

**scottish  
ensemble**

# First Light

Guest directed by Max Baillie

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A spectacular filmed concert, bringing life and energy into your world and signalling our transition from darkness to brighter times

**Premieres 29 April 2021**

**Programme**







Photo: Henry Kenyon

# A virtual welcome!

After months of lockdown, it felt very adventurous to get on a train to Glasgow and meet the wonderful musicians of Scottish Ensemble for this project. There were a few exciting firsts: in researching the Steve Martland for example, I couldn’t find a recording anywhere online, less a video recording. There is also a tradition of some string quartets being played with larger forces and I really wanted to play some Haydn like this... was there a quartet that could work? (They’re not all suited to this treatment...) I had a good long listen and the *Op. 76.No. 2* jumped right out, crying to have an added double bass and that string symphony sound to bring out all the Sturm and Drang-ness, but ultimately the uplifting quality, of this wonderful piece.

My piece *Mirrors in Time* has also not yet been recorded, and we also tried something out of the usual rehearsal mode: live workshop/arranging with the whole ensemble to turn Bach’s *Chorale 218* into something from another world. With just the score as a starting point it was a fun and creative alternative to reading the dots more or less as written, a real exercise in experimentation, which I believe should be central to rehearsing even when the music is more exactly notated. It was a total joy working with Scottish Ensemble (even if my quite serious concentrating face on the video doesn’t often show it!), and particularly at a time when real chamber music with other people is a rare thing. For the video we wanted to create a sense of alternate reality, of dark and light, and an intimacy with the players through this sonic journey. I do hope you enjoy this film!

Max Baillie

Guest Director

# Programme

Vivaldi *Concerto Grosso in G minor RV 156*

- I Allegro
- II Adagio
- III Allegro

Jessie Montgomery

Starburst

Haydn

String Quartet Op. 76.No. 2 ‘Fifths’  
(Arranged by Iain Farrington and Max Baillie)

- I Allegro
- II Andante o più tosto allegretto
- III Allegro ma non troppo
- IV Vivace assai

J.S. Bach (arr. Baillie)

Chorale 218: ‘Laß, o Herr, dein Ohr sich neigen’  
(‘O Lord let thine ear incline’)  
(Arranged by Max Baillie)

Max Baillie

Mirrors in Time

Steve Martland

Eternity’s Sunrise

Starburst by Jessie Montgomery  
Used by permission

Eternity’s Sunrise by Steve Martland  
By arrangement with Schott Music Ltd.



PS. A little extra note from us...if you can, we would suggest listening to the performance via headphones, as it will make for a more immersive experience – you’ll hopefully feel like you’re right there amongst us!

# notes on the music



Antonio Vivaldi

Concerto Grosso in G minor RV 156

- I Allegro
- II Adagio
- II Allegro

The taut, anticipatory lightness of the opening motif; the nipped accompaniment, with its fresh, quivering brightness; the irresistible sense of building energy, from delicate first shoots of the first movement to the exuberant full bloom of the last... Could our opening piece sound a little bit like spring?

Amongst Vivaldi’s famously prolific output of around 500 concerti, his *Concerto Grosso in G minor (RV 156)* is one of a smaller number written for strings with no soloist, and from the very first notes it drives forwards with the drama and momentum of strings in unison.

From the very first bars the syncopated melody has us in a state of suspension, tentatively feeling its way out of the minor key darkness – and beautifully emphasised by the gentle toying and teasing of guest director Max Baillie’s interpretation. In the second movement, as the harpsichord slowly unfurls, a solitary voice growing towards the light, a bed of strings gently stretch and keen beneath. By movement three, we are in full bloom, with life pushing onwards and upwards through driving bass, whipping, exuberant scales and that signature Vivaldi drama which, albeit most likely due to the lasting fame of his *Four Seasons* concerti, never fails to evoke the vivacious colours and textures of the natural world at its most dramatic.



