



# BBC SCOTTISH SYMPHONY CLUB

Honorary President Donald Runnicles OBE

Autumn 2019

## Newsletter

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**In this issue:**  
touring at home and abroad, the BBC Proms, recording Bartók and more

## We're back on the road again...

Music, and especially live music, has the power to soothe even the savage breast. After quite a challenging year for the Club, a sizeable audience was treated on 7 October to a highly enjoyable first concert of the new season, featuring the Doune Bassoon Quartet who, as a quartet, last played for the Club in 2012 (though individual players have entertained us since).

More events are on the way and the next Club concert will be on Monday 9 December (see the back cover for a calendar of dates). Much of this renewed activity is down to the help of the Players' Committee of the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra (hereafter BBC SSO) and, in particular, the work of cellist Gill de Groote who returns as our liaison contact.

The age profile of the membership means that we tend to lose more members than we recruit and this process was accelerated (though only a little) by the hiatus in the Club's affairs during 2018-2019. At the time of writing numbers are standing at over 80% of the membership as it stood in 2017-2018. I think that's a good result and we are very grateful to those who have renewed. We are also very pleased to welcome several new members to the Club.

Nonetheless, we need to recruit, and so I repeat the dictum of my predecessor, the late Eileen Robertson, who used to say that if every member could recruit one person each we would quickly double our numbers and be better

able to look forward to a more stable future for the Club.

In this edition of the Newsletter, I am very pleased to include a column from the Director of the BBC SSO, Dominic Parker. It covers the exciting project on which the BBC SSO has recently embarked, the recording of all of the music for orchestra by the great Hungarian composer Béla Bartók. Dominic also writes about the orchestra's forthcoming tour of Japan (30 October to 4 November).

And, speaking of tours, a good part of this Newsletter is taken up with an article that shows just how hard this orchestra works over the summer period when many of us are enjoying lengthy vacations or, as retirees, seemingly endless vacations!

We have the usual features about new recordings issued by the orchestra (including the much praised *Kullervo*, the CD cover of which is on the front of this Newsletter) as well as news about comings and goings at the BBC SSO, and some happy events in the personal lives of the players away from the stage. There are concert reports, of the recitals by Mark O'Keefe and Sasha Savaloni (following May's Annual General Meeting) and by the Bassoon Quartet.

### ...but we must have help to keep going!

The Club's Annual General Meeting in May agreed that the Club could be relaunched if the players could guarantee at least four concerts per annum and if volunteers from the membership came forward to take over in early 2020 from the present

Committee (all but one of whom announced they wished to stand down by the end of the Club's financial year, 29 February 2020).

Unfortunately, we still need help with some of the core tasks that keep the Club functioning. What are these jobs? They are keeping accurate accounts of the Club's finances (straightforward but essential); next, editing the Club Newsletter (currently using nothing more technical than Microsoft Word); thirdly, managing the membership lists and issuing concert notices and other publicity based on those lists; and lastly, as Club President, overall co-ordination of these activities, plus working with the BBC SSO, particularly the liaison person, to ensure that we have a programme of recitals for our members.

If you feel you could help, please get in touch with me as soon as possible, so that we can build a new team to manage the Club. Meanwhile, be assured the 'old team' will ensure the commitment to a full 2019-2020 season is honoured.

Finally, my usual plea: if anyone reading this Newsletter would like to contribute an article, humorous or serious, musical or otherwise, don't hesitate – call the editor! Copy deadline is 31 January 2020.

Jim McGrath

**FRONT COVER:** The very striking cover of the new recording of *Kullervo* (see page 9) is 'A knight rode on' from *Among Gnomes and Trolls* by John Bauer, 1882-1918. (Courtesy Hyperion Records)

## Club Management Committee

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## From Dominic Parker, Director BBC SSO



### The Bartók Recording Project

Friday 15 November is the release date for the first disc in the BBC SSO's ambitious plan to record the complete orchestral works of Béla Bartók (1881-1945) with Chief Conductor Thomas Dausgaard. This major undertaking, on the Onyx label, will take place over several seasons, with the aim to record a major work alongside some of Bartók's lesser known pieces on each disc. Thomas Dausgaard introduces the series and the first disc:

