

scottish
ensemble

Tchaikovsky by Heart



16-18 February

Glasgow
Edinburgh
Inverness

scottishensemble.co.uk

Welcome to Tchaikovsky by Heart

The question of playing without a score emerged during two shows Scottish Ensemble co-created with Andersson Dance (*Goldberg Variations* and *Prelude*). During certain sections we played 'from memory', which allowed us to explore physical movement in ways that would not have been possible if we had been moored to our music stands.

In addition to this external, physical freedom, I also started becoming curious about the implications of playing from memory on the musician's internal processes: how we imagine the music, how we listen to - and communicate with - each other and our audience, how we translate a musical intention into sound.

I wanted to explore these issues away from choreographed movement, so that we could really test the merits (and potential disadvantages) of playing 'by heart'.

This performance of Tchaikovsky's Serenade is an opportunity for all of us to gather new experiences - musicians and listeners alike. Memorising a score requires enormous commitment from the players, and for the inner layers of the orchestra - the second violins and violas - the challenge is particularly difficult!

On the first downbeat, the performers will cross the threshold into Tchaikovsky's exquisite world without their maps. How will it feel to navigate the territory without any visual clues? Will we inhabit the different landscapes more fully? Will we all be able to experience a richer, more direct relationship with the heart of this staggeringly beautiful piece? And most importantly, will we be able to communicate any of this to you, our audience?

These are some of the questions that we hope to touch on along the way. Ears, eyes and hearts will need to be open, focused, flexible.

We can't wait for you to join us.



Jonathan Morton
Artistic Director

Programme

.....
Edward Elgar
Introduction and Allegro

.....
Caroline Shaw
Punctum

.....
Pyotr Ilyich
Tchaikovsky
Serenade for Strings
(memorised)

notes on the music

There's a lovely story around the inspiration for Elgar's second significant orchestral work for strings. Holidaying in Wales in 1901, the composer writes how he overheard singing in the distance, tunes which he believed captured something inherently Welsh in their expression. Into his notebook they went, emerging four years later as one of the main themes in his *Introduction and Allegro* (see if you can guess which it is).

The more prosaic background is that the piece was written for the newly-formed London Symphony Orchestra, something that would really show off its strings section - a celebration of virtuosity and skill that's perhaps more immediately identifiable than its whisper of the Welsh hills.

Whilst choosing a form originating centuries earlier - the concerto grosso, in which the music passes between a group of soloists and the orchestra - Elgar's approach is modern; eschewing the stark lines or showy moments of his Baroque predecessors, his

string quartet instead feels like a rooted, integral part of the landscape. Alternately weaving between, nuzzling against, dashing out from and vibrating in togetherness with the heft of the orchestra, we journey through an exhilarating unfolding of temperaments - nostalgic lyricism, soaring adventure, and a skittish excitement which propels us towards its celebratory end.

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The idea of 'punctum' comes from renowned essayist and theorist Roland Barthes. Summed up very crudely (it's a complex and much-debated topic, which those interested in photography may wish to explore), it refers to the unexpected, entirely subjective effects of a piece of art - in Barthes' case, a photograph - on the observer: "[the] element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me."

This intriguing idea is the inspiration for Shaw's tapestry of moments; an exploration of expectation and disruption, communal

and personal, familiarity and surprise. "A particular secondary dominant" from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* is our centre of gravity, but, along with other comforting musical intervals and harmonic progressions, it is strung out, splintered, fragmented, dissolving and reemerging like memories. In denying us of their usual familiarity and patterns, what "shoots out" to pierce us forms a wholly personal sonic photograph of our own.

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With its lush sonority, Tchaikovsky's *Serenade For Strings* has become one of the staples of the Romantic string repertoire - but it was in fact a nod to a previous era, borrowing the serenade structure crafted by one of his idols, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. However - those sentiment-laden opening bars feel almost like a statement of intention: whilst nodding to a hero structurally, Tchaikovsky's was to be stylistically his own, infused with a distinctive complexity and depth of emotion.