Jessie Montgomery

Starburst

Jessie Montgomery’s *Starburst* was inspired by the definition of the term, which she cites as: “the rapid formation of large numbers of new stars in a galaxy at a rate high enough to alter the structure of the galaxy significantly”.

True to her intention, across just over three minutes, the explosive enormity of the image is scorched across our mind’s eye. What Montgomery describes as “a play on imagery of rapidly changing musical colours” creates a dazzling effect with such force, such vitality, that it leaves us with something between an aural and visual experience.

A kaleidoscopic spectrum of light, of all types and forms, flashes before us, ears and eyes: chaotic, angular blooms, spangled beams, explosive flashes between mirrored surfaces and, in passages of chaotic, building energy, the awesome sense of light itself being created, the busy work of a thousand miniature explosions.





Joseph Haydn  
(arr. Iain Farrington and Max Baillie)  
String Quartet Op. 76, No. 2 (“Fifths”)

- I Allegro
- II Andante o più tosto allegretto
- III Allegro ma non troppo
- IV Vivace assai

Whilst Haydn’s “*Fifths*” quartet earns its nickname from its four opening notes - the ever-commanding decisiveness of the falling ‘perfect fifth’ interval – the tempestuous energy that drives it forwards comes from multiple sources. The result is a rich, satisfying work with a depth of character that has earned its place amongst the composer’s most celebrated achievements.

Part of the last complete set of string quartets that Haydn composed, and without doubt the most celebrated quartets of his career (“*the harvest*”, as Haydn expert Barrett-Ayres so nicely deems them) across four movements the familiar riches and wisdom of musical traditions are interwoven with unexpected invention and innovation.

After a vivacious opening movement, taking the traditional sonata form and playing neatly with the idea of the falling fifth interval throughout, comes an elegant, lyrical second movement of variations which, sweet as it is, is still underpinned by the drama of the minor key reappearing in waves.

But in the third movement, dubbed the “*witches’ minuet*”, we shift into a sinister dance which, for the most part, follows a strict, rigidly structured two-part canon in which the viola and cello trail behind the violins, locked in a strange, ungainly dance of almost ugly imitation. In the final movement, we return to the exuberant energy of the first – but this time, peppered with the unsettling pauses, syncopations and addictive rhythmic throb of a Hungarian dance, building into a driving whirl before ending on a gleeful flourish that leaves us breathless.



