

ADVENTURES IN MUSIC
**scottish
ensemble**
WITH SCOTLAND'S PIONEERING STRING ORCHESTRA

Musica Adventus

Programme

Mon 3 December

Caird Hall, Dundee

Tue 4 December

Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh

Wed 5 December

Wellington Church, Glasgow

Thu 6 December

St Machar's Cathedral, Aberdeen

Fri 7 December

Inverness Cathedral

Sat 8 December

St John's Kirk, Perth

Sun 9 December

Crichton Church, Dumfries



welcome to Musica Adventus

Part One

Approx. 55 mins

Gabrieli

Canzone Duodecimi toni a 10

Torelli

Concerto Grosso Op. 8, No. 6:
“Per il Santissimo Natale”

1 Grave - Vivace

2 Largo

3 Vivace

Kapsberger

Tocatta Arpegiatta*

Vivaldi

Concerto for Lute in D major*

1 Allegro

2 Largo

3 Allegro

Bach

Chorale Prelude: “Für deinen
thron tret’ich hiermit”
from *The Art of Fugue*

Corelli

Concerto Grosso Op. 6, No. 8:
“Christmas concerto”

1 Vivace - Grave

2 Allegro

3 Adagio - Allegro - Adagio

4 Vivace

5 Allegro - Largo

Interval (approx. 20 minutes)

Part Two

Approx. 50 mins

Vasks

Musica Adventus

1 Moderato

Holst

Intermezzo
from *St Paul’s Suite*

Beamish

Under the Wing of the Rock

Arnold

Serenade for Guitar and Strings*

Vasks

Musica Adventus

4 Moderato - Allegro

* with Sean Shibe

All timings are approximate.

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

Performers

Scottish Ensemble

Artistic Director and Violin
Jonathan Morton

Violin

Cheryl Crockett, Liza Johnson,
Tom Hankey, Daniel Piro,
Laura Ghiro, Emily Nenninger

Viola

Jane Atkins, Andrew Berridge,
Nicole Stefani+

Cello

Alison Lawrance, Naomi Pavri

Double Bass

Diane Clark

Harpsichord

Tom Foster

Guest soloist

Guitar

Sean Shibe

+ SE Young Artist

Students from the Royal
Conservatoire of Scotland
selected to join us on tour.

Go to scottishensemble.co.uk/learning
to find out more.

notes on the music

Part One

Then

Tonight's concert opens with the bright, sonorous tones of **Giovanni Gabrieli (c1554/7 - 1612)**. One of the most influential composers of his day, the Italian composer and organist's sound is seen as the culmination of the Venetian School (the group of composers writing in Venice from around 1550 to around 1610 whose work is, today, seen as defining the end of the musical Renaissance period and the start of the Baroque). This piece comes from Gabrieli's *Sacrae Symphoniae*, a collection of motets, canzoni and sonatas for voices and instruments.

We move on to the first of two 'Christmas concertos' on the programme tonight, so-called because – perhaps unsurprisingly – they were written to be performed at Christmas celebrations, whether a religious service, or simply as music for a festive event.

The most famous ones being by Torelli, Corelli, Vivaldi and Bach, the Christmas concerto has become a genre in its own right,

the beloved fodder of compilation recordings looking to capitalise on that rich, distinctive sound of Italy on the cusp between the Renaissance and the Baroque.

On paper, what marks them out as a Christmas concerto is the inclusion of a movement called a 'pastorale'. This slow, swaying, calming, dance-like type of piece was inspired by the music made by Italian shepherds who would play their *pifferari* (a type of medieval oboe) and *zampognari* (a kind of bagpipe) in towns around Christmas time, in remembrance of the shepherds of Bethlehem.

In practice, the Christmassy feel seems to come from a combination of our sentimental linking of the rich, colourful, dramatic sound of late 1500s Italy with the equally rich imagery from this time of the nativity – like the lovely scene imagined above, perhaps, of the gathered shepherds in the moonlight – and the inherent sonorous drama of this type of music. Even those in minor keys, such as this one by **Giuseppe Torelli (1658 - 1709)**, have a distinctly festive tone to them, and, although not by definition 'programme music' (music

intended to tell a story), Torelli's seems to capture the drama of the dark advent nights. As you may be able to tell, Torelli was a virtuosic violinist, which is hinted at in the flourish and glittering drama of some of the violin passages of this piece.

