

CBSO

City of
Birmingham
Symphony
Orchestra

Scottish Symphony
Symphony Hall
Wednesday 8 November, 2023
2:15pm

CBSO.CO.UK



SCOTTISH SYMPHONY

Concert programme £4

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this evening's musical journey, taking us from the sunny skies of Seville, to the decidedly less sunny cobblestone streets of Scotland, via the nordic landscapes of snowy Finland.

We kick off this evening's concert on a vivacious note (specifically a "D" in this case), with Mozart's iconic and vibrant overture from The Marriage of Figaro that simply bursts with energy and light.

We then move to Sibelius's hauntingly beautiful Violin Concerto performed by the superstar Taiwanese-Australian violinist Ray Chen. Composed around 120 years ago, the concerto is renowned for its technical virtuosity and emotional depth.

The second half of the concert takes us to Scotland. Opening with a short work by the brilliant young Scottish composer Aileen Sweeney called Glisk, this compelling composition creates a musical glimmer of light and was commissioned by the CBSO as part of our Centenary celebrations. It is also featured on the album Sounds New, released 3rd November on NMC Recordings.

Glisk infuses tonight's programme with a modern twist, serving as a compelling contemporary bridge into Mendelssohn's Scottish Symphony. Inspired by the composer's travels to Scotland (especially the ruins of Hollyrood chapel in Edinburgh and the rugged West Coast) it is one of Mendelssohn's most popular works. Under the baton of Cristian Măcelaru we will be transported from Symphony Hall to Scotland through its sweeping melodies and rich orchestration - I hope you enjoy our journey.

Mozart, The Marriage of Figaro: Overture
4mins

Sibelius, Violin Concerto
31mins

Interval

Sweeney, Glisk
4mins

Mendelssohn, Symphony No.3 (Scottish)
40mins

Cristian Măcelaru, Conductor
Ray Chen, Violin

MEMBERS' RECEPTION

From 1:30pm. Pre-concert and during the interval.

We are very happy for you to take photographs at CBSO concerts, but please do be discreet to avoid disturbing other audience members. We would suggest dimming the brightness on your phone, taking pictures during applause breaks, and not using your flash. Please note that filming is not allowed.

We also regularly take photographs for promotional use, so you may see a professional photographer at our concerts. Please ask a member of the front of house team if you have any questions about this.

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SCOTTISH SYMPHONY

On a summer evening in Edinburgh the young Mendelssohn imagined the first notes of his Scottish symphony. It's the sound of Highland mists, warring clans, and melodies as smoky as a single malt – a stirring contrast to Mozart's comedy overture and the vast Nordic skies of Sibelius's sweeping Violin Concerto. Add in Scottish composer Aileen Sweeney's musical gleam of sunlight, alongside violin superstar Ray Chen, and you can expect fire as well as ice!

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO, OVERTURE, K.492

Cellos, basses and bassoons scurry out of the shadows and swirl upwards. The wind choir answers twice, and with a joyous blaze of sound the whole world of Mozart's upstairs-downstairs comedy bursts into bustling life. Mozart wrote his best-loved opera in 1786, turning Beaumarchais's provocative social drama into an exuberant celebration of human love in all its aspects. And he opened it with the briefest but most perfect of all operatic overtures.

In his early sketches Mozart inserted a slow, minor key *siciliano* in lieu of a development section, but he quickly discarded it. The finished overture spins along from beginning to end. And if it's not strictly true (as was once said) that you could time a boiled egg to a performance of the *Figaro* overture, Mozart undeniably proves that in just four minutes of instrumental music he can capture all the wit, zest and tenderness of this greatest of all comic operas.

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

VIOLIN CONCERTO IN D MINOR, OP.47

- I Allegro moderato
- II Adagio di molto
- III Allegro, ma non tanto

"I dreamt I was twelve years old, and a virtuoso violinist", Jean Sibelius told his diary, wistfully, in 1915. It was a boyhood dream that had once looked like becoming a reality – in November 1890 he had auditioned for the violin section of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra.

They rejected him because of his nerves. No wonder, then, that when he finally began to write a violin concerto of his own, the strain showed. "I've got some marvellous ideas for a violin concerto" he told his wife Aïno, and he worked at the concerto in Helsinki between September 1902 and September 1903.

It didn't go smoothly, and one Finnish critic slated the new concerto as "boring". Sibelius devoted the summer of 1905 to a

complete revision. It was premiered in its final form in Berlin in October 1905, by Karel Halíř, leader of the Berlin Philharmonic. Richard Strauss was the conductor. Within two decades Sibelius's Violin Concerto had entered the repertoire as one of the handful of concertos that every serious virtuoso simply has to tackle.

