



Beethoven and Stravinsky

4th and 5th May 2024. Inverness Cathedral and Strathpeffer Pavilion

Welcome to today's concert.

Stravinsky: Concerto in Eb "Dumbarton Oaks"

I. Tempo giusto

II. Allegretto

III. Con moto

Stravinsky: Suite from *Pulcinella*

I. Sinfonia (Ouverture)

II. Serenata

III. a) Scherzino b) Allegro c) Andantino

IV. Tarantella

V. Toccata

VI. Gavotta con due variazioni

VII. Vivo

VIII. a) Minuetto b) Finale

Interval

Beethoven: Symphony No. 6 *Pastoral* op. 68

I. *Angenehme, heitere Empfindungen, welche bei der Ankunft auf dem Lande im Menschen erwachen:*

Allegro ma non troppo

"The agreeable and cheerful feelings which awake in people upon arrival in the countryside"

II. *Szene am Bach:* Andante molto moto

"Scene by the brook"

III. *Lustiges Zusammensein der Landleute:* Allegro

"Merry gathering of the country folk"

IV. *Donner. Sturm:* Allegro

"Thunder. Storm"

V. *Hirtengesang. Wohltätige, mit Dank an die Gottheit verbundene Gefühle nach dem Sturm:*

Allegretto

"Shepherd's song. Benevolent feelings, with gratitude to the Deity, after the storm"

The Mahler Players, conducted by Tomas Leakey

“PERFORMANCE CONCERTO DUMBARTON OAKS WORTHY OF THE WORK” was the somewhat ambiguous telegram which Mildred Bliss, co-commissioner of the **Concerto in Eb**, sent to Stravinsky on 8th May 1938. This terse trans-Atlantic communication followed the private premiere of the concerto in the spacious music room of the Blissés’ glorious mansion “Dumbarton Oaks” in Washington D. C. The performance had been conducted by Stravinsky’s friend the composer and conductor Nadia Boulanger (who had also organised the commission in the first place) and Stravinsky was at that time too ill to travel to America. The public premiere came a little over a month later, on 16th June in Paris, with Stravinsky himself conducting. It was popular with the capacity audience (the entire concerto had to be encored) but less so with the critics, some of whom felt Stravinsky was betraying the principles and spirit of his more outwardly “revolutionary” earlier works.

As he began “Dumbarton Oaks” during the summer of 1937, Stravinsky described it in a letter to a friend as “a little concerto in the style of the Brandenburg Concertos”, and it is instructive to note that he had conducted Bach’s 3rd Brandenburg Concerto just a few months earlier. The music largely avoids direct quotations, however, and simply observing the orchestration - the inclusion of a clarinet rather than an oboe, for example, and the lack of any keyboard continuo part - shows that this is a work which takes the spirit and character of its model but then quickly goes into a very different realm. The first and last movements are both energetic and ebullient, with frequent fragmentations of metre giving a sense of rhythmic unpredictability to go with the occasionally pungent harmonic clashes. The middle movement is remarkably sparsely orchestrated in its outer sections, with a misterioso middle section which looks forward to the Symphony in C from a year or so later.

If “Dumbarton Oaks” was loosely inspired by music from the 18th century, ***Pulcinella*** was much more directly so. This ballet score is based on numerous original works in dance forms, first thought to be by Pergolesi, though more recent scholarship has shown they were by several different composers. The melodies and bass lines of the originals are often kept the same and Stravinsky creates his adapted sound world through his distinctive and colourful orchestration, the addition of dissonant inner parts and the presence of some pivotal alterations to the phrase structure.

The concept for the work came from the impresario Sergei Diaghilev of the Ballets Russes, with whom Stravinsky had already collaborated several times before the First World War, most famously on the *Rite of Spring*. Diaghilev wanted to create a ballet based on the commedia dell’arte character Pulcinella and approached Stravinsky in 1919 with an already largely formed concept. The choreographer and principal dancer was to be Léonide Massine and the stage designs were to be by none other than Pablo Picasso. Stravinsky was initially sceptical at taking on the role of an arranger of someone else’s music, but when he looked at the manuscripts of the original pieces he “fell in love” and

later wrote that his work on this score had “filled him with joy”. The premiere was on 15th May 1920 at the Paris Opera, conducted by Ernst Ansermet, and Stravinsky adapted the ballet into the suite we will perform today in 1922. He further revised it in 1949.