A prolific and original composer, **Giovanni Girolamo Kapsberger (c.1580 - 1651)** is best known today for the music he wrote for the lute and theorbo (a large lute), as well as his reputation as a virtuosic performer.

Whilst his reputation as an immensely skilled musician seems to go unchallenged, his reputation as a composer isn't as straightforward. Amongst both contemporaries and modern scholars, there is both praise and criticism of his compositional skills, some claiming innovation in his sharp contrasts, his sudden changes, an occasional lack of conformity to the rules... and others claiming lack of development and organisation.

What is undeniable is the influence he had on the development of plucked string instruments into solo stars in their

own right, making them sparkle and shine and showing off their capabilities. We'll let you make up your own mind as you listen to his seamless, flowing **Toccata Arpeggiata**...

Thanks in part to Kapsberger, by the time that **Antonio Vivaldi (1678 - 1741)** was writing, the lute had become an important instrument. His **Concerto for Lute in D Major** was written in the 1730s, towards the end of his life, a period in which he wrote two of his other lute works (the trios for violin and lute in G minor and C major). As a composer known for his astonishingly prolific output – particularly in terms of concertos, of which he wrote close to 500 – it feels surprising that he wrote only four pieces involving solo lute. Given the popularity of this concerto in particular, perhaps he would have gone on to write many more.

Originally written for lute, two violins and 'continuo' (the combination of a bass instrument, plus a keyboard instrument), this piece is now most often performed on guitar, and often arranged for guitar and full strings, as in tonight's programme. The first movement bounces along joyfully, alternating between the whole orchestra and the soloist. The second movement, which is particularly well-known on account of its gentle beauty, feels like a meditative reflection. As the solo lute shifts through

different distinct sections, the rest of the orchestra become a soft, supportive cushion, tensing and relaxing beneath the yearning, meandering thoughts of the soloist.

The piece ends with a light, playful third movement, sweeping along like a tarantella (a fast, whirling Italian folk dance) with a playful, back-and-forth dialogue between the orchestra, the soloist, and the 'continuo' (bass and harpsichord).

Also known as his "deathbed chorale", the **Chorale Prelude** by **Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 - 1750)** was published as an appendix to the first edition of *The Art of Fugue*, his final, wild, serious exploration of the musical concept of counterpoint.

It's thought that this short prelude was written as the composer lay dying, and published along with his *Art of Fugue* to make up for the incomplete final piece of the collection (whose abrupt end, or so is gleaned from an annotation by his son, was due to the fact that Bach died in the middle of writing it).

As with many myths involving artists and their deathbeds, the reality is unknown, but the text of the original prelude certainly speaks of the fear and faith of the devoutly religious composer: "Before your throne I now appear / O God, and humbly bid you, turn not our gracious face, away from me, poor sinner."

Our journey through Renaissance and Baroque Europe ends with one of the most famous Christmas concerti, that of **Arcangelo Corelli (1653 - 1713)** with its evocative subtitle: "written for the night of Christmas".

Writing a generation before Vivaldi, Bach and Handel, the concerto form was still being shaped during Corelli's lifetime, as can be seen by Corelli's choice to structure the work in separate sections which flow together to create one whole, as opposed to distinct movements.

After a slow, serious introduction which immediately heralds a sense of large-scale occasion, we move through sections of alternating liveliness, all with a sense of crystallised, wintry charm, before ending with the obligatory festive 'Pastorale' movement.

It is – arguably, of course – the most beautiful movement of them all. The gentle swaying rhythm of the shepherds' song, supported by long accompanying notes to represent the drone of their bagpipes, feels a fitting way to end the first half of this festive evening.

Part Two

Now

Our second half begins with the first movement of a lesser known work by the astonishing **Pēteris Vasks (1946 -)**, a composer “poised somewhere on a tightrope between Sibelius and Arvo Pärt, with modal string writing that recalls Vaughan Williams and exotically inflected melody” (BBC Music Magazine).

Musica Adventus is an orchestration of his third String Quartet and inspired by the idea of ‘Christmas – Peace on Earth’, which Vasks describes as “a tenet of faith, as well as an expression of hope”.