*"To celebrate the great scope and stylistic variety in Bartók's works, this new series of his orchestral works aims at bringing together on each disc two or more stylistically contrasting works. Whether inspired by impressionistic or late romantic music, by Gypsy music as heard on the streets of Budapest, peasant music from Hungary and Eastern Europe, Arabian music around the Mediterranean, or in a synthesis of many influences towards the end of his life, Bartók's music speaks to us with an irresistible vitality, passion, humour and compelling seriousness. No more so than in this first disc's youthfully exuberant Suite No.1 (recorded by us in its uncut original version – the first time on record) and his last completed orchestral work, the Concerto for Orchestra (in our performance incorporating Bartók's final changes), where remarkably he returns to the 5 movement structure of the First Suite."*

The *Concerto for Orchestra* was performed by the BBC SSO in Glasgow at the end of last season and then on tour in Salzburg prior to recording sessions taking place

in Glasgow in May. Much of the repertoire for CD Two is already recorded, and CD Three is in the planning. These will be released in coming seasons.

### BBC SSO tour of Japan

On Saturday 26 October, the orchestra leaves Glasgow to make its first ever tour to Japan, where it will perform six concerts with Chief Conductor Thomas Dausgaard in the inaugural BBC Proms Japan. International BBC Proms events have taken place before, but never in Japan, and never with the BBC SSO. And the orchestra has not travelled beyond Europe since the China tour over New Year in December 2014 - January 2015. More recent tours have taken us to Germany and Vienna, Holland, and Salzburg - but now with world attention focused on Japan, both for the current Rugby World Cup and the forthcoming 2020 Tokyo Olympics, it feels like a good time to be stretching our legs a little further.

Two years in the planning, it certainly promises to be a busy tour, and one that will enhance the reputation of the BBC SSO as an international orchestra playing at a very high level. We'll perform at two venues in Tokyo – the opening concert is at Suntory Hall, the most eminent classical venue in Japan, and then Orchard Hall in Bunkamura, in Shibuya district – a lively part of Tokyo where the audiences are younger and less traditional. We will also make an overnight trip to play at The Symphony Hall in Osaka (there is much excitement at travelling there on the famed Bullet Train) and, in conjunction with the British Council in Tokyo, we are planning music education work in Yokohama, which is the base of the Scottish Rugby team for the World Cup and a city which has signed a joint declaration of co-operation with Scotland.

The backbone of the music we'll perform in Japan is mirrored in the concerts performed in Glasgow and around Scotland in the early part of this current season: Mahler's Fifth Symphony, Sibelius' Second Symphony and Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances*, Bruch's First Violin Concerto and Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto, Elgar's Cello Concerto, and Mendelssohn's Hebrides Overture. We will also be playing Japanese composer Toshio Hosakawa's *Prelude*. And we'll be working with a fine mix of artists: the great violinist Vadim Repin joins us to perform Tchaikovsky's Concerto, and Yulianna Avdeeva, winner of the Chopin Competition in 2010 will play Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto in Glasgow and then in Japan. We are also joined by two Japanese rising stars on the international stage – Dai Miyata, who'll play the Elgar Cello Concerto, and Fumiaki Miura, who'll play the Bruch Violin Concerto. We have already worked with Dai during the summer when he came to Glasgow to record the Elgar – that disc will be released by Nippon Columbia whilst we are in Japan.

This tour being the BBC Proms Japan, there has to be a 'Last Night', and there certainly is – with a Japanese twist. The evening, which sold out months ago, is being hosted by Japanese violinist and TV personality Taro Hakase. Taro will perform some of his own works which are hugely popular in Japan. In addition, Japanese soprano Maki Mori will sing an eclectic mix of opera

arias and Japanese folk songs, and Vadim Repin will make another appearance, playing violin showpieces including Ravel's *Tzigane* and Waxman's *Carmen Fantasy*. British saxophonist Jess Gillam performs an arrangement of Milhaud's *Scaramouche*, which she played at the Last Night in London in 2018. And to remind us of home, Peter Maxwell Davies's *An Orkney*

*Wedding, with Sunrise*, will round off the final concert before we travel back to Glasgow.

Dominic Parker

## That Quiet Summer Season

Music lovers who live in central Scotland and who follow the orchestra's principal concerts in Glasgow (and to a lesser extent in other locales in Scotland) might think, if they think about it at all, that when the orchestra leaves the stage at the close of its final Thursday night series concert in the middle of May, downtime and a long summer vacation beckons.

