



Wagner: *Parsifal* Act 2

20th and 21st September 2025. Inverness Cathedral and Strathpeffer Pavilion

Welcome to today's concert.

Pierre Boulez

Initiale pour sept cuivres

Richard Wagner

Albumbblatt für Frau Betty Schott

Parsifal Act 2

Cast (in order of appearance)

Klingsor Sir John Tomlinson

Kundry Magdalena Anna Hofmann

Flower Maidens Catriona Clark, Jessica Leary and Laura Margaret Smith

Parsifal Julian Hubbard

The Mahler Players

Conducted by Tomas Leakey

Sung in German with English surtitles

Translation by Simon Rees

Version for chamber orchestra re-orchestrated by Matthew King.

Running time c.80 minutes. *Please note, there will be no interval in this concert.*

Pierre Boulez (1925 - 2016) was one of the most influential figures in the music of the second half of the 20th century. Initially an uncompromising advocate of serialist (twelve-tone) music, as he got older his approach softened and his compositions are notable for their fantasy and exploration of instrumental timbre.

As well as a composer Boulez was a hugely important conductor, mostly of the music of other 20th century masters, but also of Wagner. He conducted *Parsifal* many times at Bayreuth from 1966 onwards, his first season there coinciding with the final year of Wieland Wagner's famous postwar production. He also was the conductor of the centenary production of the Ring Cycle in 1976 by Patrice Chéreau.

We celebrate Boulez's centenary with a performance of his *Initiale*. A short virtuosic piece for seven brass instruments, it has fanfare-like elements and is an extraordinary distillation of his later style. It was composed in 1987 and revised in 2010, just six years before his death.

Albumblatt für Frau Betty Schott

Wagner wrote a number of piano works throughout his life. His final piano piece, *Albumblatt für Frau Betty Schott* dates from 1875, and was composed for the widow of Wagner's publisher Franz Schott. It is probably Wagner's most successful and refined composition for piano solo: a richly contrapuntal miniature tone poem, woven out of an intricately ornamented hymn-like theme that seems to echo motifs from the operas that precede it (*Die Meistersinger* and Act III of *Siegfried*). The organic structure and highly personal polyphonic harmony are typical of Wagner's late style.

A curious feature of Wagner's genius however is the way in which his compositional material tends always to evoke orchestral sound. On a piano, the sustained legato textures of this music can disappear, and the sonority can seem a little too dry. In undertaking to clothe the music with orchestral sound, I was very conscious of the beautiful chamber-like interplay of instrumental sound that characterises Wagner's late orchestral writing. This version of the *Albumblatt* is therefore scored for the same ensemble that Wagner used for his *Siegfried Idyll* with the intention of exploring, through a variety of timbres, the expressive polyphony of melodic lines in this exquisite and rarely played miniature.

Tonight's reorchestration of Act 2 of *Parsifal* continues a project that began last year with the Mahler Players' premiere of my reduction of Act III for chamber orchestra. Debussy once declared *Parsifal* to be "one of the loveliest monuments of sound ever raised to the serene glory of music" and he told Stravinsky that he had only ever encountered "orchestral infallibility" in Wagner's final opera. In rescoring Act 2, it has been instructive to observe and respond to Wagner's orchestral imagination shifting magically from the brooding darkness of Klingsor's sorcery to the voluptuous thrills and terrors of the later scenes. It's a roller-coaster ride!

Matthew King, September 2025

Wagner is best known today as a composer of operas, yet the word 'composer' does not fully do justice to the scope of his work and vision, nor 'operas' to the grandeur of his artistic achievements. He was indeed a composer so revolutionary that almost everything composed afterwards seemed either to be influenced by him or reacting against him. Yet he was also a writer of epic poetry; of theoretical texts on aesthetics, philosophy, music and politics; an important figure in German nationalism; a conductor; and an impresario. He delved into Teutonic and Norse mythologies to create subject matter for his art, and

also the founding myths for the fledgling state of unified Germany. In doing so he became a writer and political figure of such renown that, before most music lovers had heard a note of his music, he was an intellectual celebrity across Europe – it is often claimed that he is the most written-about figure after Jesus Christ and Napoleon Bonaparte.