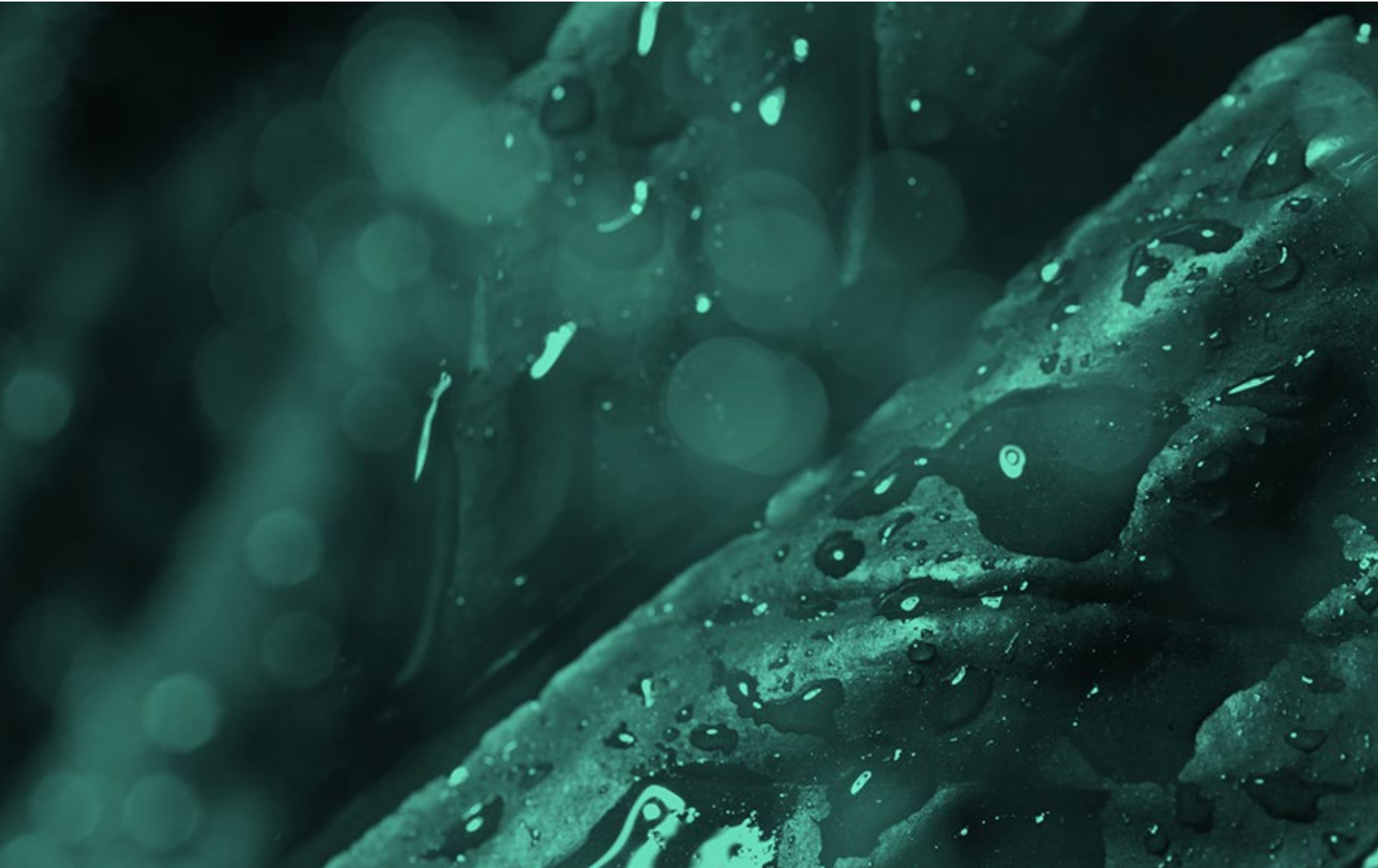
J. S. Bach (arr. Max Baillie)  
Chorale 218: ‘Laß, o Herr, dein Ohr sich neigen’ (‘O Lord let thine ear incline’)

Baillie’s evocative interpretation of this Bach chorale serves as a curious and contemplative interlude, containing as it does a miniature, other world that somehow speaks to the contradictory collective emotions of the past year.

The chorale, with its heft and weight and solemnity, its sound inseparable from the church organ, introduces the idea of spiritual comfort and solace – but it’s disrupted, by unnerving spatterings of urgent, plucked strings, sudden hurrying paces, a structure that ebbs and flows with its own agenda.

Against the grounded, earthy rise of the lower strings, the gossamer sheen of the upper strings whisper to us of a higher plane, ethereal and other-worldly, creating a beautifully jarring contrast that, unlike the traditional chorale, refuses to settle completely into one thing – and in their final coming-together, we’re left, fittingly, with both a resolution and the faint discordant whisper of the bittersweet.

Max says:  
“*With this arrangement I wanted the listener to imagine what this chorale might sound like if it were put through a time warp, with each phrase almost like a Weberian self-contained little world of colour and succinct story-telling. You can hear the bones of the original, but I re-orchestrated it to make it sound contemporary. It was devised in rehearsals with the Scottish Ensemble players all working off the same score, with lots of experimentation - playing with register, different textures super-imposed onto the original harmony. It is meant to look both forward and back in time.*”