The reality is, of course, much different: a four week vacation period in July sandwiched between tours and concerts away from home during the remainder of May, much of June and August and September. Many rock and pop songs lament the effects of life on the road away from family and loved ones (for anyone interested, a particularly sardonic take on the subject is Loudon Wainwright's "*Road Ode*", but there are many others). Although the rigours of orchestral gigging may be less demanding than those of rock and pop (if only because the organisational infrastructure is better and the fans less demonstrative), and though travel brings its own rewards, still, after a busy season of rehearsals, concerts and recordings there must be times when players long for a quieter life. But, each year that is not to be. The summer of 2019 would be as busy as most, and busier than some.



Statue to Mozart in Salzburg (Philip Burrell)

### Salzburg, 22-24 May

First came a visit in late May to Salzburg in Austria, the birthplace of that icon of the classical period of 'classical music', Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Playing Mozart would, however, have been the equivalent of carrying coals to Newcastle, and so the programmes over three days eschewed that master musician in favour of the late Romantics. All three concerts were given in the Grosses Festspielhaus and all were recorded for BBC Radio 3.

The first two concerts featured performances of the Piano Concerto No 1 in D minor by Brahms, a piece demanding of players and listeners alike if only because of its duration at nearly three-quarters of an hour, but a most rewarding piece nonetheless. The soloist was Elisabeth Leonskaja and the conductor throughout the tour was the BBC SSO's Chief Conductor, Thomas Dausgaard. The piece had already featured in Glasgow with the same soloist earlier in the month.



The BBC SSO rehearsing at Grosses Festspielhaus with Thomas Dausgaard and Elisabeth Leonskaja (piano). (Simon Butterworth)

Benjamin Britten famously disliked the music of Brahms and so, if there was to be a UK composer on the programme, one of his compositions was unlikely to partner the Brahms. Instead that honour went on the first night to Elgar's First Symphony and on the second night to Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*. Again, both pieces had featured in the Glasgow series earlier in the month.

The final concert saw another performance of the Elgar, but in the first half Elisabeth Leonskaja turned her talents to Robert Schumann's only Piano Concerto. This was preceded by a comparative rarity, the *Hungarian Sketches* by Bartók.

Audiences at each concert were treated to two encores from the orchestra.

The first was the *Andante Festivo* by Sibelius, while a Scottish flavour was provided by the second, an arrangement of traditional dances by Gordon Cree simply entitled *Eightsome Reels*.



Players backstage just before a concert at the Grosses Festspielhaus, Salzburg (Simon Butterworth)



The BBC SSO at the Grosses Festspielhaus in Salzburg, taking a bow, with conductor Thomas Dausgaard and piano soloist Elizabeth Leonskaja (Courtesy Grosses Festspielhaus)

## Orkney, 21-23 June

The orchestra's connection with the St Magnus Festival dates back to the advocacy of the late Martin Dalby (BBC Scotland's former Head of Music) and his determination to support the Festival in its earliest days. That link remains as strong today. The BBC SSO played three very varied concerts in Kirkwall and all were recorded for future broadcast.



BBC SSO truck outside St Magnus Cathedral (Gill de Groot)

The first, on 21 June, was in the beautiful surroundings of St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, and the focus was on the BBC SSO's string section, with Laura Samuel acting not just in her usual capacity as Leader but also as Director. The programme was of American and British music, some very popular, some less well known. The former was represented by Samuel Barber's famous *Adagio for Strings*, which probably first became really 'big' following its inclusion in Oliver Stone's Vietnam War film 'Platoon' and whose popularity was secured, in the UK at least, by the advent of Classic FM, where it is currently #11 in its 'Hall of Fame', coincidentally also its opus number! That radio station has also served some of the music of Ralph Vaughan Williams well, represented in the cathedral's acoustics by his magnificent *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (currently the Hall of Fame's #4). Turning to the less well-known, *For Sonny* is an early piece by Scotland's pre-eminent composer Sir James MacMillan which was written to commemorate a friend's grandson who had died a few days after birth. Originally for string quartet, the piece was performed in Kirkwall in a version for string orchestra, which the composer had debuted with the BBC SSO in 2014. Finally, the soprano Mary Bevan, a rising star, joined the strings of the BBC SSO to perform Benjamin Britten's superb *Les Illuminations*, composed in 1940 and comprising settings of some of Arthur Rimbaud's splendidly obscure poems.