Much of Wagner's theorising took place in manifesto-style publications, notably *Art and Revolution* and *The Artwork of the Future*, both published in 1849, and his book *Opera and Drama* of 1851. He advocated for the unification of arts into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (a 'total artwork'), which should be rooted in folklore – a pertinent notion in the nationalistic context of the nineteenth century, when disparate kingdoms of Italy and Germany unified into new nation states that needed folk histories and mythology to create shared cultural ancestry.

Amidst the broad sweep of his thought were also practical, technical innovations, such as the idea of a darkened auditorium for performances, and the invention of the modern 'orchestra pit' to allow the singers to be heard and seen more clearly; his vision for a new way of experiencing theatre was so extensive that in order to fully execute it, he had his own theatre built at Bayreuth.

Wagner's music dramas were often composed on a vast scale, with large orchestras, hugely demanding vocal parts and sometimes enormous durations. He drove the drama along with harmony that was strikingly radical not just in its embracing of added 'colour' and dissonance, but in the way he built up moments of tension on top of one another. He would then delay the resolution of this tension to create a sense of yearning, finally released in moments of ecstasy that are almost unmatched within music.

He used musical symbolism to enrich the drama within his operas, thanks to his invention of the *leitmotif*. These short fragments of melody corresponded to a particular character, place, object or emotion. Spun together in musical counterpoint, they create a complex web of extra-musical meaning, operating on an almost subconscious level – a network of musical and dramatic memories that live in his audience's minds.

Parsifal was Wagner's final music drama, premiered in 1882 at the recently-completed Bayreuth opera house. However it was conceived much earlier, in 1857, during the twelve year break between Acts 2 and 3 of *Siegfried*, the penultimate part of the *Ring Cycle*, when he also created *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Meistersinger*.

As in the other major works Wagner drafted at this time, *Parsifal* has its roots in northern European myth and legend, which he considered the source of authentic German culture. *Parsifal* concerns the quest for the Holy Grail by the Arthurian knight known as Percival, Perceval or Parzival (in Old English, French and German respectively). It is a Christian

epic with ancient origins, but also a story of heroism inspired by true love, and a metaphor for the Buddhist search for enlightenment – a new interest for Wagner at the time.

Legend has it that two relics from Christ's final days – the chalice used at the Last Supper, known as the Holy Grail, and a fragment of the Spear that wounded Christ on the cross – were guarded by a brotherhood of knights, and in *Parsifal* the Grail's sanctuary is in a mythical location in Spain, called Monsalvat. In the *Prelude* to Act 1, the scene is set with a through-composed piece of orchestral music, whose breadth, shimmering textures and frequent silences help to create a reverential, mystical atmosphere.

Act 1 begins in a forest glade and introduces the Kingdom of the Grail, ruled by Amfortas, whose father Titurel ruled before him. An old knight, Gurnemanz, cares for Amfortas, who was wounded by the Spear when the fallen knight Klingsor stole it. Klingsor has since become a magician. Gurnemanz is seeking a 'pure fool made wise through compassion' who, according to prophesy, will be able to cure Amfortas. Kundry, a woman suspected of witchcraft, arrives with a healing balsam, before Parsifal wanders into the scene bearing a swan he has killed. Kundry quizzes him, and it seems that Parsifal knows almost nothing about himself – could he be the 'pure fool'? The knights bear Amfortas back to the Grail castle, bringing Parsifal with them. There, Amfortas reveals the Grail and they take Communion, before he is borne off again in a procession, wound gaping.

Act 2 takes place in the domain of the ex-knight, now magician, Klingsor. He summons Kundry, who is under his spell, and compels her to seduce Parsifal. Having obtained the Spear, Klingsor hopes to destroy Parsifal and prevent him saving the knights of the Grail. Parsifal has fought his way to Klingsor's enchanted garden and is being caressed by flower maidens. Kundry then arrives, transformed into a great beauty, and tries to win him over with memories from his childhood. She says she saw Parsifal suckling at his mother's breast, and that his mother died because he left her and never returned. She elicits a kiss from him, asking for the love he owes his mother. He rejects Kundry's further entreatments and realises this is the very kind of corruption that caused Amfortas's undoing. Kundry then tries to elicit sympathy from Parsifal, telling him how, ever since she laughed at Christ on the cross, she has endured a curse of unending life through rebirths, alternating between service to the knights of the Grail and to Klingsor. Parsifal has realised that Kundry caused Klingsor's downfall, and resists her as she and Klingsor attempt to stop him leaving; Klingsor hurls the Spear, which Parsifal takes and uses to make the sign of the cross; the castle and magic garden – Klingsor's domain – collapse and disappear.

