



Bruckner: The Third Symphony

Sunday 7th December 2025. Inverness Cathedral

Welcome to our concert.

Mozart: Overture to *Don Giovanni*

Bruckner: Symphony No. 3 (1st version, 1873)

I. *Gemäßigt, misterioso*

II. Adagio. *Feierlich*

III. Scherzo. *Ziemlich schnell. Trio. Gleiches Zeitmaß*

IV. Finale. *Allegro*

The Mahler Players, conducted by Tomas Leakey

Please note there will be no interval in this concert. The approximate duration is 1 hour and 20 minutes.

Don Giovanni by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756 – 1791) was premiered at the Estates Theatre in Prague on 29th October 1787, conducted by the composer himself. The libretto was written by Lorenzo Da Ponte, with whom Mozart also collaborated on *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786) and *Così fan tutte* (1789/90). *Don Giovanni* is Mozart's darkest opera but simultaneously full of the humour and sheer force of life which characterises the other Da Ponte operas. The action opens with the title character, an aristocratic seducer, being challenged by the Commendatore, the father of one of his conquests. Don Giovanni wins the fight and kills him. As the opera continues he gets into progressively deeper water until eventually he meets his match, when the Commendatore returns as a undead statue and defeats him, dragging him to the underworld.

As was Mozart's habit, he composed the overture last, completing it the day before the premiere. It commences with a dramatic *Andante*, which uses musical material from the terrifying penultimate scene in which Don Giovanni meets his fate. This is followed by an energetic and utterly contrasting *Molto allegro*. In performances of the opera the overture segues directly into the first aria but today we will perform Mozart's own alternative ending for concert performances.

Anton Bruckner (1824 – 1896) was born near Linz in Upper Austria and learned the organ from an early age. He initially followed his family line into the school-teaching profession and took up music full-time at the age of 32, winning the audition to be organist in Linz. His first attempt at a symphony, the F minor "Study Symphony", came

in 1863, the same year in which he finished formal studies in composition. He moved to Vienna in 1868 to take up the professorship in Organ, Counterpoint and Figured Bass at the *Konservatorium der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* (the forerunner of today's University of Music and Performing Arts), and spent the rest of his life in the city, producing nine of his eleven symphonies there.

Bruckner began composing the Third Symphony in autumn 1872, shortly after completing his Second. The first three movements were finished by July 1873 and in August the composer took a holiday in Kurort Marienbad, a spa town in the present-day Czech Republic. Here he finished the main sketch of the finale. On his way back to Vienna he took a detour via the Bavarian town of Bayreuth, where, unannounced, he knocked on Richard Wagner's door. The legendary composer was hard at work on *Götterdämmerung* but invited Bruckner in and they spent the afternoon and evening together, during which Bruckner presented to Wagner the manuscripts of his Second and Third Symphonies. He expressed his wish to dedicate one of them, of the Master's own choosing, to Wagner. To Bruckner's great joy, Wagner agreed and chose the Third. The symphony was complete by the end of 1873, but was rejected for performance in trial rehearsals with the Vienna Philharmonic in 1874 and again in 1875, with its great length cited as one of the reasons. Consequently Bruckner set about cutting and revising the symphony, with the next main version (1877) still rejected by the Vienna Philharmonic but accepted by the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde at the insistence of conductor Johannes Herbeck. However, Herbeck died between the inception of the plan and the concert, with the performance eventually conducted by Bruckner himself. It was a great humiliation; in rehearsals the orchestral musicians were rude and obstructive, and during the performance the public gradually left, with only a small number of his most ardent supporters remaining at the end. These enthusiasts included a young man by the name of Gustav Mahler, who later was entrusted with the task of preparing a piano reduction of the symphony. Ten years passed before Bruckner returned to make further cuts and revisions, eventually leading to the 1889 version, which was finally accepted by the Vienna Philharmonic and premiered in 1890. This 1889 version was how the symphony was known to the world for many years, before the earlier versions came to light and were published. Today's original 1873 version was first performed in December 1946 by the Staatskapelle Dresden conducted by Joseph Keilberth. However, it was not published as part of the complete edition until 1977 and there were no further performances between 1947 and 1978.

Bruckner's Third Symphony has the nickname "*Wagner-Symphony*". This is due to its dedication and the numerous allusions and quotes from Wagner's music which it contains. Most of these only appear in the original 1873 version, being cut from later revisions. It is not clear from surviving sources whether the Wagner allusions were an original part of Bruckner's concept or if they were added subsequently to Wagner's acceptance of the dedication (if Wagner had instead chosen the second symphony, would

that have been the one to incorporate the quotes?). Interestingly there are hardly any *direct* quotes, with the harmony always slightly different from the original. Whether this was deliberate or not we will never know. Although scores for the Wagner works quoted had been published, Bruckner may or may not have had access to one; it is possible that he was working from his aural memory of a concert of excerpts including from *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Walküre* which Wagner had conducted in Vienna in 1872.

Beethoven and Schubert, and especially their Ninth and *Unfinished* Symphonies respectively, were also crucial models for Bruckner. Perhaps most obviously, Bruckner's symphonies often emerge out of a haze, building to a unison climax like in the first movement of Beethoven's Ninth. The Third also takes other aspects of the Ninth, for instance the chromatically descending bass line in the first movement's coda, the juxtaposition of contrasting themes in duple and triple time in the slow movement and the quotation of themes from the first three movements in the finale.