The next concert was also in Kirkwall, but at the Picaquoy Centre Arena, a leisure and sports facility built in 1999. It has an auditorium seating 1,600. The conductor was now Ben Gernon (whom Glasgow audiences saw in May) and the repertoire was music

associated directly with the First World War and its aftermath. This tied in with this year's Festival's theme of 'Peace and Reconciliation'. The little known Rudi Stephan (1887-1915) was a German casualty of the First War and his brief *Music for Orchestra* commenced proceedings. It was followed by a far more famous work (in this country at least), Elgar's Cello Concerto of 1919, played by Jamal Aliyev, the young Turkish cellist who made a striking BBC Proms debut in 2017. The central work was a rarely performed cantata of 1936, *Dona Nobis Pacem* by Vaughan Williams. For this the BBC SSO was joined once more by soprano Mary Bevan, plus bass Neil Davies and the St Magnus Festival Chorus. The piece, a precursor of Britten's *War Requiem*, sets poems of Walt Whitman, passages from the Mass and the Bible - and Hansard (namely, John Bright's famous and passionate speech in Parliament at the time of the Crimean War: "*The Angel of Death has been abroad throughout the land; you may almost hear the beating of his wings*"). This is a must-hear piece. I hope it features in the BBC SSO's Thursday series before too long.

instance Ole Schmidt and his composition *Hommage*. The whole was brought to a close by Handel's brilliant suite written for George II in 1749 to celebrate the end of the War of the Austrian Succession, the famous and tuneful *Music for the Royal Fireworks*.

Some official BBC SSO filming took place while the orchestra was on Orkney, mainly in connection with various learning projects, for use on the BBC SSO's website.

### Edinburgh International Festival, 8 & 17 August

Next, the orchestra travelled to the Edinburgh International Festival, more easily accessible for its loyal following in the central belt of Scotland.

Chief Conductor Thomas Dausgaard was back on the rostrum for the first of two BBC SSO appearances at the Usher Hall. That concert opened with the UK premiere of *Glorious Percussion* by Sofia Gubaidulina, the contemporary Russian composer, in which the BBC SSO was joined by renowned Scottish percussionist Colin Currie and his ensemble. In the second half, audiences were treated to extensive excerpts from Grieg's complete music for Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* including such famous pieces as 'Morning' and 'In the Hall of the Mountain King'. The beautiful 'Solweig's Song' was sung by the soprano Malin Christensson.

The second concert, on Saturday 17 August, was conducted by Joana Carneiro, and featured works by Sir James MacMillan, namely *A Scotch Bestiary* and *Woman of the Apocalypse*. This concert was the BBC SSO's contribution to a theme that ran through the Festival this year, a five concert retrospective celebrating the composer's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday (and bringing together several first performances, though on this occasion none by the BBC SSO).

### BBC Proms, Royal Albert Hall, August 2, 3 & 13 and September 1

This year the BBC SSO again featured in 4 BBC Prom concerts at the Royal Albert Hall (nos 19, 20, 35, 58) and as can be seen from the dates these and the Edinburgh Festival dates overlapped.

Prom 19 on 2 August was conducted by Thomas Dausgaard and featured soloist Alexander Melnikov in Robert Schumann's Piano Concerto alongside performances of Richard Strauss's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* and Sir James MacMillan's *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*. Dausgaard remained at the helm for Prom 20 on the following day. This was a Scandinavian affair, in keeping with earlier 'Composer's Roots' programmes at previous seasons in Glasgow. This one focused on Jean Sibelius. Pekka Kuusisto (assisted by an ensemble of singers and folk musicians) traced the evolution of Finland's classical tradition from improvised folk beginnings to the brilliance of Sibelius's only Violin Concerto, and the whole was rounded off by a wonderful



At the Picaquoy Centre (Picaquoy Centre Trust)

The third concert, again at the Picaquoy Centre and again conducted by Ben Gernon, featured the brass, wind and percussion of the BBC SSO. Copland's famous wartime *Fanfare for the Common Man* was complemented by Joan Tower's response, a *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman*. In between there was Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*. It too had inspired another composer to put pen to paper, in this



The Royal Albert Hall, London (Courtesy of BBC SSO)



Ilan Volkov and the BBC SSO (Courtesy of BBC SSO)

performance of the same composer's Symphony No 5 but in its original 1915 four movement version. In fact, this was the UK performance premiere of that early version, which would be superseded by the three movement masterpiece of 1919 so well known today.

