

# scottish ensemble

Re-defining the string orchestra

## Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762)

Concerto grosso in D minor, op.5 no.12

'La Follia' (1727)

In an evening devoted both to infernally catchy tunes – let's call them earworms – and to links with the past, it's only fitting that the first piece should have both. 'La follia' is one of the oldest earworms around, first emerging at the end of the 15th century in Spanish and Italian vocal music and Portuguese dance music. The tune unfolds in such a natural way that it'll seem familiar even if you've never heard it before – which is probably why it's so infuriatingly catchy. It gained its name – which literally means 'madness' – because dancers seemed to go out of their minds when dancing to it. Geminiani's concerto grosso on 'La follia' looks back not only to this ancient melody, but also to his teacher Arcangelo Corelli's Violin Sonata op.5 no.12 of 1700, of which it is an elaborated arrangement. Geminiani added a second virtuoso solo violin part, shrewdly designing the concerto grosso to promote both Corelli's music and his own creative skills to audiences in London, where he had settled in 1714. After a solemn statement of the short 'La follia' theme at the start, the set of 24 fast-changing variations casts the melody in almost every guise imaginable, from lightning-quick arpeggios to foot-tapping jigs and stately marches.

## Henryk Mikolaj Górecki (1933-2010)

Harpichord Concerto (1980)

1 Allegro molto –

2 Vivace marcatissimo

The Polish composer Henryk Górecki established his international reputation in the early 1990s, when a recording of his slow, mournful Third Symphony of 1976 became a worldwide sensation. His snappy, sparkling Harpichord Concerto, written four years later and cast in two fast, vigorous movements, is a world away from the serious Symphony, but, like it, manages to wring maximum emotional effect from the most minimal means. In the case of the Concerto, those means are constant movement, unapologetic repetition, ostinato melodies and unstoppable motoric rhythms. The piece's iconoclastic tone

confounded critics at its premiere, but the composer signalled that we perhaps shouldn't take the work too seriously, even referring to it as a 'prank'. In the first movement, Górecki seems to be looking back to Baroque toccata forms, with a slow-moving unison string melody accompanied by ceaseless, fast-moving harpsichord ornamentation, each new phrase heralded by a sweeping flourish from the soloist. In the dance-like second movement, which follows without a pause, a jaunty melody is passed back and forth between harpsichord and strings in incessant quavers and a bright D major tonality, contrasting with far more dissonant harmonies later on.

## Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Concerto for violin and string orchestra

(Concerto Accademico) (1925)

1 Allegro pesante 2 Adagio 3 Presto

Vaughan Williams might not be the first composer you'd associate with the clean-cut neo-classicism that swept art and music in the first half of the 20th century. Nevertheless, his Concerto for violin and string orchestra pays affectionate homage to J.S. Bach, and specifically the older composer's Concerto in D minor for two violins, which Vaughan Williams loved so much that he requested it to be played at his funeral (a wish that was granted). But the later composer's trademark folk-inspired lyricism is unmistakable. The lean, muscular themes of the first movement nestle among Bach-style counterpoint, but even the soloist's Baroque-style elaborations can't disguise the melodies' hearty, folksy character. The dreamy Adagio has opulent harmonies, and the rhapsodic solo part here sounds at times as though it's been taken straight from Vaughan Williams's famous *The Lark Ascending*. The short Presto, full of infectious energy, is based around a scampering jig tune that Vaughan Williams reworked from his 1914 opera *Hugh the Drover*, but the movement ends in quiet resignation.

## Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

St Paul's Suite (1912)

1 Jig 2 Ostinato 3 Intermezzo 4 Finale

The folk theme continues in Holst's *St Paul's Suite*, a catchy piece brimming over with memorable English melodies. Indeed, it was Vaughan Williams who introduced the young Holst to folk music while both men were students at London's Royal College of Music. Holst wrote the Suite in 1912 for students at the St Paul's Girls' School, Hammersmith, where he was director of music from 1905 until his death

in 1934, in gratitude for a new sound-proofed music studio where he was to write almost all of his compositions. The robust jig opens with a gripping unison folk theme across all the strings that memorably alternates 6/8 and 9/8 times. Pity the poor second violins in the good-natured *Ostinato*, who have to maintain a turning figure throughout virtually the whole movement. The mysterious *Intermezzo* opens with pizzicato strings, and the oriental inflections in its melody may hint at Holst's interest in North African and Asian musics. But if it's earworms you're after, you can't do much better than the *Finale*, in which the bright, sunny folk tune 'The Dargason' circles around no fewer than 30 times in endlessly inventive variations. Holst's masterstroke, though, is to combine it with another English folk tune, much-loved and known by all, which emerges with quiet nobility from the bubbling texture.