One of the most enduring features of the *Serenade* is its generous, two-for-one offer: four tonally different pieces that both stand alone, and link together as a cohesive whole. Of course, in any piece, this is something we could only logically appreciate after it's ended, but Tchaikovsky somehow intensifies this experience with a moment in the final movement that, despite repeated listening, is so welcome, so satisfying, that it never fails to bring a light-bulb moment of joy, as if answering a question we didn't realise we had. Yes, we bob through an elegant waltz, revel in lyrical, reflective beauty, and whirl through exhilarating Russian folk dances - but when we arrive back at the restorative resonance of the chorale where we began, we understand we were always going to return home.

But, back to the first movement, where we don't know that yet - after the slow chorale, in which the strings play in thick, glorious togetherness, we shift into passages of muscular drama and perpetual energy. There is so much going on here - the first theme, with the cellos being put through their paces, providing a quick-noted, tense undercurrent to the upper strings' repeated two-note refrain, constantly

leading us on; then the non-stop cascades of the second theme, tripping up and down, only to fall back to the start, as if circling round and round, without getting anywhere. And then, almost as a teasing, miniature echo of what to expect in the final movement, we find ourselves back at the chorale.

Guided by Mozart, the second movement is the dance movement - but, instead of the expected Minuet, Tchaikovsky yet again makes it his own by offering a waltz that, beneath its elegant, dancing lightness, hides expertly-crafted harmonic shifts. The light-as-air, graceful melodies of the upper strings are pulled taut by this very subtle sense of jeopardy, a threat of complexity, beneath the surface, beautifully complemented by the gentle falling out of time created by extended pauses.

The third movement offers yet another shift in tone, drenched in dark lyricism and sublime melancholy which pulls us in to its soundworld and holds us there. After the rich earthiness of the movement, the ending surprises us again; as the churning emotion smoothes into a calm resolution, the strings move higher and higher until they become harmonics, fading

out on a sheer, ethereal shimmer of light, evoking something altogether more heavenly and spiritual.

From this same light, the final movement emerges, with a soft, calm passage inspired by a Russian folk melody that, in retrospect, feels like a mirage - because, suddenly, everything shifts, and we find ourselves breathlessly whisked away in an exhilarating, joyful, quick-footed romp inspired by melodies from Russian folk dances, in beautiful contrast to the stately, measured delicacy of our previous waltzing. And so we whirl forwards, faster and faster, hurtling towards the most powerful moment of the entire piece, in which the dance dissolves, seamlessly, gorgeously, into the opening chorale - somehow richer, enhanced, more significant.

The final, delicious twist is that we don't end here. The chorale seems to get stuck on one of the notes, getting faster, and faster, before bursting into a spirited rush to a celebratory end before we know what's happening. All that's left is for us to sit back and reflect on the quite astonishing journey we've just been on.

Programme notes:
Rosie Davies

about the **performers**

Performers

Violin

Jonathan Morton
Eva Pórarinsdóttir
Daniel Pioro
Cheryl Crockett
Roberto Ruisi
Juliette Roos

Violin 2

Kate Suthers
Joanne Green
Laura Ghiro
Dave Shaw
George Smith

Viola

Jane Atkins
Dorothea Vogel
Andrew Berridge
Kathryn Jourdan
Zoe Matthews

Cello

Alison Lawrance
Naomi Pavri
Duncan Strachan

Double Bass

Diane Clark

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.

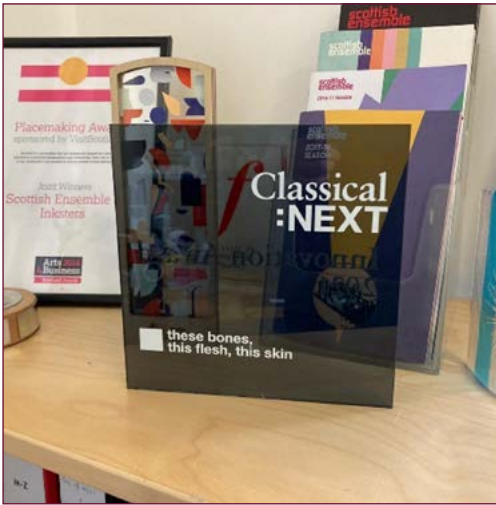
Committed to musical collaboration, SE not only regularly collaborates with high-profile guest artists – from trumpeter Alison Balsom and mezzo-soprano Sarah Connolly to violinists Patricia Kopatchinskaja and Nicola Benedetti, to name only a few – but also with artists from other disciplines and art 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 Centre for Performing Arts (Washington D.C.) and the Barbican Centre (London).