Martyn Brabbins was the conductor for Prom 35 on 13 August, and this was a special affair. Brabbins had asked fourteen composers (Dai Fujikura, David Sawer, Sally Beamish, Colin Matthews, Iris ter Schiphorst, Brett Dean, Wim Henderickx, Richard Blackford, Harrison Birtwistle, Judith Weir, Gavin Bryars, Kalevi Aho, Anthony Payne and John Pickard) to put together a piece to celebrate his own 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, the composite composition (a BBC commission) to be in the style of Elgar's 'Enigma Variations' and boldly entitled *Pictured Within: Birthday Variations for MCB*. The fourteen variations were on a mystery theme written by a composer who still prefers to remain anonymous. The piece was well received. On more familiar ground the audience next heard Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music* of 1939 which was commissioned and premiered by Sir Henry Wood (commissions or premieres by Wood being a theme in this year's Proms). This was in an unusual version for 4 soloists and chorus. Brabbins is Music Director of English National Opera and these soloists were drawn from ENO's Harewood Young Artists scheme. After the interval, the audience was treated to a relative rarity, Brahms's *Song of Destiny* for chorus and orchestra, before the evening closed with the piece that had inspired the opener, Elgar's famous 'Enigma Variations'.

The orchestra ended its 2019 BBC Proms performances in London on 1 September and this time the conductor was Ilan Volkov. The evening began with a BBC-commissioned world premiere by Canadian composer Linda Catlin Smith, called simply *Nuages*. Volkov's programming showed the imaginative flair that audiences have so come to admire. Next came *The Fiddler's Child* by Janáček, premiered in the UK by Wood in 1924, and Karol Szymanowski's *Love Songs of Hafiz* (sung by soprano Georgia Jarman). The second half was taken up by Tchaikovsky's Symphony No 2, 'The Little Russian'.

The BBC Proms connection was not finished. The BBC SSO returned home to perform the Glasgow element of 'Proms in the Park' on the Last Night, Saturday 14 September, with several guest artists (among them, Barbara Dickson and Scottish soprano Eleanor Dennis, the latter coincidentally a former ENO Harewood Artist). This popular (if somewhat cold) *al fresco* event was conducted by Stephen Bell. But though summer had now firmly given way to autumn, the orchestra's travels were not quite over...

### Lammermuir Festival, 19 September

The Lammermuir Festival this year celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. St Mary's Church in Haddington provided the venue for the BBC SSO's contribution. The baton was in the hands of guest conductor Matthew Halls. Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* began the programme, followed by Stuart MacRae's *Prometheus Symphony* (featuring soprano Jennifer France) a work jointly commissioned by the Festival and BBC Radio 3. Sibelius's Symphony No 5 closed the concert, in its familiar 1919 version.

### Coda

And what did the critics make of all this activity? Frustratingly, not as much as one would hope. No one was sent by the papers (or the BBC) to Salzburg to review those concerts and the Austrian press appears silent. Similarly, none of the Scottish or UK papers seem to have sent staff to cover the St Magnus Festival, perhaps reflecting the financial pressures facing the fourth estate. Likewise, the local press in Orkney appears to have been silent too, though at least one happy customer expressed his gratitude on Facebook, declaring he had "loved the concert in the Cathedral last night...the Vaughan Williams was AMAZING (sic)."

However, the orchestra's appearances at the BBC Proms in London and the Edinburgh International Festival received much better coverage.