The **Sixth Symphony** was first performed at Beethoven’s famous “Akademie-konzert” (benefit concert) in Vienna on 22nd December 1808. This colossal event, which began at 6:30pm and lasted for over four hours, also included the premieres of the Fifth Symphony, Choral Fantasy and Fourth Piano Concerto, as well as performances of movements from the Mass in C, the concert aria *Ab! Perfido* and an improvisation by Beethoven at the piano. The evening was not a great success, with contemporary reports suggesting it was undermined by insufficient rehearsal time, bitter cold, and (perhaps inevitably, given the conditions) unsympathetic musicians in the orchestra.

Even if the performances left something to be desired, a more remarkable collection of premieres could scarcely be imagined and the first work on the programme that cold December evening was the symphony we shall play today (the Sixth Symphony was indeed premiered a few hours before the Fifth). On the title page of the autograph score Beethoven wrote: “Pastoral-Sinfonie oder Erinnerung an das Landleben (mehr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Malerei)” [“Pastoral Symphony or recollection of country life (more an expression of sentiment than painting)”] or, more freely translated: “more an expression of feelings than the illustration of things”. This is a valuable clue to understanding the symphony, for, while there is “tone painting” (for instance representations of the murmuring of a small stream with two muted cellos, birdsong, claps of thunder and whistling of the wind in a storm, and the call of the alhorn) these pictorial elements never conflict with Beethoven’s extraordinary sense of symphonic structure and humanity, which, as in all his works, transcend the particular.

Tomas Leakey

Mahler Players were founded by Tomas Leakey in 2013.

As part of our *Mahler in Miniature* project we performed chamber orchestra versions of Mahler’s First, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Ninth and Tenth Symphonies, *Das Lied von der Erde*, and most of Mahler’s other song cycles. We have commissioned many new works, including *Birth-Rebirth* by leading Scottish composer Stuart MacRae. Since 2017 we have had a particular focus on the music of Wagner, which has included the complete Act 1 from *Die Walküre*, Act 2 from *Tristan und Isolde*, Act 3 from *Siegfried* and substantial sections of music from *Götterdämmerung*, *Parsifal* and *Tannhäuser*. We have worked with some of the greatest singers of our era, including Sir John Tomlinson, Magdalena Anna

Hofmann, Peter Wedd and Lee Bisset and in 2023 were joined by the Wagnerian Anthony Negus as guest conductor.

In 2021 we released our first album, which features the world premiere recording of Matthew King's *Richard Wagner in Venice: A Symphony*. This Symphony brings to life for the first time many of Wagner's late sketches, left unfinished at the time of his death in 1883, and until now largely unknown and unheard outside specialist circles. Also featuring is Wagner's own beautiful masterpiece for chamber orchestra, *Siegfried Idyll*. The CD is available at today's performance.

Tomas Leakey (conductor)

Tomas is the Founder and Music Director of The Mahler Players. In this role he has collaborated with world-renowned artists, recorded a well-received album and conducted most of Mahler's music, as well as a wide range of repertoire ranging in period from Bach to Boulez and contemporary composers.

Tomas is particularly passionate about Wagner's music and performances have included complete acts from *Die Walküre*, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Siegfried* as well as substantial excerpts from *Tannhäuser*, *Götterdämmerung* and *Parsifal*. Tomas' work on the music of Wagner led to him being awarded the Bayreuth Stipendium by the Wagner Society Scotland in 2022.

In the youth music and educational realm, Tomas is the conductor of the Highland Regional Youth Orchestra and he has also led projects in which works such as Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale*, Walton's *Façade* and the BBC Ten Pieces were performed in schools across the north of Scotland to hundreds of children.

Tomas began his musical life as a trombonist, playing in the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland. He is also a pianist and began conducting during his time at the University of Cambridge. He studied with and was encouraged in his conducting by the formidable late George Hurst and undertook additional study with Denise Ham at the London Conducting Academy and at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. He further developed his craft through attending masterclasses, including with Johannes Schlaefli, Alexander Vedernikov and Toby Purser. Another important influence has been the conductor Anthony Negus.

As well as his work with the Mahler Players and Highland Regional Youth Orchestra, he will make his debut with the Aberdeen City Orchestra in May 2024.