Scottish Ensemble News



Award winners

In December we received the news that our 'Solo Collaborations' digital project, *these bones, this flesh, this skin* had won a prestigious award for contemporary classical music - the Classical: NEXT innovation award. We're thrilled to receive this honour, joining awardees from Germany, Lithuania and Brazil.

For this collaboration of music, dance and cinematography, we worked with composer Martin Suckling, choreographer Joan Clevillé of Scottish Dance Theatre, and cinematographer Genevieve Reeves, producing a unique online experience that can be viewed in ever-changing ways.

The award is now well at home in our Glasgow office and you can explore the project further via our website.



The Bridge Festival

Our collaborative festival, bringing together four thought-provoking, adventurous ensembles from around Europe, and originally scheduled for April 2020, is now taking place this April. The festival is a multi-day extravaganza of vibrant, genre-defying live music taking place across the four corners of Glasgow.

The Festival is brought to you by Scottish Ensemble (UK), Ensemble Resonanz (Germany), Trondheim Soloists (Norway) and PLMF Music Trust (Estonia): quite simply, some of Europe's best string players and boundary-pushing groups. Expect collaborations, late-night club gigs, brand new works, music in unexpected places...and more.

Keep an eye on The Bridge website at bridgestrings.eu for more information being released in the coming weeks.



Scottish Creations: Call for Artists

Does your local area inspire you to create?

Are there local myths, legends or personal tales to be told?

Want to share your creativity and be part of a national tour telling Scotland's stories?

We've teamed up with Creative Lives to invite amateur artists and makers across Scotland to take part in *Scottish Creations*, collecting stories from across the nation and capturing how you feel about your local area.

We're curating a special exhibition to accompany our tour in May 2022 and are looking for paintings, drawings, tapestry, knitting, poetry, wood carving, illustration, photography, pottery – or however you choose to be creative – that are inspired by your local area and its stories.

For more information on this exciting project and to submit your work, head to our website.

Our Supporters

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John Dale in memory of Jacqueline Dale
Margaret Fothergill
Neil & Alison Kelly
The McGlashan Charitable Trust
Andrew Pringle

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Jeff & Emily Fergus
Fabienne Harrison
John Innes

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The Right. Hon. Lord Matthew Clarke
Ian & Irene Dickson
Alison Lawson
Stella Morse
Simon & Lesley Paterson
James Potter
Dame Seona Reid
Jennifer Shearer
Alastair Stewart
Malcolm & Aileen Wishart

Strings Attached Fellows

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Fraser Anderson
Peter Armit
Dale A. Bilsland
Ian & Nuala Booth
Stephen & Margaret Brearley
Margaret Bremner
Roderick & Patricia Brodie
Anna & Stephen Brooke
Colin Brown
Georgina Clark
Pam Clark
Joe Coleiro
Lindsay & Graeme Colville
Sheila Colvin
Freddie & Michael Dale
Lea & Adrian De Villiers

Thorben Dittes
Rosemary Ewles
Robert Fleming & Ellen Thomson
Ken Forbes & Margaret Gibson
Pete Fozard
Donald Fraser
Donald & Alison Gordon
Stuart Goudie & Caron Anderson
Jenny Jamison
Alison Lawrance
Cathy Lawrance
Iain Leggatt
Josephine Leighton
Graham & Elma Leisk
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Neil Metcalfe & Pat Monaghan
Colin & Valerie Miller
Rosemary Millington
Alan Moat
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Clare Munn
William Norris
Christina Paulson Ellis
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Roy & Sue Rampling
Dame Seona Reid
Daphne Robertson
Fred & Irene Shedden
Bill & Linda Stephens
Magnus & Alayne Swanson
Simon Taylor
Anne Thom
Scott Turnbull
William & Carolyn Walker
Lesley Watt
Alison Wylie

*plus the
Strings Attached Friends*

Legacies

Anonymous
I.B. Currie
Alasdair Fraser
Joe Coleiro

Patrons


Marina, The Lady Marks
Baron Vallance of Tummel

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 ScottishEnsemble

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