Bachtrack was enthusiastic about Prom 19. *“From the grumble of a low C organ pedal and bass drum tremolo at the outset, the opening brass fanfares were paced and measured from Thomas Dausgaard, and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra made the most of the hall’s acoustic...the highlight of the night was James MacMillan’s The Confession of Isobel Gowdie. It was this orchestra who gave the premiere of the work in 1990 (in this very venue) and it was performed here once again in the presence of the composer. One didn’t have to know the narrative of this tragically sad work to understand the highly intense emotions in this extraordinarily communicative reading... The pristine intonation and richness of the strings stood out, for example the quality of the vibrato-less tone from the violas was exquisite. Placing the two percussionists at opposite ends of the platform created a sense of dialogue.”*

The Independent, which gave a full 5 stars to Prom 20, headlined its review with *“Exhilarating performances by the [BBC] Scottish Symphony Orchestra.”* The Guardian critic wrote of the Sibelius symphony that *“Dausgaard and the BBC SSO played it with tremendous conviction... the great revelation, and what made this performance so moving, is what the score shows about Sibelius as an artist: his bold re-orderings and re-scoring and his readiness to cut and tauten the symphonic argument”.*

The daring of Prom 35 elicited this, also from The Guardian: *“and not just any run-of-the-mill premiere either, but a work commissioned for the occasion from no less than 14 composers. Brabbins himself apparently came up with the idea to ask some of those with whom he has worked regularly to contribute to a birthday work mirroring the shape of Elgar’s Enigma Variations, giving one variation to each of them for Pictured Within: Birthday Variations for MCB, which began his programme with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. Such collaborative ideas sometimes fall flat, but this one didn’t. The theme – restrained, even enigmatic – had been written anonymously (perhaps by the birthday boy himself?) and Brabbins had allotted the variations very*

*cannily...The Elgar original ended the concert with a typically muscular Brabbins performance with the orchestra with which he was closely associated for more than a decade, carefully avoiding sentimentality...As a birthday celebration it covered most of the bases.”*

As for the BBC SSO’s final 2019 London Prom appearance, the Guardian assigned 4 stars and declared it *“thrilling and beguiling...The BBC SSO clearly enjoy working with Volkov, too; the playing was consistently alert and incisive...Their account of Tchaikovsky’s Second Symphony, was as thrillingly febrile as anything I’ve heard in the Albert Hall this year.”*

The Times covered the first of the Edinburgh Festival concerts, commenting on *“the extracts from Grieg’s Peer Gynt music, beautifully played by the orchestral strings which throbbed with anguish during Ingrid’s Lament and managed gut-wrenching pathos during Åse’s Death.”* It also covered the orchestra’s appearance at the Lammermuir Festival which was in St Mary’s Church, Haddington: *“There aren’t many site-specific pieces of music, but some definitely suit particular spaces...the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra strings conjured up a gorgeously rich sound for Tallis’s theme and its rhapsodic transformations.”* As for the Sibelius *“the heroic brass balanced the soft strings beautifully in the spacious acoustic”,* while The Herald declared the performance of the Sibelius *“a revelatory reading”.*

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And so, only one week before the beginning of the 2019-2020 season with a performance of Mahler’s Symphony No 5 at Glasgow City Halls, there ended a typically busy summer of touring and organisational challenges for the players and other staff of the BBC SSO. That’s a lot of playing and rehearsing, including four UK premieres and little duplication of repertoire - simply amazing!

Jim McGrath

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## BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra Recordings – New and Recent Releases

**Lassen, Schwarzenka and Langgaard: Violin Concertos**  
**Linus Roth (violin), BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Antony Hermus (conductor)**  
**Hyperion CDA68268 77 minutes**

Hyperion’s series on the Romantic Violin Concerto has here reached Volume 22! Three concertos are presented, all real rarities. Each receives the strongest possible advocacy from soloist and orchestra alike.

*“There’s more captivating playing from violinist Linus Roth on volume 22 in Hyperion’s Romantic Violin*

*Concerto series, a melodic voyage of discovery through works from two Danes, Eduard Lassen and Rued Langgaard, and the Prussian, Philipp Scharwenka. Langgaard’s is a single-movement piece from 1943, nostalgically recalling an earlier age of compositional innocence. Lassen’s is more muscular, but overflowing with delightful melodies, while Scharwenka’s is the most sweetly pleasing, with a deeply lyrical central andante.*

*Roth plays with almost missionary zeal, he and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, under Antony Hermus, making a convincing case for these works to be more widely performed.” (Guardian)*

*"This latest instalment is a winner... throughout, Linus Roth is the master of his craft, at one with the three Concertos, and benefitting from alert and sympathetic support from Antony Hermus and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, all rounded by Andrew Keener's exemplary production and Simon Eadon's first-class sound." (Classical Source 5 star review)*

