

**scottish
ensemble**

ADVENTURES IN MUSIC

for a

Winter's Night

Concerts by Candlelight

3–11 December

Cockermouth

Dundee

Aberdeen

Inverness

Perth

Dumfries

Edinburgh

Glasgow

Programme



welcome to

For A Winter's Night

Our December concerts have become a much-loved and important part of the SE calendar, providing an anchor point in an otherwise shifting and dynamic programme of events.

In contrast with our increasingly fast-changing and unpredictable world, these candle-lit evenings draw us in. We keep coming back for a potent mix of architectural and sonic beauty, where old and new sounds reverberate across old stones and centuries, perhaps reminding us of important truths that we can too easily forget in our daily lives.

Each piece of music you'll experience tonight captures a different facet from the rich world of music for strings, and many reference and celebrate specific moments in our fifty year history – an exciting new commission, a forward-thinking collaboration, a significant recording. I have threaded many of these highlights together into a musical mosaic, a style of programming which can often forge unexpected connections. All of us at SE look forward to sharing these with you tonight.



Jonathan Morton
Artistic Director

Performers

Scottish Ensemble

Artistic Director & Violin
Jonathan Morton

Violin
Cheryl Crockett
Daniel Piro
Liza Johnson
Eva Thorarinsdottir
Laura Ghio
Alastair Savage

Viola
Jane Atkins
Andrew Berridge

Cello
Alison Lawrance
Naomi Pavri

Double Bass
Diane Clark
Olaya García Álvarez*

*SE Young Artist

Promising strings students chosen to accompany us on tour as part of our training programme with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

All timings are approximate.
Programme order correct at time of printing; any changes will be announced from the stage.

Programme

Our latest ‘adventure in music’ is a journey not only through centuries, styles and musical genres but through the emerging themes that link these pieces together – from nature, to romantic love, to transcendence. Turn the page to follow along with your official guide...

Part One

50 mins approx.

Henry Górecki

Part III

from *Three Pieces in Old Style*

Martin Suckling

In Memoriam

from *Postcards 2012-13*

trad. from South India

Raga Kiravani

adapted by Daniel Pioro

trad. from Transylvania

Pè-loc

from *Romanian Folk Dances*,
transcribed and orchestrated
by Béla Bartók

Gustav Holst

Ostinato

from *St Paul's Suite*

Anna Meredith

Variation on Tullochgorm

from *Scottish Variations*

Edvard Grieg

Rigaudon

from *Holberg Suite*

Piers Hellawell

Part III

from *Sound Carvings from
the Water's Edge*

Antonio Vivaldi

Winter: Part II

from *The Four Seasons*

John Tavener

Tears of the Angels

Interval *20 mins*

Part Two

50 mins approx.

Pyotr Ilyich

Tchaikovsky

Waltz

from *Serenade for String Orchestra*

Walter Gross

Tenderly

arranged by James Manson

Jean Sibelius

The way of the Lover

from *Rakastava*

Benjamin Britten

Romance

from *Variations on a
Theme of Frank Bridge*

Antonín Dvořák

Larghetto

from *Serenade for Strings*

trad. from Shetland

Day Dawn

arranged by Henning
Sommerro

Johann Sebastian Bach

Aria and Variation No. 13

from *Goldberg Variations*

arranged by Dimitri
Sitkovetsky

trad. Hymn

In the Bleak Midwinter

arranged by Daniel Pioro,
inspired by Gustav Holst

Erkki-Sven Tüür

Insula Deserta

An adventure through music for strings

PART ONE

Looking back...

We begin with a piece that was written in the middle of the 20th century, but which sounds like music from a far more distant time. **Górecki** was a Polish composer known for his avant-garde music – but with his **Pieces in Old Style**, the clue was in the name. Searching for an alternative source of beauty and inspiration amidst the forward-thinking atonality of his own time, the composer turned to the thick, weighty harmonies of the Renaissance. In this intense piece, he creates dense pillars of sound that seem to move together like some eternal jigsaw, locking and unlocking and lending the whole thing a feeling of human, emotional gravity and transcendent levity – no mean feat, within barely five minutes of music...

The clue is similarly in the name with **Suckling's Postcards 2012-13**, the idea being that the musical concept for each of the four pieces in the collection should be able to fit on the back of a postcard. In **Memoriam** is a miniature

elegy. We start with the chirrup of birds in conversation – intended to signal “the feeling of stepping out on the first day of Spring” – only to be introduced to the mournful lament of the cello that soon emerges from beneath. The result is a thought-provoking vignette on the clash of personal loss with the ambivalent continuation of nature that can accompany grief.

