returns via gleaming harmonics, and a graceful chord drops in at the last to give this prayer its final full stop.

Sally Beamish

Partita for String
Octet
(1st movement)

After ten days spent on the 2019 Carl Nielsen Violin Competition judging panel, Sally Beamish's musical mind was 'filled with Bach'. Feeling inspired, she decided to take the string octet – a form used to great effect by Bach devotee Felix Mendelssohn – and combine it with the partita – a type of suite Bach usually used for solo instruments.

Beamish's Partita spans three movements; the first, the Prelude, places a fragment of Bach's D Minor sonata for solo violin in the first viola part, and builds an ostinato around it (Beamish is a viola player). She constructs a more typical story, with characters, roles, dialogue, and a meaty conclusion, as the ostinato breaks apart, reforms, and then unites in an abrasive, single note statement.

Anna Meredith

Variation on
Tullochgorum

Put simply, the theme and variations form is just composers telling tales. An unadorned melody gradually acquires elaborations, diversions, and extensions, until the original 'story' becomes almost unrecognisable.

That's exactly what happened with Scottish Variations, a piece Scottish Ensemble commissioned in 2014. They took the traditional strathspey *Tullochgorum* (popularised by Scottish fiddle player and self-styled 'King of the Strathspey' James Scott-Skinner) and invited a group of Scotland's leading composers to contribute their own, imaginative variations.

The strathspey is characterised by its snapped rhythms, and Meredith turns that rhythmic quirk into an entire movement: the insistent snaps become both the piece's quickened heartbeat and an accompaniment to zooming *cantabile* lines. This is musical mythmaking in action: finding the crux of a story, viewing it in isolation and bending it into something 'new-old'.

**John Blackwood
McEwen**

Quartet No.15: In
Modo Scotico
(1st movement)

McEwen had a soft spot for the string quartet. His fifteenth – that's just the numbered ones – carries the subtitle 'a Little Quartet, *in modo scotico*' (in a Scottish way), a self-effacing way of noting his homeland inspiration that was typical in McEwen's music. (He was less retiring in other areas, like his pamphlets titled Total Democracy and Abolish Money).

The piece dates from 1936, the same year he left his post as Principal of the Royal Academy of Music. Quaint, buoyant, and rather like Ravel, the folk influence reveals itself gradually, through wistful melodies and a meandering pentatonic dialect. The story McEwen tells begins brightly, before slipping into a more pensive mood.

Programmes notes by Hugh Morris

The Session

A few thoughts on the Scottish Creations session: when Ailie Robertson and I first met to discuss ideas for the session, uppermost in our minds was trying to create something that would have a sense of structure but would also allow for creative freedom and be a welcoming environment for local community players who wanted to take part.

The initial idea we discussed of trying to represent each of the different locations the ensemble are visiting on the tour seemed a good starting point. The first place I remember us both mentioning was Aberdeen, I think because instinctively James Scott Skinner stood out as an obvious musician with connections to that area and 'Hector The Hero' was a tune we reckoned would be known and played by lots of players in all the locations we were visiting. Over the next few weeks I did likewise with the other touring venues, pondering where we were due to visit, the musicians and music special to each and the individual significance historically they all had.

There were melodies that jumped out at me as being unique in their quality but also in the emotional connection to the various areas we were due to visit. For Mull, the Iona Boat Song (Caol Muile) has a resonance to St. Columba's journey to Iona in 563 AD and seemed a beautiful tune to begin the session each night. The Lament of Flora MacDonald by Niel Gow junior (Nathaniel Gow's son) was, I thought, a poignant melody with historical connections to Skye. Niel Gow senior (Nathaniel's father) is represented in the feature on the Highlands', with a popular strathspey and reel. Gow was an important contact for Robert Burns during the poet's Highland Tour and Robert Burns himself is one of the poets featured during the session. I felt with this being the Year of Stories and its significance to the ensemble tour, each stage of the session should be represented by a poem read by a member of the ensemble.

Alongside the melodies mentioned above, there will be other traditional melodies from Shetland and Dundee along with a couple of my own compositions, that I've arranged especially for Ailie and the ensemble to play on this tour, that have connections to the Highlands and Shetland. The sessions in each location will hopefully merge the old and the new, the present day community musicians in all these areas alongside Scottish Ensemble, with a glimpse of their history expressed through words and music.

