



Weber and Beethoven

Sunday 16th March 2025, 4pm and 7pm. Inverness Cathedral

Welcome to today's concert.

Weber: *Euryanthe* Overture

Weber: *Oberon* Overture

Beethoven: Symphony No. 5 in C minor, op. 67

I. Allegro con brio

II. Andante con moto

III. Allegro

IV. Allegro. Presto

The Mahler Players, conducted by Tomas Leakey

Running time c.60 minutes. *Please note, there will be no interval in this concert.*

Carl Maria von Weber (1786 – 1826) was one of the most important composers of the early Romantic period and arguably the founder of German opera. From 1817 until his death he was the Königlichler Kapellmeister at the Dresden Hoftheater (today the Semperoper). He rose to fame in 1821 due the success of his opera *Der Freischütz* “The Freeshooter” and went on to complete two further operas, *Euryanthe* and *Oberon*, before his tragically early death from tuberculosis in 1826.

Euryanthe was premiered in Vienna on 25th October 1823 at the Theater am Kärntnertor, the same building which was to host the first performance of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony a little over six months later. Beethoven himself was not present at the *Euryanthe* premiere, poignantly telling a friend afterwards: “I would have come, but what for?”, pointing to his ears (by the early 1820s he was almost entirely deaf). He and Weber did enjoy a memorable lunch together during the rehearsal period for *Euryanthe*, however, and Beethoven showed interest in the opera, having been impressed by *Der Freischütz*. He sympathised with Weber's struggles with an unsatisfactory libretto, as he had suffered from similar problems with his own opera, *Fidelio*.

The story of *Euryanthe* has common origins with Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* and Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and the broad outline of the plot is as follows: set in 12th century France, the nobleman Adolar places a wager on his wife Euryanthe's fidelity. A nefarious couple team up to mislead Adolar into believing that Euryanthe has betrayed him; he despairs and

plans revenge but later discovers the truth and the couple reunite, in the process giving peace to the ghost of Adolar's dead sister. The libretto, by Helmina von Chezy, is of notoriously low quality and the opera, despite a moderately successful opening run in Vienna, never achieved the popularity of *Der Freischütz*. Despite various attempts at revivals, including by Mahler and Roller in 1903, performances of the complete opera are a rarity today. This is unfortunate because it contains some remarkable music. The overture, the only part of the work to have found a permanent place in the concert repertoire, features two of the main themes associated with Adolar's love for Euryanthe as well as a mysterious and harmonically ambiguous passage for eight solo violins, which is from the ghostly scene by the tomb of Adolar's sister.

In the last few years of his life Weber's fame spread rapidly across Europe and *Oberon* arose out of a commission from the Royal Opera in London. The libretto, which was no more successful than that of *Euryanthe*, was by James Robinson Planché. With characteristic hard work and determination Weber learned English over the course of a few months in order to be able to set this text. He travelled from Dresden to London in February 1826 and completed the overture just three days before the opera's premiere on 12th April. Eight weeks later he was dead at the age of 39. His body remained in London until 1844, when one of his successors as Kapellmeister in Dresden, a man called Richard Wagner, helped to organise the return of his remains to his home country.

The character of Oberon may be familiar from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but Weber's *Oberon* is based on a different story, with origins in the 13th century. The fairy king Oberon and his wife Titania have quarrelled over whether men or women are more inconstant and sworn never to reconcile unless they can find a couple who remain true to each other despite the most arduous trials. The couple to be tested are found in the form of Huon of Bordeaux and Reiza of Baghdad, who are brought together by the magic of the elves and duly survive the trials sent their way, which include storms, shipwreck, abduction by pirates, slavery, attempted seduction and imminent execution. As can be inferred from this description the plot is rather fantastical and was deliberately designed for the Covent Garden audience, who at that time seemingly preferred special effects to character development. As a result, *Oberon* has suffered much the same fate as *Euryanthe* in terms of present-day performances.

The overture is constructed from some of the main musical ideas of the opera, cleverly combined and sequenced to create a self-contained piece. It begins with a soft horn call, whose function in the opera is to summon Oberon, and includes fairy music, a distant march, a love song and a storm scene. The euphoric and slightly manic theme which brings the overture to a close comes from the scene where Reiza believes she and Huon are about to be rescued from the island on which they were shipwrecked, before she has realised that the "rescuers" are pirates.

The **Fifth Symphony** of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827) had an unusually long gestation period, with the first sketches dating from 1804 but completion not until spring 1808. It contains an expansion of the orchestra compared with his earlier symphonies; in the finale he adds a piccolo, contrabassoon and, for the first time in symphonic music, three trombones.