Act 3 takes place years later, in spring at the Grail Kingdom. The aged, reclusive Gurnemanz revives the near-lifeless Kundry. An armoured Parsifal arrives with the Spear;

Gurnemanz recognises him and asks him to disarm as it is Good Friday. Parsifal learns that Amfortas, longing for death, has ceased to reveal the Grail, the knights are in disarray, and Titurel has died. Kundry and Gurnemanz bathe, bless, and anoint Parsifal, who in turn baptises Kundry. Good Friday and Christ's sacrifice are mirrored in spring's renewal. The Grail, Amfortas's litter and Titurel's coffin are carried to the Hall of the Grail. Amfortas refuses to uncover the Grail, daring the knights to kill him. Parsifal appears, heals Amfortas with the Spear. Kundry, redeemed, dies. Parsifal becomes the new lord of the Grail, taking the gleaming chalice and blessing the knights with it, whilst a white dove floats above him.

Anthony Friend

Sir John Tomlinson *Klingsor*

Sir John Tomlinson was born in Lancashire. He gained a B.Sc. in Civil Engineering at Manchester University before winning a scholarship to the Royal Manchester College of Music in 1967. He received the Royal Philharmonic Society Music Award for Singer in 1991, 1998 and 2007 and in 2014 their Gold Medal. He was awarded a CBE in 1997 and knighted in the Queen's Birthday Honours of 2005.

Sir John's career spans five decades across the world, including 18 Bayreuth Festivals (he is known particularly for his portrayals of the great Wagner roles), over fifty roles at Covent Garden, and a similar number at the English National Opera (ENO), where he was a member of the Company in the 1970s.

Recent engagements include Swallow in PETER GRIMES (ROH), the title role in Shakespeare's KING LEAR (Grange Festival), and the title role in THE MIKADO (ENO). Engagements in 2025 have included the role of Grandpa in the world premiere of Mark-Anthony Turnage's FESTEN at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, Titurel in the new production of PARSIFAL and Dikoj in KÁŤA KABANOVÁ at the Glyndebourne Festival. Sir John continues to give concerts in the UK and throughout the world.

Magdalena Anna Hofmann *Kundry*

Magdalena Anna Hofmann was born in Warsaw, completed her vocal training in Vienna and started as a mezzo-soprano. She has performed roles like Leonore (*Fidelio*), Carlotta (*Die Gezeichneten*), Marschallin (*Der Rosenkavalier*), Giorgetta (*Il Tabarro*), Isolde (*Tristan und Isolde*), Sieglinde (*Die Walküre*), Brünnhilde (*Die Walküre, Siegfried*) and Kundry (*Parsifal*) at the opera houses and festivals of Bologna, Budapest, Copenhagen, Dresden, Hannover, Lyon, Salzburg, Tianjin, Wiesbaden and Vienna (Theater an der Wien). She has worked

with conductors and stage directors such as Daniele Gatti, Adam Fischer, Kirill Petrenko, Daniel Harding; Johannes Erath, David Pountney and Keith Warner.

In the 2025/26 season Magdalena will make her debuts in the title role of *Elektra* in a new production at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein as well as Ortrud (*Lohengrin*) in Tenerife. She will also perform the role of Marie in *Wozzeck* conducted by Charles Dutoit in Shanghai, and Brünnhilde and Sieglinde at the Budapest Wagner Days, conducted by Adam Fischer. In addition to her operatic performances she will sing Tove in Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* in Liepāja, Latvia.

Julian Hubbard *Parsifal*

Julian Hubbard trained at the Royal College of Music and the National Opera Studio in London. He has performed at opera houses and festivals worldwide, including at the Salzburg Festival, La Monnaie, Brussels, Rome Opera, Staatsoper Stuttgart, Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe, Teatro Nacional de Sao Carlos, Lisbon, Irish National Opera and Scottish Opera.