### Henryk Mikolaj Górecki (1933-2010)

#### Three Pieces in Old Style (1963)

##### 1 Aria 2 Menuetto I 3 Menuetto II

Long before his Third Symphony brought him international acclaim, Henryk Górecki enjoyed a notorious reputation as one of the leading figures of the Polish avant-garde, with a flamboyantly complex musical style. His *Three Pieces in Old Style*, however, marked an abrupt turning point. What shocked listeners at the work's premiere in Warsaw in 1964, and what made it so radical, was its very simplicity: its diatonic harmonies, slow-moving rhythms, and ear-pleasing melodies. It was also the first of the composer's pieces to reflect the music of his native Poland, drawing, as its title suggests, on folk music often centuries old. The melancholy first movement has a haunting atmosphere, led by violins in a simple melody that gets louder and more confident at each of its four repetitions. The dance-like second movement accompanies a scurrying violin melody with sprightly chords in the rest of the strings. The introspective third movement is based on a 16th-century Polish wedding song. This ancient-sounding music is interrupted twice, though, by a dense, cluster-like harmonisation of the same melody, the strings moving in eight parallel lines just a single note apart.

### Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

#### Concerto grosso in B minor op.3 no.10 for four violins, cello and strings (from *L'estro armonico*) (1711)

##### 1 Allegro 2 Largo - Larghetto 3 Allegro

*L'estro armonico* (usually translated as 'Harmonic Fancy') was Vivaldi's first published set of concertos,

and with its daring orchestrations, striking textures and propulsive rhythms, it made the composer's name throughout Europe. Demand was so high that following its 1711 publication in Amsterdam, it was reprinted in London and Paris, and even the great J.S. Bach reworked the B minor work heard tonight as a concerto for four harpsichords and strings. The set was probably written for performance at the Ospedale della Pietà, the Venetian school for orphaned and illegitimate girls where Vivaldi taught from 1703 to 1725. This tenth concerto is scored for the unusual combination of four solo violins, solo cello, strings and continuo, and is in three short movements. The opening *Allegro* begins with a striking dialogue between the soloists rather than with the full orchestra. An extraordinary *Larghetto* passage in the middle of the slow movement calls upon the four violin soloists to use four contrasting arpeggio techniques, creating a glistening texture that calls to mind 'Winter' from *The Four Seasons*, and a dancing, triple-time theme winds its way through the final *Allegro*.

### Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

#### Simple Symphony (1934)

##### 1 Boisterous Bourée

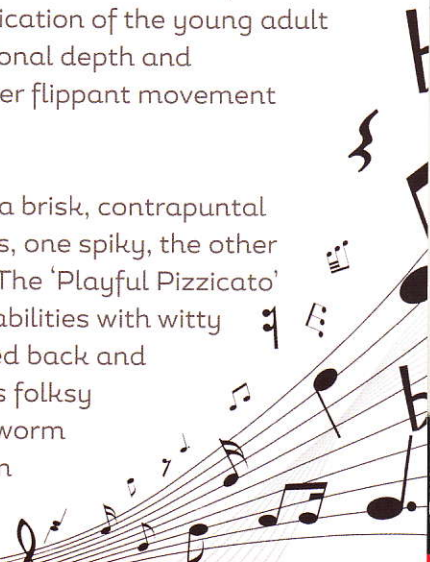
##### 2 Playful Pizzicato

##### 3 Sentimental Sarabande

##### 4 Frolicsome Finale

Britten, too, looked back to the past in his *Simple Symphony*, but it wasn't to music from centuries earlier. Instead, it was to his own childhood compositions, written when he was aged 9 to 12. He finished the *Simple Symphony* in the year he completed his studies at London's Royal College of Music, but by that time he had already been composing for an astonishing 16 years, amassing a remarkable number of piano pieces, songs, chamber works and even orchestral pieces. This richly imaginative score combines the innocence of childhood with the sophistication of the young adult in music of far more emotional depth and inventiveness than its rather flippant movement titles might suggest.