The first movement is very much a prelude for the journey to come. Based on themes from a traditional Christmas carol, it utilises some of Vasks’ hallmarks as a composer, most particularly the feeling of dipping in and out of a landscape created in the air around us.

St. Paul’s Suite, by **Gustav Holst (1874 - 1934)** was named, rather more prosaically, for the school where he was Director of Music from 1905 to 1934. Having added a music wing to the school, they then built the composer the sound-proof room in which he wrote music for the final twenty years of his life, and this piece was a mark of his gratitude.

The third movement, which we perform tonight, begins with a strikingly romantic, winding melody which seems to incorporate both a pastoral English and more exotically Eastern-inflected folk sound (a love of folk songs being one of the introductions made by Holst’s lifelong friend, Vaughan Williams). The solo violin, twining over pizzicato strings, is soon joined by a viola, before the whole band enter into an exhilarating adventure full of the Holst-esque melodic, cinematic drama that has, thanks mostly to *The Planets*, become attached to his name.

The folk influence continues in **Under the Wing of the Rock** by **Sally Beamish (1956 -)**, commissioned and first performed by Scottish Ensemble with Lawrence Power on viola, and thick with atmospheric Celtic influence. The title is a line from a poem, *Lullaby of the Snow*, found in a 19th-century collection of Gaelic songs and prayers and describing a haunting scene of a young mother singing to her child as they fled the Glencoe massacre.

The two outer sections offer up the mother’s emotive song, with the haunting solo viola cleverly yet poetically conveying a sense of speech in its improvisatory, spontaneous feel. Between these sections comes an unexpected, urgent chase, using fragments of rhythms and chants from Celtic working songs, before we hear the mother’s song again.

English composer **Malcolm Arnold (1921 - 2006)** boasts an impressively prolific output of film scores, his most famous likely being *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), for which he won an Academy Award. His ear for cinematic drama is apparent in this shimmering, atmospheric **Serenade for Guitar and Strings**, with sections of sweeping, sugared romance flanking a pizzicato passage of swift, exaggerated drama.

We close tonight’s concert with the fourth and final movement of Vasks’ majestic **Musica Adventus**. Beginning with the sound of birdsong, the hymn-like nature is interrupted by jabbing, dance-like rhythms, appearing from nowhere and breaking the peace with their insistent, prodding repetition, finally disintegrating into frenzied confusion.

But the piece resolves, ending with sheets of sheer, high strings. Whether Vasks is trying to say that peace on earth is achievable or not seems to be left to the listener, but the sparsity of the ending does seem to instill a sense of a vast, organic and universal calm – one that can be accessed through music.

It’s on that rather thought-provoking note that we’ll say a huge thank you for sharing our winter celebrations with us, and wish you a happy and peaceful Christmas and New Year.

Programme notes by Rosie Davies

about the performers



Sean Shibe

One of the most heralded guitarists of his generation, Sean's approach to the traditional classical guitar canon challenges preconceptions and avoids clichés.

Born in Edinburgh in 1992, Sean studied at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland before becoming, at the age of 20, the first guitarist to be selected for the BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists scheme, and the only solo guitarist to be awarded a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship. Numerous other awards and prizes include a prestigious Royal Philharmonic Society Award earlier this year.

Sean is grateful for support from the Hatori Trust.



Scottish Ensemble

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

Committed to musical collaboration, SE not only regularly collaborates 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, SE 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 company Vanishing Point. SE also has a long history of commissioning new works. In recent years SE's international reputation has also grown considerably and SE has now performed in Taiwan, China, Brazil, the USA and across Europe, at festivals from the Thuringia Bach Festival to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and venues including the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts (*Washington D.C.*) and the Barbican Centre (*London*).



Jonathan Morton
Artistic Director

Violinist Jonathan Morton is in demand as a chamber musician, soloist, teacher and leader. As Principal First Violin with London Sinfonietta, Jon has worked closely with many of today's leading composers and performers, including Steve Reich, Harrison

Birtwhistle, Mica Levi, Jonny Greenwood, Louis Andriessen, Thurston Moore and many others. Regularly praised for his eclectic, engaging approach to programming and the presentation of music in general, he has a particular passion for 20th- and 21st-century music, as well as bringing a fresh perspective to older works.

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