Max Baillie  
Mirrors in Time

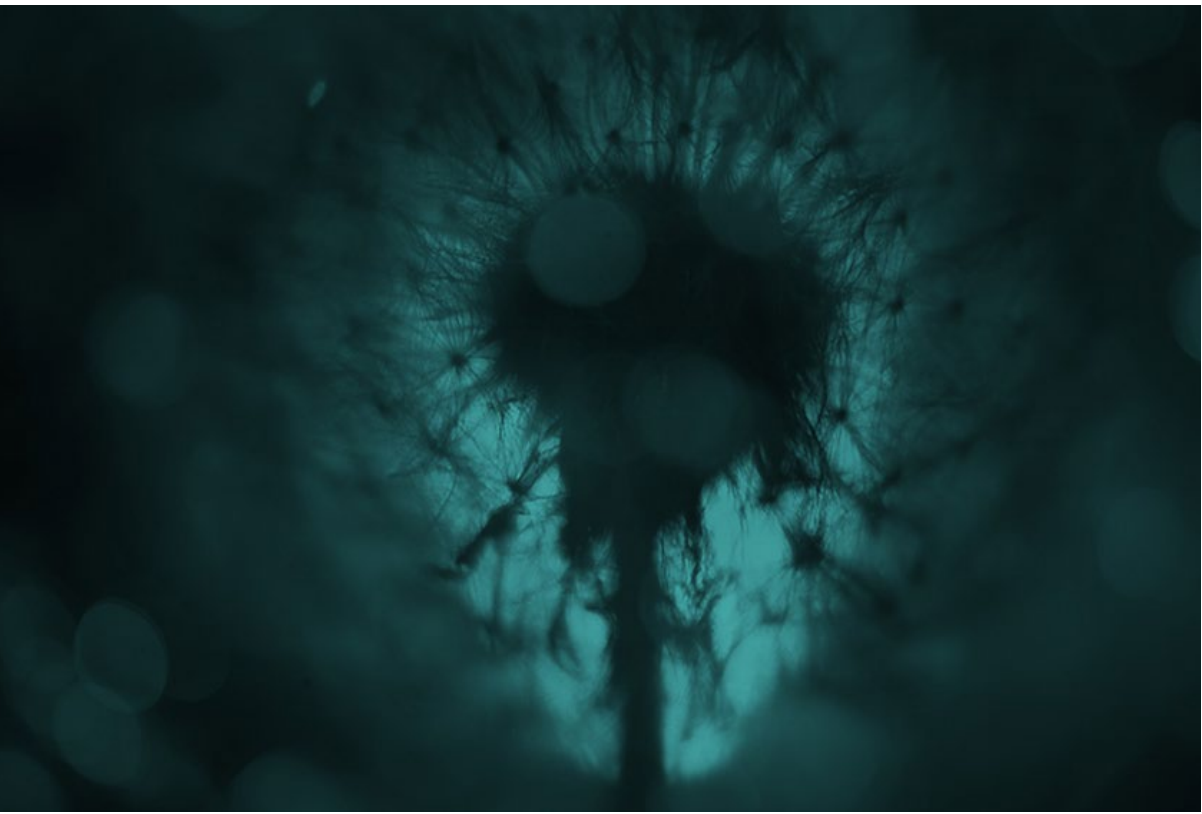
Ethereal and earthly; improvised and structured; east and west; alone and together... With Baillie’s fantastically compelling *Mirrors in Time* comes more delicious contrast and contradiction. It underpins the very collection of sounds on offer – the distinctively uncanny timbre of the electric violin, acoustic strings, soft shaken percussion and the grounding smack of the bass drum. But it’s also in the journey we’re taken on, moving between an other-worldly plane, populated by a lonely voice exploring the tangled echoes of its own mind, to the convivial euphoria of a dance party, a picture of life and togetherness, before retreating back to solitude.

The piece opens with the electric violin as a lone mystic, its angled explorations landing in strange places against a backdrop of gentle strings. Soon, the soft, apprehensive beat of a drum appears; a warning, constant and unsettling. We feel it, as well as hear it, in our stomachs as free-flowing, string-crossing complexity is nudged then pulled into a steady rhythm, the discipline of arpeggios, the support of other percussion - before exploding into a dance of joyous contradiction. Baroque counterpoint is set to a bouncing dance-pop beat; the dance-pop beat is tempered by West African poly-rhythms; and the poly-rhythms are thrust forwards by the trance-like, tribal, beat of the drum like an ancient heartbeat.