However, despite the importance of his forebears, Bruckner is one of the most individual composers. His voice, especially from the Third Symphony onwards, could be no-one else. His works are unique in the repertoire, with their compelling combination of the radical and the archaic, colossal structures and exquisite detail, adventurous harmony and voice-leading grounded in the Renaissance and Baroque. It is also worth mentioning that Bruckner was an extraordinary improviser on the organ. He was celebrated for his virtuosity, especially during tours to Nancy and Paris (1869) and London (1871). His facility to improvise effortlessly may partly account for why he was so willing and able to continuously adapt and revise his symphonies; the concept of a "definitive" version of Bruckner's works is arguably not as relevant as with other composers.

We hope you enjoy today's performance of this remarkable and rarely played symphony.

Tomas Leakey

The Mahler Players were founded by Tomas Leakey in 2013.

We have performed chamber orchestra versions of Mahler's First, Third, 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*, Acts 2 and 3 from *Parsifal* and substantial sections of music from *Götterdämmerung* 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 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 Leahey (conductor)

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

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.

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.

The Orchestra

FIRST VIOLIN

Emma Donald (leader), Simon Evans,
David Murray, Francis Moore-Colyer,
Josie Robertson, Jerome Robertson,
Heather Lanz

SECOND VIOLIN

Alexandra Darolti-Farquhar, Rachel
Farmer, Ellis Ash, Hazel Younger,
Paula Starritt, Matthew Gallacher,
Christian Badentz

VIOLA

Adam Csenki, Anna Morrison, Berent
Korfker, Catherine Mackay

CELLO

Kate Ellingson, Steve Collisson, Ed
Pendrous, David Palazzo, Imke
Henderson

DOUBLE BASS

Tam Darlugdach, Adrian Maitland,
Hector Waudby-West,

FLUTE Ruth Binks, Babs Crocker

OBOE Leslie Callander, Krysztof
Hawryszczuk

CLARINET Mhairi Callander,
Mike Weare

BASSOON Bruce Gordon, Baz
Chapman

FRENCH HORN Rob Farmer,
William Jamieson, Emma Winchester,
Gill Cammack

TRUMPET Harry Marshall, David
Cooper, Sjoerd Tel

TROMBONE Mark Bell, Hannah
Arora, Joe Scott

TIMPANI Ally Russell

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Our next concerts

Sunday 22nd March 2026

12 noon and 4pm (two performances on the same day)

Strathpeffer Pavilion

Beethoven Symphony No. 1 in C major

interval

Beethoven Symphony No. 2 in D major

Tomas Leakey *conductor*

£25 Standard

£15 Discretionary concession *

£10 Under-26s

£5 under-18s

* Explaining our new symphonic ticket pricing. Thank you to the many audience members who engaged with our recent survey. We included a request for feedback about our pricing and a space to give a suggestion of the ideal ticket price for one of our concerts. The average (mean) suggestion was £25. It is important for the sustainability of the orchestra that we support ourselves by covering a high enough proportion of our costs through ticket sales. With this in mind, and listening to the message received via our survey, we have updated our standard price and removed the previous concession for audience members over the age of 60. However, there was feedback from some of you that an increase in price would make it hard for you to attend, so alongside this necessary price increase we are trialling a new and cheaper concession rate of £15. Unlike the old concession rate, which was linked to age, student- or employment-status, this new concession is entirely discretionary. It can be purchased by anyone regardless of age and there is no requirement to provide evidence of need. We trust you, our valued audience, to choose the right option for you.

To encourage the next generation of concert-goers, we retain our original reduced rates of £10 for under-26s and £5 for under-18s (I.D. may be checked).

As previously there is the option to make an additional donation during the checkout process. This is currently set by default to £5 but can easily be removed or changed.

Thank you for your understanding!

Tickets for our Beethoven performances in Strathpeffer Pavilion on Sunday 22nd March 2026 are available now via www.mahlerplayers.co.uk.

With warm thanks to

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David and Fiona Johnson

Ash Johnston

Thomas Baxter and Benjamin Mawston
(Rossmor Guesthouse)

Professor Sue Lightman

Alan Maitland

Leo and Cathy McClymont

Dr Helen Robinson

Benefits of the Mahler Circle membership include complimentary tickets with reserved seating, acknowledgement in our programmes and occasional invitations to post-concert receptions. If you would be interested in finding out more about the Mahler Circle please get in touch: contact@mahlerplayers.co.uk.

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In May 2026 the Mahler Players plan to undertake our biggest challenge yet.

Wagner: *Parsifal* (complete) semi-staged performance

These will be the first complete performances of *Parsifal* in Scotland since 2003. The cast will include Sir John Tomlinson, Magdalena Anna Hofmann and Peter Wedd.

- Thursday 28th May and Sunday 31st May 2026, Inverness Cathedral

Approximate duration: 6 hours (including two intervals of 1h 15m and 25m).

Tickets will go on sale in early 2026. If you would like to support us in the meantime with a donation towards this project, small or large, we'd love to hear from you.

The Mahler Players is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) Charity
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