But it's possible to see why early listeners were puzzled. No concerto has quite the same mixture of fiery passion and glacial coolness; virtuosic display and elemental strength. Moments of nature poetry alternate with gruff grandeur; yet it all adds up to one of the most gripping emotional journeys in 20th century music. Take that first movement - it sweeps from its haunting, whispered opening through moments of luscious sentimentality to stirring, storm-blown orchestral climaxes. Despite all the drama (and a fiendishly difficult solo part), it feels inevitable; even natural. On one of the

sketches for this movement, Sibelius actually drew a sunrise – with the slurs over the notes transformed into wheeling seagulls.

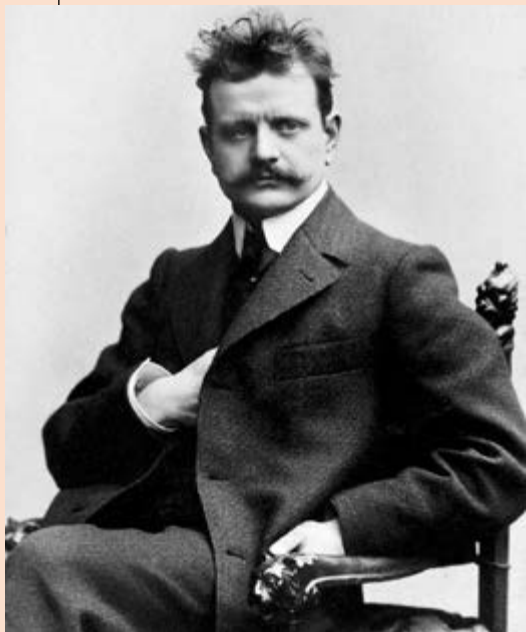
Keening woodwinds and quiet drumrolls open the *Adagio* coolly, making the violin's deep, expressive melody seem all the more of a contrast. The movement unfurls into a lyrical and warmly romantic interlude: some listeners have heard it as a reflection of Sibelius's recent travels in Italy. The *finale* comes as a release: a dance, though it's anything but lightweight. In 1935 the British critic Donald Tovey dubbed it a “polonaise for polar bears”, and the phrase has stuck. Perhaps the violin's glittering gymnastics make the climate of this movement too warm for polar bears – but there's a definite chill in the gales that rise through the concerto's closing pages. If Sibelius is drawing a line under his own dreams of becoming a violinist, he does so with one of the simplest and most decisive endings even he ever wrote.

Aileen Sweeney

GLISK

Aileen Sweeney is a Glaswegian composer and accordionist who studied at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Aileen's success at the 2021 Scottish Awards for New Music saw her piece *Above the Stars* performed by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, subsequently winning the award for Large Scale New Work sponsored by PRS. Brought up around folk music, Aileen loves rattling out some reels on the box. As well as composing, Aileen enjoys a natter and co-hosts the *Ear to the Ground* podcast with Ben Eames. If she's not composing or gigging with her bands, she can probably be found climbing up a hill, bingeing on a Netflix documentary or venturing to a Scottish island in her tent.

Glisk was commissioned for the CBSO's centenary celebrations, and was premiered at Symphony Hall in January 2023. According to the composer:



JEAN SIBELIUS (c. 1898-1900).
PHOTOGRAPHER DANIEL NYBLIN, CC BY 4.0,
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"Glisk is an old Scots word meaning a fleeting glint or flicker. It's often used to describe a gleam of sunlight coming through the clouds or figuratively, 'a glimpse of the good' in Shetland. Often used to describe fleeting moments of good weather (that probably won't last very long!) It seemed like the perfect word to capture the short burst of uplifting music I wanted to write to celebrate the 100th year of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra!"

Listen to *Glisk*, featured on our new recording: Sounds New. This compilation release showcases the best of contemporary orchestral music featuring 20 new commissions by rising-star composers. See more on page 23.

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-1847)

SYMPHONY NO.3 IN A MINOR, OP.56 (SCOTTISH)

- I Andante con moto –
Allegro un poco agitato
- II Vivace non troppo
- III Adagio
- IV Allegro vivacissimo

Young gentlemen of the 18th century travelled to Italy to absorb the beauties of classical Rome. But the age of Wordsworth and Walter Scott had stronger tastes. And so, in the summer of 1829, the 20-year old Felix Mendelssohn toured Great Britain with his friend Karl Klingemann, visiting North Wales, Liverpool and the Scottish Highlands and islands. Despite a few problems with seasickness and bad folk-musicians, the Scottish landscape affected Mendelssohn profoundly. Within a year, he'd written his *Hebrides* overture, and was talking about composing a whole "Scottish symphony".

But Mendelssohn was a young man in a hurry, with a fast-developing career. And he didn't like to rush his major compositions.

He put his sketches aside for over a decade and the *Scottish* symphony was finally premiered (in Leipzig) on 3 March 1842. But Mendelssohn was always clear about the moment it had been conceived. Back in July 1829 he'd written to his family about his visit to the ruined Holyrood Chapel in Edinburgh:

"In the deep twilight we went today to the palace where Queen Mary lived and loved [...] The chapel below is now roofless. Grass and ivy thrive there and at the broken altar where Mary was crowned Queen of Scots. Everything is ruined, decayed, and the clear heavens pour in. I think I have found there the beginning of my "Scottish" Symphony."