After the dance has faded, the silence and space seems larger, to have expanded both outwards and inwards. Stripped of his buoyant support, our solo explorer travels through echoes, in a final statement that winds between fragments of Eastern mysticism and virtuosic flair, before landing upon a sweet, harmonious moment of resolution and togetherness – only to fade back into the ether, alone, as the piece began.

Max says:  
“*I used to use a loop pedal with my electric violin to make clashing rhythmic patterns which would play, layer up, and repeat themselves through an amplifier.. Although weird and disjunct, these patterns would gain a certain familiarity and sense of the cyclical because of their repetition. You can hear this in the piece’s opening, which is actually a simple melodic progression clustered up into crunchy chords. At that time I was also inspired by a lot of West African music, and so some of the rhythmic patterns in the middle section of the piece, (in which you can hear Baroque lines in a concerto grosso style but all in cross-rhythm) are transcribed from West African drumming patterns. So there are some diverse influences there - that says a lot about me! In writing it I wanted to conjure something from outer space, ethereal and other-worldly, especially at the end where you hear the piece disappear into the next galaxy!”*





Steve Martland  
Eternity’s Sunrise

The piercing streams of golden light which open Martland’s *Eternity’s Sunrise* are almost unbearable in their intensity. Slabs of pure luminosity, grounded by the firm pluck of ensemble pizzicato, bear down on us with the unflinching strength of a bright sun. Pauses of different lengths, the slight variations as notes escape like flicks and sparks of light, unsettle us further, jarring with the repetition.

Between these high-voltage episodes comes their inverse: the soft, introspective shadow, reminding us that light, and presence, cannot exist without its opposite - darkness, absence.

Although written for the concert hall rather than the theatre, the piece is infused with the drama of dance and movement (it was in fact intended as a companion piece to Martland’s *Tiger Dancing*, which was written for the choreographer Henri Oguike and his company). As the piece shifts into the ragged, menacing, almost demented hulk of the ensemble playing in unison there is a sense of violent dance in its rhythms. With only a brief respite from our shadow motif, we soon find ourselves trapped in a trance-like state, a busy, building momentum, jagged persistence, that builds to a glorious, wide-screen climax, sliced through by the triumphant opening motif as dawn finally breaks.

As well as its piercing and persistence, the undeniable power of *Eternity’s Sunrise* is in the strength created by the muscular togetherness of the ensemble playing as one - a notion which feels particularly apt, at a moment in which the world contemplates what it means to be apart, and what it means to be together. On that note, we’ll leave you with the words which inspired Martland’s piece: the four power-packed lines of William Blake’s *Eternity*.

*He who binds to himself a joy  
Does the winged life destroy;  
But he who kisses the joy as it flies  
Lives in eternity’s sunrise.*

Programme notes written by Rosie Davies  
Natural imagery: Max Baillie and Richard Watson

Performers

*Director/Violin*

Max Baillie

*Violin*

Kate Suthers  
Kana Kawashima  
Tristan Gurney  
Laura Ghiro  
George Smith

*Viola*

Jane Atkins  
Andrew Berridge

*Cello*

Alison Lawrance  
Naomi Pavri

*Bass*

Diane Clark

*Harpsichord*

Jan Waterfield

Film credits

*DoP/ Director*

Richard Watson

*Music Director*

Max Baillie

*Music Recording and Mixing*

Jonathan Green

*Camera Operators*

Stuart Edwards  
Ray Bird

*Animated programme*

Suit Suit Studio

Filmed at The Engine Works,  
Glasgow by Flux Video

Biographies

Scottish Ensemble

Scottish Ensemble is a pioneering string orchestra based in Glasgow and regularly performing across Scotland, the UK and the globe. A constellation of exceptional musicians led by Artistic Director Jonathan Morton, SE champions music for strings, promoting the rich diversity of the string repertoire, exploring adventurous ways through which it can be presented and shared, and seeking out thoughtful ways of connecting it to contemporary life.