Alastair Savage, May 2022

About the Performers



Violin 1
Kate Suthers
Liza Johnson
Alastair Savage
Gongbo Jiang

Violin 2
Ellie Consta
Laura Ghio
Aaron McGregor

Viola
Jane Atkins
Andrew Berridge

Cello
Alison Lawrance
Naomi Pavri

Double Bass
Diane Clark

Harp
Ailie Robertson



Ailie Robertson

Ailie is a multi-award winning composer and harpist based on the west coast of Scotland. Her composition work ranges from concert music to theatre and film scores.

She has been commissioned to write for some of the world's most prestigious cultural institutions including the BBC Proms, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Dunedin Consort, Exaudi Red Note Ensemble, Bang on a Can, Cappella Nova and the Riot Ensemble. She was composer-in-residence with Sound Festival and is currently composer-in residence with Glyndebourne Opera. She was awarded the 'Achievement in New Music' prize at the Scottish Awards for New Music.

Scottish Ensemble

The UK's leading string orchestra, Scottish Ensemble is a group of outstanding musicians championing music for strings. Founded in 1969, and based in Glasgow, we give dynamic, vibrant performances and musical events across Scotland, the UK and beyond.

Committed to musical collaboration, we not only regularly collaborate with high-profile guest artists – from trumpeter Alison Balsom and mezzo-soprano Sarah Connolly to violinists Patricia Kopatchinskaja and Nicola Benedetti, to name only a few – but also with artists from other disciplines and art forms.

Since 2014, Scottish Ensemble has presented a series of annual cross-artform collaborations that have so far included projects with visual artist Toby Paterson; Swedish contemporary dance company Andersson Dance; electronic-classical crossover composer Anna Meredith and visual artist Eleanor Meredith; and Scottish theatre companies Vanishing Point and Untitled Projects. We also have a long history of commissioning new works with recent and forthcoming commissions including works by Edgar Meyer, Erkki-Sven Tüür, Mica Levi and, of course, Ailie Robertson.

In recent years our international reputation has also grown considerably and we have now performed in Taiwan, China, Brazil, the USA and across Europe, at festivals from the Thuringia Bach Festival to the Savannah Festival, Georgia, and venues including the John F. Kennedy Centre for Performing Arts (Washington D.C.) and Barbican Centre (London).

Scottish Ensemble News



Concerts for a Summer's Night

We're back on the road again next month with an informal evening of music to celebrate the long evenings of a Scottish summer.

Mirroring our ever-popular Concerts by Candlelight, this first in a new annual series of events will take you on an atmospheric journey through an eclectic mix of musical styles, including Mozart's scampering, energetic Magic Flute Overture, Purcell's hypnotic Fantasia and Dvorak's American Quartet, evoking expansive, wide-open vistas.

To take advantage of that evening sun, we're setting these concerts in an array of light-filled settings, ranging from spectacular atriums to a Byre in the Perthshire countryside. We invite you to grab a drink (the first is on us!), settle in, and enjoy an evening of superb music in the company of Scottish Ensemble.

Mon 20 June 8:00 pm
Perthshire Rossie Byre

Tue 21 June 8:00 pm
Edinburgh National Museum of Scotland

Wed 22 June 8:00 pm
Aberdeen Art Gallery

Thu 23 June 8:00 pm
Glasgow Barras Art and Design

Support Our Work

We're delighted to be touring the Highlands and Islands of Scotland with Scottish Creations. We love performing music and sharing our passion with artists, participants and audiences who may be inspired to share their own creativity.

Scottish Ensemble is a registered charity and each year we raise funds to help us take innovative performances and participative projects to a variety of settings. The generosity of our individual supporters makes an invaluable contribution to our programme of work.

Your donations enable us to create new projects, take live music to schools and vulnerable communities, and collaborate with some of the most talented artists in Scotland.

If you've enjoyed tonight and want to support our work, there are many ways for you to do so; join our Strings Attached membership from £30 a year and enjoy exclusive behind-the-scenes insights, or make a donation to support a specific strand of our work.

All donations are greatly appreciated.

Please scan the code or visit our website at scottishensemble.co.uk/support-us

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Donald & Alison Gordon
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Graham & Elma Leisk
Janet MacDonald
Neil Metcalfe & Pat Monaghan
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*plus the
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Alasdair Fraser
Joe Coleiro

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Marina, The Lady Marks
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Scottish Ensemble

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An Tobar & Mull Theatre

