

# New programmes full of collaborations and promise



David Kettle

**T**he daffodils are out, and it's almost light at 5pm. It can mean only one thing: yes, it's launch season for Scotland's national orchestras. The Scottish Chamber Orchestra and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra unveiled their 2020-21 seasons just a few days back, with the BBCSSO, Scottish Opera and others still to come. But, on the admittedly partial evidence so far, it looks like a strong and rather intriguing year ahead for classical lovers in Scotland.

A concert of video games music is far from the only innovation in the RSNO's rich and eclectic coming season. Things might start with a continuation of the current season's Beethoven celebrations – the mighty Ninth Symphony under music director Thomas Søndergård – but how about a musical exploration of links between Poland and Scotland, or brand new pieces commissioned from some of our nation's most exciting contemporary composers? That first strand – dubbed Polska Scotland – celebrates Scotland as an abiding European state with music by Szymanowski, Górecki, Panufnik, Lutoslawski and – yes – Chopin nestling in across eight of the orchestra's concerts. But it takes guts to kick the whole season off with a brand new flute concerto commissioned by the RSNO from young Scottish firebrand Jay Capperauld: his *Our Gilded Veins* was written for the RSNO's exceptional principal flautist Katherine Bryan, and it's an exciting prospect alongside Beethoven's Ninth. Capperauld's concerto is joined later in the season by new Scottish-themed works from David Fennessy, Craig Armstrong, Christopher Duncan and Michael Murray. No room for a woman's voice in there? Nonetheless, it's a bold strand to the RSNO's programming, and it's heartening to see the orchestra supporting Scottish voices in this way.

Elsewhere, Midori is artist in residence across two concerts, and other starry soloists include



Photographs: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders

Midori, left; RSNO's Thomas Søndergård

Karen Cargill, Paul Lewis and Benjamin Grosvenor. Oh, and one Nicola Benedetti, who's also with the orchestra for a pair of concerts: alongside another new work – the Scottish premiere of a new Violin Concerto by Liverpoolian polymath Mark Simpson, an RSNO co-commission – she performs Szymanowski's First Violin Concerto with the combined forces of the RSNO and National Youth Orchestra of Scotland.

Perhaps not surprisingly, it's Benedetti who forms a link between the RSNO and SCO seasons, and

*Emelyanychev is on the podium for no fewer than seven of the SCO's concerts*

she's soloist in Bruch's First Violin Concerto in the SCO's opening concerts for 2020-21. But the focus of the SCO's season, also perhaps not surprisingly, is principal conductor Maxim Emelyanychev, who was something of an unknown quantity this time last year, but has quickly established himself as one of Scotland's most exciting, engaging musical figures on the strength of his SCO concerts so far – dynamic, energetic and with a nice dash of unpredictability. He's on the podium for no fewer than seven of the SCO's concerts, ranging from Bach and Mozart to a John Adams strand that

runs through the season.

The SCO has excellent form in forging fruitful musical relationships, and the coming season celebrates several of them – not least current associate composer Anna Clyne, who unveils new works for wind ensemble, chorus and orchestra. François Leleux returns to bring his larger-than-life musicianship to two concerts, both featuring his own miraculous talents as an oboist, and one also showcasing violinist Lisa Batiashvili, who happens to be his wife.

Most exciting, however, is the return of Finnish violinist, director and all-around musical radical Pekka Kuusisto, who packed out halls in the current season, and returns for a pair of concerts in 2020-21. The first centres around Britten's glorious *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings*, featuring Allan Clayton and former SCO principal Alec Frank-Gemmill. The second is a much more radical departure, however, teaming Kuusisto up with Scottish folk singer Karine Polwart and composer/sound designer Pippa Murphy in a concert themed around the current climate crisis, built around a brand new song cycle, *If You See Me, Weep*, commissioned from Polwart and Murphy by the SCO.

Both orchestras' seasons feel particularly rich and diverse, with plenty to entertain, stimulate and provoke – and that's just as it should be. ■

[www.sco.org.uk](http://www.sco.org.uk); [www.rsno.org.uk](http://www.rsno.org.uk)