The 'Boisterous Bourée' is a brisk, contrapuntal allegro built on two themes, one spiky, the other more lyrical and folk-like. The 'Playful Pizzicato' tests its players' plucking abilities with witty interlocking phrases passed back and forth between them, and its folksy central section has an earworm whose halting melody soon lodges itself in the brain.



The hauntingly eloquent 'Sentimental Sarabande' has a sombre theme that unfolds over a throbbing G in the cellos and bass, and the 'Frolicsome Finale' lives up to its name, with a memorably scurrying opening theme, a brisk development section, and a celebratory coda dashed off as quickly as the players can manage.

David Kettle

Martin Suckling (1981 -)

Chimes at Midnight (2013)

Postcard #3 - from the turning of the year

### Jonathan Morton

Jonathan Morton is Artistic Director and Leader of the Scottish Ensemble and enjoys a varied career as a director, leader, soloist, chamber musician, and teacher. In 2012 he became Leader of the London Sinfonietta after enjoying a longstanding relationship as a guest player. A champion of new and little-known music and a highly versatile performer, his appearances at numerous festivals and venues include Wigmore Hall, London; Edinburgh International Festival; Concertgebouw, Amsterdam and Kammermusik Festival, Nuremberg. His eclectic and engaging programming style has seen him collaborate with and direct some of the most progressive and innovative orchestras and chamber groups in the UK and Europe. With the Ensemble, Jonathan has collaborated with leading musicians from different musical traditions, made a number of acclaimed recordings and appears regularly on BBC Radio 3. Jonathan plays a Nicolo Amati violin, made circa 1640.

### Jan Waterfield

Jan Waterfield studied music at Girton College,

Cambridge, followed by studies in piano and harpsichord at London's Royal Academy of Music, with David Willison and John Toll. As principal harpsichordist with Paul McCreesh's Gabrieli Players, she has played throughout Europe and contributed to many award-winning recordings; most recently 'A New Venetian Coronation', with its celebration of the ceremonial beauty of Giovanni Gabrieli's instrumental and vocal music. She also plays harpsichord regularly with the Academy of Ancient Music, Classical Opera Company, The Sixteen, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, The Scottish Ensemble and Edinburgh's own 'Ludus Baroque'.

### Scottish Ensemble

Re-defining the string orchestra, the Scottish Ensemble inspires audiences in the UK and beyond with vibrant performances which are powerful, challenging and rewarding experiences. As the UK's only professional string orchestra, the Ensemble is based in Glasgow and is built around a core of 12 outstanding string players who perform together under Artistic Director Jonathan Morton. The Ensemble has commissioned new works from composers such as John Tavener, James MacMillan, Sally Beamish, and Luke Bedford amongst others in recent years, as well as working with guest artists such as trumpeter Alison Balsom, tenor Toby Spence and cellist Pieter Wispelwey. Alongside performances across Scotland, the Ensemble presents an annual series of concerts at London's Wigmore Hall and has appeared at BBC Proms and the Edinburgh International, City of London, Aldeburgh and St Magnus Festivals. Recent invitations to tour abroad have resulted in engagements in Belgium, Austria, Turkey, China and the USA.

**We would like to thank all of our supporters, including those who wish to remain anonymous, for their generous support:**

**Funders** Creative Scotland, Glasgow City Council, Aberdeen City Council, Dundee City Council. **Trusts & Foundations** The Bacher Trust, The Binks Trust, WA Cargill Fund, The Gordon Fraser Trust, The Hugh Fraser Trust, The Gannochy Trust, The Holst Foundation, James T Howat Charitable Trust, The Inchrye Trust, The ITH Charitable Trust, The Kimie Trust, The Michael Marks Charitable Trust, The Bill and Margaret Nicol Trust, The Moffat Trust, The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust, PRS for Music Foundation, The Robertson Trust, The RVW Trust, The Tay Charitable Trust

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