Emma Donald (leader)

Originally from the Highlands, Emma Donald has been playing the violin since the age of

8. Growing up, she enjoyed learning both classical and traditional Scottish music, and has strived to keep both passions running simultaneously. She has a first class honours degree in music from the University of Edinburgh, and she works full time as a freelance musician based in Glasgow.

Emma is very passionate about chamber music and she is a founding member of the Fyrish String Quartet who have performed across Scotland since 2017. She is also an accomplished composer under the name Emma Jean. Her piece “The Sound of Sleepless Kings” was premiered in April 2023 by the Fyrish String Quartet. Emma is one half of the contemporary folk duo with harpist Isbel Pendlebury. Their first album *Arenite* is available online and their original music was featured as part of “The Farewell Glacier”, a programme broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in February 2024.

FIRST VIOLIN

Emma Donald (leader), Simon Evans,
Ruth Kalitski, Melissa Hutter, Josie
Robertson, Jerome Woodwark

CLARINET Mhairi Callander, Mike
Weare

BASSOON Bruce Gordon, Kate Smith

SECOND VIOLIN

Andrew Birse, Emily Birse, Sophie
Cushnie, Hazel Younger, Rachel
Farmer

FRENCH HORN Wendy Ritchie,
William Jamieson

TRUMPET Alasdair Grant, Sjoerd Tel

VIOLA

Laurie Rominger, Berent Korfker,
Rebecca Minio-Paluello, Catherine
Mackay

TROMBONE Mark Bell, Dave Allan

TIMPANI Hazel Brown

CELLO

Kate Ellingson, Rachel Steele, Calle
Arngrip

FRONT OF HOUSE

Sam Leakey, Lisa Khadaeva, Kim Kelly

DOUBLE BASS

Tam Darlugdach, Chris Sergeant

PUBLICITY AND LOGISTICS

Rachel Farmer, Rob Farmer, Sam
Leakey, Lisa Khadaeva, Kim Kelly

FLUTE/PICCOLO Ruth Binks, Babs
Crocker, Michael Crocker

MAHLER PLAYERS TRUSTEES

Tomas Leakey, Mhairi Callander, Rob
Farmer, Rachel Farmer

OBOE Leslie Callander, Krys
Hawryszczuk

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Mahler Players 2024/25 season

Bruckner Symphony No. 4 in Eb *Romantic*

Bruckner 200 and Inverness Cathedral 150

Sunday 8th September 2024 - 4pm at Inverness Cathedral
(one performance only)

Wagner *Parsifal* - Prelude to Act 1 and the complete Act 3 (concert performance)

Saturday 2nd November 2024 - 8pm at Inverness Cathedral

Sunday 3rd November 2024 - 3pm at Strathpeffer Pavilion

Gurnemanz - Sir John Tomlinson

Parsifal – Peter Wedd

Amfortas – tba

Mahler Symphony No. 3 (version for chamber orchestra by Rob Farmer)

Saturday 31st May 2025 - 8pm at Inverness Cathedral

Sunday 1st June 2025 - 3pm at Strathpeffer Pavilion

Tickets and season passes are on sale now from www.mahlerplayers.co.uk

With warm thanks to

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The Mahler Circle - members

Ash Johnston and Donna Mortimer

Professor Sue Lightman

Dr Helen Robinson

Sandra and John Black

Thomas Baxter and Benjamin Mawston (Rossmor Guesthouse)

Tickets typically cover at most half of the cost of putting on our concerts, and sometimes much less than this. With a challenging climate for securing public funding, we are highly dependent on the generosity of our supporters. If you feel what we do is of value and would like to support us, we would love to hear from you.

We have a supporters' network called **The Mahler Circle**. For an annual contribution you would:

- receive 2 complimentary tickets to each programme we perform, at the venue of your choice and with seats reserved.
- be informed about our plans ahead of public announcements.
- receive a complimentary copy of our CD, *Richard Wagner in Venice*.
- have the option to be acknowledged in our concert programmes.

We also welcome any other support that may be available.

Additionally, we are keen to develop further relationships with businesses - local, regional and national - and have a framework which offers a tiered system of sponsorship.

If you would like to know more about any of the above options, please get in touch with us: contact@mahlerplayers.co.uk.

We thank you for your support and generosity!

You can find us on Facebook, Instagram and X **@mahlerplayers**.

The Mahler Players is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) Charity No. SC044711