Stepping out: exploring and discovering

From here, we begin to travel further – across time, geography, and into new sound worlds. It's fascinating how what is essentially an arrangement of sounds – the combination of the notes themselves, the ones they're next to, and the way they're ordered and clustered – can transport us, immediately, to a specific place or time. From the opening notes of SE violinist Daniel Pioro's arrangement of this traditional South Indian raga, we are somewhere else; immersed in a heavily fragranced, heaving, hypnotic piece of music conjuring the exoticism of the ancient East.

Compelling and addictive, the whole thing is underpinned by a drone that acts as a centre of gravity, rooting us in order to allow our minds – potentially souls, depending on your beliefs – to drift.

Raga Kiravani shifts, seamlessly, into another work inspired by traditional music, this time from Transylvania – allowing us to notice the fascinating similarities of music composed on different sides of the world, pre-globalisation and pre-internet. Arranged by **Bartók** – a Hungarian composer fascinated by folk music of his native and surrounding countries – the Romanian dance-inspired **Pê-loc** shares much of the hypnotic, mesmerising effect of the raga, with its chanting chords and seductive, twisting, beckoning melody.

Gaining momentum: finding energy

We're released from our trance by a sudden wave of energy, and three pieces full of the lithe, nimble, agile excitement of neat-and-fast strings. With its chipper little melody and delicate plucked strings,

in **Holst's Ostinato**, the composer demonstrates how repetition as a creative device can be used to create something lively, interesting and enjoyable. What could have felt like an exercise in composition has become a sweet and memorable work that keeps the listener on its toes and remains a favourite in the composer's repertoire.

Those familiar with the Scottish fiddle tradition may well recognise the title **Tullochgorm** – if not necessarily the original melody coming through in **Meredith's** piece inspired by the traditional Highland tune. Instead, she distills the rhythm, energy and repetitive thump that characterises the fiddle tune and creates something entirely new, building to a fairly rock-and-roll climax!

The dance continues with **Grieg's Rigaudon**, inspired by another European dance tradition. The 'rigaudon' was a lively folk dance for couples, popular in 17th-century France (and, as so many were, soon formalised for courtly purposes – this type of dance was particularly prevalent in Louis XIV's court). One of the most striking and enjoyable features of Grieg's offering is the encouragement of a fantastically rustic, folkie feel through the quick, fiddle-like melodies shared by the violin and viola. The beating heart of music that would have

been found in the streets, the taverns, the fields – melodies, rhythms and dance steps passed down through generations – really comes across in the sense of joyful abandon infusing this virtuosic work.

Pausing to appreciate nature

With **Piers Hellawell's** evocatively-titled **Sound Carvings from the Water's Edge**, we shift into another realm again, pausing to appreciate the inspiration that nature – wild and vast, beautiful and untameable – represents across all art, not only music. In Hellawell's 'sound carvings' (he has done others, inspired by a volcanic crater and Antarctica's Ice Wall; this was written on the island of Harris), the individual parts stand alone, almost like objects to be admired separately, and creating a powerful collection of images.

Far more well-known is **Vivaldi's** portrayal of winter, taken from his ludicrously ubiquitous *Four Seasons* concerti, in which he hoped to capture elements of each of the seasons through music. We've chosen the second movement from the **Winter** concerto for the way it seems to capture the cheerful brightness of a crisp winter's day. The trembling, shivering melody can morph into a happy whistle through numbed lips, or a whining wind through bare branches, depending on how it's played; either way, the

plucked strings provide the constant, neat, frost-bitten nip of sharp, falling snowflakes. Whatever you hear, its undeniable cheer suggests that it's a picture of winter as viewed from a position of cosy warmth – from behind a window, perhaps. Indeed, in the score, Vivaldi included sonnets that had inspired him. For *Winter*, the sonnet ends: "This is winter, which nonetheless / brings its own delights."

Transcending it all

To end our first half, though, we rise above the frost-glittered delights of the mortal universe...

Tavener's Tears of the Angels revisits the mysticism we touched on earlier but this time in a highly moving piece that glistens and rings with the composer's Orthodox Christian beliefs. We couldn't do better than Tavener's own (fairly daunting) description of how the piece should be played: "*Tears of the Angels should be played at the extreme breaking point of tenderness. In other words, totally beyond our compassion, and beyond our comprehension. Wrapped in a depth of inner silence of which we have no idea, a state of being, not an emotion, a tender light piercing the agonising darkness of the world. Since we are 'human' and not angels, the music can only be 'imagined' by us. All the strings are muted throughout, except for the part marked solo violin. The solo violin is 'the chief among the Angels', and the whole piece must sound serene and seamless.*"

PART TWO

Feeling romantic

The lushness of strings playing en masse seems almost tailor-made for anyone wanting to convey a feeling of sweeping, swooning romance – as we hear in everything from heart-rending symphonies, to folk or rock ballads, to that climactic schmaltzy moment in the latest romantic comedy.