The symphony was first performed at Beethoven's famous benefit concert in Vienna on 22nd December 1808. This colossal event also included the premieres of the Sixth Symphony, Choral Fantasy and Fourth Piano Concerto as well as other works and an improvisation by Beethoven at the piano. A contemporary report sheds light on the rehearsal situation: "*singers and orchestra were composed of heterogenous elements, and it had been found impossible to get a single full rehearsal for all the pieces to be performed, all filled with the greatest difficulties.*" The Fifth Symphony was performed immediately after the interval, with Beethoven fearful that the audience would have grown too tired to fully appreciate it had it been placed in its more natural position at the end of the concert. Despite the mixed success of the premiere the enormous significance of the symphony was soon recognised; it was published in 1809 and the German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann issued his famous review in 1810. Beethoven, and this glorious symphony in particular, has remained a precious and inescapable part of our shared culture ever since and we are privileged to have the opportunity to bring the music to life today.

Tomas Leakey

Beethoven's music wields the lever of fear, awe, horror, and pain, and it awakens that eternal longing that is the essence of the romantic ... What instrumental work by Beethoven confirms this all to a higher degree than the profound Symphony in C Minor, a work that is splendid beyond all measure. How irresistibly does this wonderful composition transport the listener through ever growing climaxes into the spiritual realm of the infinite. E.T.A. Hoffmann, 1810

The 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* and the 3rd Acts from *Siegfried* and *Parsifal* as well as substantial sections of music from *Tannhäuser* and *Götterdämmerung*. 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 and 2024 were joined by the noted 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 his performances have included complete acts from *Die Walküre*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Siegfried* and *Parsifal* as well as music from *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and *Götterdämmerung*. 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* and Walton's *Façade* 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, and started 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, Tomas made his debut with the Aberdeen City Orchestra in 2024. He will return to the orchestra for a third collaboration on 27th September 2025 with a programme of Beethoven, Haydn and Brahms' Fourth Symphony.

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, she is a founding member of the Fyrish String Quartet and the Cairdeas Trio. She is also an accomplished composer, with Fyrish String Quartet premiering her piece “The Sound of Sleepless Kings” earlier this year. Emma is one half of a contemporary folk duo with harpist Isbel Pendlebury. Their original music is being featured as part of “The Farewell Glacier”, a programme being broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in January 2024.

FIRST VIOLIN

Emma Donald (leader), Simon Evans,
Emily Birse, Ruth Kalitski, Heather
Lanz, Maureen Turnbull, Julian
Rippiner

SECOND VIOLIN

Andrew Birse, Aden Mazur, Ellis Ash,
Paula Starritt, Hazel Younger, Rachel
Mackison, Mark Osborne

VIOLA

Rachel Farmer, Vanessa Turner,
Catherine Mackay, Berent Korfker,

CELLO

Kate Ellingson, Joe Donmall, Rachel
Steele, Imke Henderson

DOUBLE BASS

Tam Darlugdach, Hector Waudby-West

FLUTE Ruth Binks, Babs Crocker

PICCOLO Michael Crocker

OBOE Leslie Callander, Krys
Hawryszczuk

CLARINET Mhairi Callander, Mike
Weare

BASSOON Bruce Gordon, Kate Smith

CONTRABASSOON

Alison Bardgett

FRENCH HORN Rob Farmer, Willie
Aristide-Deighan, Wendy Ritchie,
William Jamieson

TRUMPET Harry Marshall, Sjoerd Tel

TROMBONE Hannah Arora, Scott
Annison, Joe Scott

TIMPANI Ally Russell

HRI | Munro architecture

CHARTERED
ARCHITECTS
& DESIGN
CONSULTANTS

+44 (0)1463 240066

@hri_munro_architects

info@hri-architects.com

hri-architects.com



Dates for your diary

Saturday 31st May 2025 - 8pm at Inverness Cathedral

Sunday 1st June 2025 - 3pm at Strathpeffer Pavilion

Mahler Symphony No. 3

The Mahler Players

Tomas Leakey – conductor

Barbara Scott – mezzo-soprano

On 31st May and 1st June we invite you to join us for two performances of Mahler's Third Symphony. Mahler famously said that a symphony "must be like the world, it must embrace everything" and in this gigantic work he fulfils that pronouncement perhaps more than in any other. This will be its first performance in the Highlands, in the new version for chamber orchestra by Rob Farmer.

Tickets are on sale now from www.mahlerplayers.co.uk or you can scan the QR code below.



With warm thanks to

The Members of the Mahler Circle and HRI-Munro Architecture

The Mahler Circle - members

Thomas Baxter and Benjamin Mawston (Rossmor Guesthouse)

Sandra and John Black

David and Fiona Johnson

Ash Johnston

Professor Sue Lightman

Leo and Cathy McClymont

Dr Helen Robinson

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.

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