

scottish
ensemble

Breathe

Take a moment. Reflect. Be still.

25-28 October

Inverness
Glasgow
Edinburgh
Dundee

Programme



scottishensemble.co.uk



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAL



Images: Tommy Ga-Ken Wan

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 create dynamic, vibrant performances and musical events across Scotland, the UK and beyond. Committed to musical collaboration, we not only regularly collaborate with high-profile classical artists – from trumpeter Alison Balsom and mezzosoprano 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 commissions including works by Edgar Meyer, Erkki-Sven Tüür, Mica Levi and Ailie Robertson. In recent years our international reputation has also grown considerably, and we have performed in Taiwan, Japan, 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).

Curator

Andrew Berridge

Guest Director

Tristan Gurney

Violin 1

Cheryl Crockett
Liza Johnson
Michelle Dierx

Violin 2

Kate Suthers
Joanne Green
Laura Ghio

Viola

Andrew Berridge
Morag Robertson

Cello

Alison Lawrance
Naomi Pavri

Double Bass

Diane Clark

Programme

Gjermund Larsen Solbønn

La Monte Young Composition 1960 #7

Nico Muhly Diacritical Marks

Daniel Kidane Breathe

Ludwig van Beethoven Finale from String Quartet No.9

Caroline Shaw Ritornello 2.sq.2.j.a

Donald Grant Taladh

Welcome to *Breathe*

Breathe. Let the air in, filling your lungs and relish the sensation of lightness and freedom. Pause - and exhale, feel the release as the tension flows out of you. Now settle back comfortably, open your ears, and breathe in the sound...

Tonight's performance is a blend of meditative listening techniques and an exploration of how we can let the music in more fully, relishing texture and resonance while we literally surround you with music. And in that moment we hope to share more of the experience with you - how does it feel to shape the music you are hearing? How do we as performers feel connected to our audience? As we take you on a journey through an evening of diverse music, we will explore the relationship between performer and audience, letting you feel as connected as possible to the musicians around you.

During the last few years, we've been expanding our work with Maggie's cancer support centres, taking live performances to small mindfulness groups, and using music both as a tool for therapy and to provoke a conversation about how it can make us feel on a fundamental level. These sessions have been so richly rewarding for both our musicians and the participants that we wanted to bring this experience to the concert hall, to share our gratitude for the unique energy that live performance brings.

There will be music, from a range of composers both familiar and lesser known, and a chance to explore and discuss how these varied voices can speak to us in the most direct and personally relevant way. 'Breathe' is a chance to immerse yourself in the sound of the Ensemble as you might in the comfort of your own home - there is no formal 'concert hall' etiquette to follow, just a calm, safe environment to sink deep into the sound and let yourself breathe...

Andrew Berridge
Violist and Programme Curator

Programme Notes

Across seventy-five unbroken minutes of music, speech and thought, Breathe asks the vital question: how does music really make us *feel*?

Gjermund Larsen Solbønn

First up, something to focus the mind. Award-winning folk musician Gjermund Larsen performs on both the violin and the Hardanger fiddle, an eight-stringed instrument from western Norway capable of producing resonant drones and yearning chords. Solbønn translates as 'sun prayer', a solemn piece that slowly advances into something more descriptive and ruggedly passionate.

La Monte Young Composition 1960 #7

Detailed description was far from La Monte Young's mind when he compiled Compositions 1960, a group of text-based pieces which deconstructs the idea of notated music altogether. Some pieces involve eccentric instructions – to release butterflies into the performance space (#5) or 'build a fire' (#2) – but #7 is the only one to use 'conventional' musical notation. Two notes, a fifth apart, appear on a five-line staff, tied indefinitely; the accompanying direction simply adds 'to be held for a long time'.

And... that's it! Young lends us – performers and listeners – the freedom to interpret his piece however we like, letting the music live for as long as we decide.

Nico Muhly Diacritical Marks

From La Monte Young's unbroken span, which holds its breath for as long as it can, to Nico Muhly's piece for string quartet which breathes sharply, then deeply, then quickly once more.

Muhly describes his anxiety with the idea of the string quartet, and the historical expectation that it must represent 'giant expressions of a composer's emotional life'. To that end, he chooses something static and objective as his conceptual inspiration. Diacritical marks are the dashes on letters that indicate how they're pronounced; think Dvořák, Janáček or Lutosławski. Muhly translates that idea into composition, interrogating precisely how sound is articulated, and how that is expressed via the printed note.