It might seem surprising that a young German should know so much Scottish history; in fact, like most young Europeans of his generation, Mendelssohn was smitten with the novels of Walter Scott, and their tales of chivalry, derring-do and warlike clans amidst rugged landscapes. The *Scottish* symphony doesn't quote folksongs: think of it as a piece of musical Walter Scott fan-art, by one of the supreme masters of Romantic orchestral colour. The sombre opening is that twilight vision at Holyrood; the first *Allegro* is a musical depiction of dark and passionate struggles amidst a wild landscape.

The second is altogether lighter: and although Mendelssohn doesn't directly quote any Scottish melodies, people tend to agree that its bubbling clarinet theme sounds uncannily like *Charlie Is My Darling*. The *Adagio* breathes pure romance, with only a few warlike skirls in the distance to prepare the way for the headstrong squalls and warlike marches of the *finale*. The struggle plays itself out; the orchestra takes a breath and like a deep-voiced chorus, a stirring hymn tune rises from the bottom of the orchestra. Triumph spreads through the orchestra, and the horns whoop with joy as the symphony sweeps towards a resounding finish.

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Conductor

CRISTIAN MĂCELARU



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Cristian Măcelaru is Artistic Director of the George Enescu Festival and Competition, Music Director of the Orchestre National de France, Chief Conductor of the WDR Sinfonieorchester, Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Interlochen Center for the Arts' World Youth Symphony Orchestra, and Music Director and Conductor of the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music. At the 2023 George Enescu Festival, his inaugural season as Artistic Director, Măcelaru leads the George Enescu Philharmonic, WDR Sinfonieorchester and Orchestre National de France alongside the Romanian Youth Orchestra. Additional 2023/24 season highlights include Măcelaru's debut with the Philharmonia Orchestra and return engagements with the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. In North America, he has led the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, National Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, The Cleveland Orchestra and the Philadelphia Orchestra, where he was Conductor-in-Residence for three seasons.

RAY CHEN

Violinist and online personality, Ray Chen redefines what it means to be a classical musician in the 21st century. Initially coming to attention via the Yehudi Menuhin (2008) and Queen Elizabeth (2009) Competitions, of which he was First Prize winner, he has built a profile in Europe, Asia, and the USA as well as his native Australia. Profiled as “one to watch” by the *Strad* and *Gramophone* magazines, his profile has grown to encompass his featuring in the *Forbes* list of 30 most influential Asians under 30. He has appeared with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhausorchester, Munich Philharmonic, Filarmonica della Scala, Orchestra Nazionale della Santa Cecilia, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and others. He works with conductors such as Riccardo Chailly, Vladimir Jurowski, Sakari Oramo, Manfred Honeck, and Daniele Gatti. Born in Taiwan and raised in Australia, Ray was accepted to the Curtis Institute of Music at age 15, where he studied with Aaron Rosand and was supported by Young Concert Artists. He plays the 1714 “Dolphin” Stradivarius violin on loan from the Nippon Music Foundation.





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We're musicians, but we're also parents, teachers, runners, gardeners, writers, sports fans, foodies and so much more. We're part of your city, and we couldn't be happier to be here to play, share, write, sing, live and breathe music with you!

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REFLECTIONS ON FIVE YEARS AS CHAIR OF THE CBSO

It has been my absolute privilege to have been Chair of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra for the last five years – over which time there have been many wonderful memories.

I have attended a whole range of incredible concerts performed by our world-class orchestra in Birmingham. I particularly enjoyed the five concerts last season when our own players performed the solo works: Marie-Christine with Weinberg, Oliver with Mozart, Eugene with the Nielsen Violin concerto and Vivaldi, and Elspeth in June with Britten. I also loved the huge Carmina Burana which went on to play to a full house at the BBC Proms with a very enthusiastic standing ovation.

Aside from Birmingham, I have had the pleasure of watching the orchestra perform at various venues around the UK and have joined them on several overseas tours. Witnessing the orchestra's captivating performances in front of enthusiastic crowds at international concert halls, including Mirga and Sheku's performance at Carnegie Hall in New York, was nothing short of amazing.

I am proud to have seen the superb work bringing music into the lives of thousands of young people, through schools' concerts and outreach work, and we have now opened the ground-breaking Shireland CBSO Academy in Sandwell. Despite the challenges of the last few years, I am pleased to leave the orchestra in good shape for the opportunities ahead and in very good hands under the leadership of Emma Stenning and Kazuki Yamada.

I look forward to continuing to join the orchestra at concerts and being the Chair the Sound of the Future Campaign Board as we look to raise the final £1M of the £12.5M Campaign.



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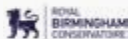
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