Highlights have included **Lars** in the world premiere of *Festen* at The Royal Opera House, **Gallo** in the world premiere of Miroslav Srnka's *Voice Killer* at Theater an der Wien, the title role of **Parsifal** for Teatro Massimo, Palermo, La Monnaie, Brussels and with the Danish National Symphony Orchestra, **Siegfried** (*Die Walküre*) for Stadttheater Klagenfurt and in concert for Volksoper Wien and **Froh** (*Das Rheingold*) for English National Opera. He has also appeared with the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, at the Edinburgh and Aldeburgh Festivals, at Wigmore Hall and with BBC Radio 3.

This season he makes his role debut as **Erik** *Der fliegende Holländer* at Opéra de Rouen, performs the world premiere of Francesconi's *Timon Études* at Teatro Regio di Parma, and joins the Berner Symphonieorchester as the tenor soloist in Beethoven's 9th Symphony.

Catriona Clark *Flower Maiden*

Scottish soprano Catriona Clark graduated with Distinction from both the RCM and RCS winning many of their prestigious prizes. Catriona has performed many roles including Violetta (*La Traviata*), Hanna Glawari (the Merry Widow), Cio Cio San (*Madame Butterfly*), Mimi and Musetta (*La Bohème*), Marie (*La Fille du Régiment*), Susanna (*Le Nozze di Figaro*), Tytania (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Frasquita/Micaela (*Carmen*), Pamina/Papagena (*Die Zauberflöte*) with companies including the Royal Opera Linbury Studio, Scottish Opera, Diva Opera, Opera Bohemia, Opera Project and London Festival Opera and at festivals including Les Azuriales in Cap Ferrat, Festival de Vézère and the Edinburgh International Festival.

For Scottish Opera performances include Suor Osmina (*Suor Angelica*), Berta (*Barber of Seville* access shows), Frasquita (*Carmen* access shows) *Madame Mao* (*Nixon in China*

unwrapped), L'Elisir d'amore (cover Adina), La Boheme (cover Musetta), Così fan Tutte (cover Fiordiligi), Gilbert and Sullivan's Gondoliers (cover Gianetta) and Utopia Limited (cover Princess Zara).

Career highlights include performing Adèle in Die Fledermaus alongside Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, Jose Carreras, Alfie Boe, Bryn Terfel and Diva Opera in the Royal Albert Hall, performing the world premiere of Demimondaine by John Frederick Hudson and recently recording the role of the Banshee (Shamus O'Brien) for Retrospect Opera with the Orchestra of Scottish Opera.

Jessica Leary *Flower Maiden*

Described as 'a polished and radiant soprano' (Opera Magazine), Jessica Leary has worked throughout the UK and abroad with companies including Scottish Opera, Bayreuth Festival, Grange Festival Opera, Buxton International Festival, Iford Arts, Dunedin Consort, RedNote Ensemble, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, and at venues and festivals including Edinburgh International Festival and Barbican Centre.

Recent highlight performances include her debut at the Edinburgh International Festival in the role of *Lynne* in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *A Grand Night for Singing*, Second Woman in the world premiere of Wallen's *Dido's Ghost* with Mahogany Opera at The Barbican Centre, London, and Tebaldo in *Don Carlo* for Grange Park Opera. For Scottish Opera she has performed several times as the Soprano Soloist for the Pop-Up Opera Tour, Euridice *Orfeo & Euridice* with the Young Company, Sandman (Cover) *Hansel and Gretel*, Cis/Emmie/Harry (Cover) *Albert Herring*, Eurydice *Orpheus in the Underworld* (Education Tour) and Helena *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Further operatic roles include Edelknabe *Lohengrin* (Bayreuth Festival), Damigella & Venere *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (Aldeburgh), Iphis *Jephta* (Iford Opera). On the concert platform, Jessica has sung regularly with Dunedin Consort in works such as Bach *St Matthew Passion* and Blow *Venus and Adonis* (Cupid), and Villa-Lobos *Bachianas Brasileiras* with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra (recorded for BBC Radio 3).

Alongside her singing work, Jessica holds teaching posts at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and the Universities of St Andrews and Edinburgh, and is an examiner for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM).