It's cast in eight short movements, each a mini-essay riffing on a single idea. Framed by two driving movements, the middle six strains are more rhapsodic in character that build on different kinds of drone music. But however much Muhly tries to avoid it, there's a great amount of emotion in the music, from the bustling opening to the melancholic wanderings of the middle movements.

Daniel Kidane Breathe

Daniel Kidane's effortlessly still pandemic commission for string ensemble gives tonight's performance its name. 'As if emerging from a haze', Kidane writes at the start of the score; even then, Breathe takes a while to emerge from its slumber. When it eventually shudders into life, something surprising comes into view: a host of carefully interwoven melodies, bathed in light and reminiscent of Bach, or even Vaughan Williams' exceptionally popular Tallis Fantasia.

Ludwig van Beethoven Finale from String Quartet No.9

Then comes something genuinely from antiquity. Beethoven's Op.59 No.3, one of three string quartets commissioned by Russian ambassador Andreas Razumovsky, is nicknamed the 'Eroica' because of its gloriously executed conclusion: a scurrying canon that turns into a fugue-like explosion of fiery energy. A shot of direct sunlight.

Caroline Shaw Ritornello 2.sq.2.j.a

There's a sense of restlessness in both the Beethoven finale, and Caroline Shaw's Ritornello 2.sq.2.j.a, even if they work with wildly different energy levels. According to Shaw, the form of the string quartet contains 'something familiar ... yet you can keep on opening these doors and diving down rabbit holes'. This piece contains all of Shaw's hallmarks: sweet, tonal blocks of sound, articulated by a language of swells, blemishes and sighs, and possessing lots of unusual shapes and crafty textures to keep the listener on their toes. Plus, in using the ritornello – a kind of theme and variations form – Shaw continues her fascination with consolidating her compositional voice by engaging with time-honoured methods (a courtly Entr'acte opens her acclaimed Attacca Quartet album Orange, and baroque dance structures shape her most famous work, the Pulitzer Prize-winning Partita for Eight Voices). The multitude of ways Shaw disguises and morphs the returning motto – sometimes beyond recognition – is what gives this ritornello its charm. And the slightly odd title? A reference to Shaw writing and rewriting numerous versions of the work over several months – an act of compositional ritornello in itself.

Donald Grant Taladh

Alongside its use of traditional forms, Shaw's music often looks to nature for inspiration, and its network of sighs and shouts confirm hers as a music that's truly living and breathing. Violinist and composer Donald Grant takes that idea to the extreme with his beautiful Taladh, originally cast as a response to a string arrangement of J.S. Bach's Goldberg Variations, but that ends up far removed from Bach's original. What grounds this gentle lullaby is something very human, where the silent breaths between phrases become as important as the folksy melodic lines. Taladh dreams of a land far beyond here, as it drifts peacefully towards rest.

Programme Notes: Hugh Morris

Ensemble News



Scottish Ensemble welcomes new team members

We are delighted to welcome two new members of staff to our office at Glasgow's Centre for Contemporary Arts. We have Ryan Hay (pictured above in the vibrant yellow) joining us as our Creative Learning Manager and William Coates-Gibson (sadly not pictured!) leading on our digital content creation. Ryan's background is in theatre and their work in the ensemble focuses on artist development activities, health and wellbeing, New Scots, and young people. The Digital Content Producer role is a new one within the team which will give renewed focus to our digital work - like our 2021 music video featuring music by Philip Glass, which has now reached almost 50,000 views worldwide!

Supporting our work

If you've enjoyed tonight's event, we would be extremely grateful if you could consider further support for our work. Each year we raise funds to support our work both on and off the stage, enabling us to share live music with vulnerable groups, with children and young people and with our audiences across the country.

All donations, no matter what size, are gratefully received and help to ensure that we can share more music with communities across Scotland.

If you'd like to have a more regular connection with our organisation, we would very much like to welcome you to our Strings Attached members group. Joining is easy – visit our website or scan the QR code here:



in Sync: Our first-ever family concert

In September we launched *in Sync* in collaboration with MishMash Productions, an immersive listening experience for young people and their families. This was a brand-new event for us which saw us take *in Sync* to schools and concert halls in Glasgow, Inverness, Aberdeen, and Dundee with fantastic responses from young people and adults alike. The flamboyant performance (from memory!), choreography, props, and set design all brought to life music from across five centuries and four continents. We would like to give a special thank you to everyone who donated to our Fund for the Future, which helped to bring this project to life.

“Just amazing and an off the wall example of introducing youngsters to strings.” Audience member

Images: Tommy Ga-Ken Wan

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Scottish Ensemble

CCA, 350 Sauchiehall Street
Glasgow, G2 3JD

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