In our romantic interlude, the classic, poised **Waltz** from **Tchaikovsky's** *Serenade for Strings* sweeps into **Tenderly**, a classic from the American golden era of music by songwriter **Walter Gross**, arranged here by double bassist James Manson. We chose this as a fond favourite from the tea dances we've put on across Scotland over the years (part of our events taking music out of the concert hall). But with its aching harmonies and strings, there's also something about this music that seems coated with the candied, cosy, bittersweet nostalgia of Christmas...

No-one does emotive, cinematic strings quite like **Sibelius**, but while you'll hear these in the other movements of **Rakastava** ("The Lover" – recommended listening, if you're not already familiar with it), we've chosen to share this short middle movement, for the way it fizzles along with the disbelieving, suspended breathlessness of someone

falling in love. Compare this to **Britten's Romance**, which follows. Taken from his *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*, each variation was intended to reflect a different character trait of his composition teacher. This romantic waltz – meant to convey Bridge's charm – feels so easy, so overtly abundant in schmoozy charm, that it almost feels like a parody – compositional fun, or a tongue-in-cheek statement? No-one has been entirely sure. We wrap things up with the operatic lyricism of the **Larghetto** from **Dvořák's** popular *Serenade for Strings* – a huge outpouring of emotion that manages to simultaneously sound tender, wistful and tranquil.

Celebrating shared traditions...

As the end of the concert draws near, we begin to think about ritual, and tradition; about processes and customs shared by us as human beings, passed down through generations and through time, and how beautiful it is that these sounds we inherit can remain so vibrant, so meaningful, to us today. **The Day Dawn** is an arrangement of a traditional fiddle tune from Shetland – thought to date back to Norse times, or certainly many centuries – that would be played either on the morning of the Winter's Solstice or Christmas Day. Listening today, its solitary voice still speaks out to us so clearly from its frozen, still,

stark landscape. The emotional power of the solo voice, ringing out across time, is something we find particularly fascinating. Take **Bach's Goldberg Variations**, composed in the courts of Germany in 1741. Written as a soothing diversion for an insomniac count (or so the story goes), the lonely voice that flows, spirals, twists, evolves and ultimately circles back across the course of 30 variations still communicates to us today: directly, and with a feeling of personal resonance.

We expect you'll recognise the final piece in this section. In 1906, **Holst** set Christina Rossetti's poem *A Christmas Carol* to music. **In The Bleak Midwinter** is now firmly rooted in our carol tradition: the sound of resounding, comforting winter warmth – and of our collective aural history.

...before stepping into the future

We've chosen to end not on a carol, but an inspirational soundscape that seems to conjure the vast beauty of nature. Both awe-struck and detached – or, as writer David Fanning coins it, full of "the ecstatic and the ascetic" – there is something simultaneously complex and simple about **Erkki-Sven Tüür's Insula Deserta**. We hope its spiked, shimmering shards will send you out into the night full of the magic and wonder of this time of year.

Celebrating 50 years of

Scottish Ensemble

Delve deeper...

If you're interested in reading SE's full and fascinating history, written by one of our dedicated – and eloquent! – supporters, please go to scottishensemble.co.uk and search for 'history'

SCOTTISH ENSEMBLE AT
50
YEARS

Compiling some of our favourite and most significant musical moments is nearly as difficult as narrowing down the many landmark moments in our history. Here are just a few...



1969

We are born! Publisher and polymath John Calder approaches renowned violinist Leonard Friedman about forming a band to perform in Baroque operatic productions at Calder's multi-arts festival, **Ledlanet Nights...** and the **Scottish Baroque Ensemble** is founded. Our first performance? Handel's *Alcina*, squeezed into the small hall of Ledlanet House



1976

We quickly grew, and in 1976 made our **first gramophone record** (featuring works by Purcell, Mozart and Haydn) as well as setting off on our first international tours to the USA and Germany

1984

Should a Baroque orchestra be tackling works by Stravinsky, and other exciting 20th-century composers? In 1984, the decision was made to become simply **Scottish Ensemble**, better reflecting the mix of music we were exploring in our programmes



1991

In 1991, we signed a record deal with Virgo Classics, the classical wing of Richard Branson's **Virgin Records** (pictured: Branson attending one of our concerts, complete with baton!)

1993

Having secured a major deal with British Telecom – the largest commercial sponsorship in Scotland for a performing arts organisation at the time – from 1993–2003 we were the **BT Scottish Ensemble** (and the name stuck! This is what we'll always remain to some of our long-time audience members)



2014

An exciting decade of exploration led to our first cross-artform production, **20th-Century Perspectives**, exploring music and architecture with visual artist **Toby Paterson** in a previously-derelict modernist warehouse in Glasgow

2018

Having toured the world since 2015, our cross-artform collaboration with Andersson Dance, **Goldberg Variations - ternary patterns for insomnia**, received its 30th performance at **London's Barbican Centre** in July 2018. Four months later, we premiered our second collaboration with the Swedish dance company.

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