Laura Margaret Smith *Flower Maiden*

Scottish mezzo-soprano Laura Margaret Smith is an award-winning performer, hailed by *Gramophone* magazine as "a name to watch." Laura has performed operatic roles including Waltraute (*Götterdämmerung*, Edinburgh Players Opera Group), Brangäne (*Tristan und Isolde*, Mahler Players), Edelknabe (*Tannhäuser*, Bayreuth Festival), Eudamia (*Dorilla in Tempe*, Wexford Festival Opera), Siebel (*Faust*) and Lola (*Cavalleria Rusticana*) for Paisley Opera/Scottish Opera, Title role *Carmen* and Olga (*Eugene Onegin*) for the Edinburgh

International Festival Discover Opera Project. She has appeared in productions at Scottish Opera, Wexford Festival Opera, Opera Holland Park, Opera Bohemia and NOISE. Recently she sung Erda (*Das Rheingold*) and Waltraute in concert with Susan Bullock and Lionel Friend and was a member of the acclaimed Bayreuth Festival Chorus for ten years.

On the concert stage, she has performed at Wigmore Hall, Melbourne Recital Centre, Royal Festival Hall, and for BBC Radio 3. Laura is a keen interpreter of contemporary music and has collaborated with Red Note Ensemble, Psappha Ensemble, Opera Mahogany, Scottish Voices and Hamburg State Opera/PODIUM Festival. She has premiered and recorded works by John Maxwell Geddes (Delphian Records) and her upcoming duet album with Myrna Tennant features works by Brahms, Mendelssohn, Graham Hair and Jack Body.

Laura is a former Scottish Opera Emerging Artist, a graduate of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and alumna of the Georg Solti Accademia, Samling Institute, and Britten Pears. She is a vocal coach for NYCOS and RSNO Youth Chorus and works regularly with the Edinburgh International Festival's Discovery and Participation programmes.

The Mahler Players were founded by Tomas Leakey in 2013 as a seven-piece ensemble which has gradually expanded in scope to the current orchestra of around 40 players.

We have performed chamber orchestra versions of most of Mahler's music. More recently we have also had a focus on Wagner and Beethoven. We have worked with some of the greatest singers of our era, including numerous collaborations with Sir John Tomlinson, and were joined in 2023 and 2024 by Anthony Negus as guest conductor. In 2021 we released our acclaimed debut album, featuring the world premiere recording of Matthew King's *Richard Wagner in Venice: A Symphony*.

Tomas Leakey

Founder and Music Director of the Mahler Players, Tomas also works with the Aberdeen City Orchestra and is the conductor of the Highland Regional Youth Orchestra. He has a particular interest in the music of Wagner and his performances have included complete acts from *Die Walküre*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Siegfried* and *Parsifal* as well as excerpts from *Lobengrin*, *Tannhäuser*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and *Götterdämmerung*.

Tomas began his musical life as a trombonist. He studied with and was encouraged in his conducting by the formidable late George Hurst and undertook further study with Denise Ham at the London Conducting Academy. Remaining highlights of 2025 include performances of Brahms' Fourth Symphony with the Aberdeen City Orchestra (27th September) and Bruckner's Third Symphony with the Mahler Players (7th December).

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 Harris String Quartet and the Cairdeas Trio. She is also an accomplished composer; her works have been performed by several string quartets in the UK. Emma is one half of a contemporary folk duo with harpist Isbel Pendlebury. Their original music was featured as part of “The Farewell Glacier”, a programme broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in January 2024.

FIRST VIOLIN

Emma Donald (leader), Emily Birse,
Ruth Kalitski, Deborah Nealon, David
Murray

SECOND VIOLIN

Andrew Birse, Alexandra Darolti-
Farquhar, Ellis Ash, Hazel Younger

VIOLA

Rachel Farmer, Anna Morrison,
Bernhard Nicolás Ersfeld Mandujano

CELLO

Kate Ellingson, Joe Donmall, Calle
Arngrip

DOUBLE BASS

Chris Sergeant, Joe Standley

FLUTE Babs Crocker

OBOE Leslie Callander

COR ANGLAIS Krys Hawryszczuk

CLARINET Mhairi Callander,
Mike Weare (doubling BASS
CLARINET)

BASSOON Bruce Gordon, Kate Smith

FRENCH HORN Rob Farmer, Wendy
Ritchie, Christine McGinley, Emma
Winchester

TRUMPET Alasdair Grant, Callum
Robb

TROMBONE Mark Bell, Dave Allan

TUBA Gavin Woods

TIMPANI Ally Russell

HARP Erica Sinclair

SURTITLES OPERATOR Mike Crocker

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