SE is a bold advocate for progress in the classical sector, and in 2020 received the prestigious Royal Philharmonic Society’s Ensemble award in recognition of ‘sheer quality and innovation’.

Whether through imaginative concert programmes and work with soloists (including violinists Nicola Benedetti, Patricia Kopatchinskaja and Pekka Kuusisto, pianist Gabriela Montero, trumpeter Alison Balsom, percussionist Colin Currie, bassist Edgar Meyer, and many more) or cross-artform collaborations (with the likes of Swedish contemporary dance company Andersson Dance, composer/producer Anna Meredith, theatre companies Vanishing Point and Untitled Projects and visual artist Toby Paterson), SE presents well-known pieces alongside newly commissioned or more rarely performed works with the aim of introducing audiences to inspiring music which may challenge, surprise or inspire them, focusing on compelling musical story-telling and visually-striking production.

This ethos of connecting music with contemporary life is extended through SE’s year-round programme of creative learning and community activities, which incorporates collaborations with schools, charities and healthcare organisations to share the well-being benefits of engaging with live music amongst a diverse audience.

Max Baillie

A graduate of the Yehudi Menuhin School, Cambridge University, and Berlin’s UdK, British-German violinist and violist Max Baillie is sought after as soloist, chamber musician, and orchestral leader in the UK and abroad.

His musical life reflects his interest in the cross-pollination of musical styles, having led Bjork’s string orchestra in the Royal Albert Hall, recorded with guitar maestro John Williams, and dueted with Bobby McFerrin in New York. From folk tunes in the Welsh hills to major festivals across the world, Max leads a chameleonic life embracing classical, improvisation, and appearances on stages big and small.

Max plays in ZRI, a quintet drawing together the folk and gypsy influences in works by Brahms, Schubert, and Janacek, and which was inspired by the Red Hedgehog Tavern: a Viennese gateway to the East as well as a favourite drinking hole. Together they have played at festivals across the UK and in Europe and most recently appeared as featured artists and on Swiss radio at the Boswil Sommerfest. They also tour their own live score to Charlie Chaplin’s early classic ‘The Adventurer’.

Max also founded Lodestar Trio with stars of the Scandinavian folk scene Erik Rydval and Olav Mjelva, exploring Baroque music through the meeting of violin, Swedish nyckelharpa, and Norwegian hardanger fiddle. Max is a regular at chamber music festivals, which in the last few years have included SoNoRo in Romania and Italy, Lawrence Power’s West Wycombe Chamber Music Festival, and plays regular duo concerts with his father, cellist Alexander Baillie, including touring the Brahms Double concerto with national orchestras of South Africa. For almost 10 years Max has played with Notes Inegales, an innovative contemporary music and improvisation group which invites diverse musical guests for each of their club nights near Euston, including regular slots for the London Jazz Festival.

Max regularly leads Swiss chamber orchestra CHAARTS including tours of China and Switzerland, appearing with Mischa Maisky, Gabor Takacs-Nagy, and Fazil Say, and recording for Sony.

Max is working on an album of his own electronic music, plays the mandolin, and has a Political Philosophy degree from Christ’s College, Cambridge.

The filmmakers

Gray’s School of Art graduate Rich Watson founded his video production company *Flux Video* in 2013, and in almost seven years of business has produced and directed sector-spanning films across multiple genres. With a background in fine art and specialised knowledge in photographic media, Rich takes a holistic approach to film-making. As a self-shooting producer he works with companies from concept to creation, with a broad spectrum of projects in Flux’s portfolio, from corporate and commercial content, to music videos and documentaries.



Filming *First Light*



Photography: 0405 Photography



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