*"The ebullient, tuneful opening of Eduard Lassen's D major Concerto from 1888 put a smile on all my colleagues' faces, and the lovely cantabile slow movement of the Scharwenka (composed six years later) lodged itself firmly in my head after just one listening. Langgaard's much later single-movement work (clocking in at just ten minutes) is also a treat..." (Presto Classical)*

#### **Sibelius: Kullervo**

**Benjamin Appl (baritone), Helena Juntunen (soprano), Lund Male Chorus, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Thomas Dausgaard (conductor)  
Hyperion CDA682248 74 minutes**

The first performance of *Kullervo* in 1892 was a triumph for the young composer, yet Sibelius suppressed it and it remained virtually unknown until after his death. It was first recorded in 1971 by Paavo Berglund and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and has since enjoyed several fine performances on disc, though not nearly as many as the individual symphonies; and (perhaps on account of its length) it is still a comparative rarity in concert programming. *Kullervo* can now be seen as the first step in Sibelius's symphonic odyssey. It was included in the BBC SSO's 2017/18 season. As the following review extracts show, this recording has been very well received indeed!

*"Set down hard on the heels of an acclaimed concert performance in Glasgow during May 2018, Thomas Dausgaard's new recording of Kullervo has lots in its favour. Not the least of its many virtues is the enthusiastic, scrupulously prepared and rhythmically spry contribution of the BBC Scottish SO (a shout-out to their crisply articulate strings and irresistibly 'vocal' woodwinds in particular). Plaudits, too, for Dausgaard's purposeful, keen-eared direction, some shrewdly chosen tempos ensuring that Sibelius's daringly ambitious scheme unfolds with impressive cumulative power; certainly, his lithe, red-blooded handling of the remarkable central scena ('Kullervo and his sister') plunges the listener into the thick of the action—an impression reinforced by the comparatively upfront balance afforded to soloists Helena Juntunen and Benjamin Appl (both of whom cover themselves in glory)...all told, a hearty welcome to this fresh-faced newcomer." (Gramophone)*

*"Young Sibelius's unhappy hero, once rarely heard, is now all the rage ... Thomas Dausgaard, who's carried on the Runnicles legacy with the excellent BBC orchestra in Scotland, stakes an equally individual claim. Every unorthodox texture, ostinato and accompaniment makes its mark; the Brucknerian discontinuities are relished as musical theatre, with silences tense and dramatic. Even the battle movement, which can sometimes seem the most conventional, has stunning beauties of sonority, like high violins and woodwind with only horn as bass...the entire performance [is] artfully balanced so that everything sounds good in Glasgow's gorgeous City Halls. Kullervo may not have triumphed, but the Scots and their Danish chief conductor absolutely do here." (BBC Music Magazine, double 5 star review for performance and recording)*

*"This new recording from the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra under their chief conductor Thomas Dausgaard captures that thrilling combination of brooding Nordic evocation with expressive edginess like few others. Right from the outset the BBC Scottish strings manage to pitch their tone ideally between folk-like earthiness and concert-hall refinement, while mellow horns and plangent double reeds give the opening character portrait a noble intensity... Hyperion's experienced recording team of Simon Eadon and Andrew Keener has done an outstanding job evoking the unique atmosphere of this landmark score in the space of the City Halls, Glasgow, and this disc now takes its place among the most urgently compelling accounts of Sibelius's early masterpiece. Essential listening for those wanting to explore the composer beyond the conventional canon, and with presentation greatly enhanced by notes from Sibelius expert Daniel Grimley." (The Europadisc Review)*

*"...one doubts if a finer account than this has appeared. Dausgaard is magnificent, holding the five-movement structure together superbly, inspiring orchestral and vocal forces to compelling musical expression." (Musical Opinion, 5 star review)*

*"... the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, big as always on brass and percussion, respond to any detail and every intention. Dausgaard brings plenty to the table. The rhythmic bite and string articulation (nourished despite being no more than 14.12.10.8.6) generate febrile electricity and tautness from the onset, the tutti climaxes attacked powerfully, the voicing of sound-print chords and solos keenly judged...come the end, gripped by the sensualism, swagger and sorrow of it all, the Loki fire, you feel as though you've been on an epic symphonic voyage, that here, youth regardless, lies truly some of the most imaginative, inventively original, raw music of an era, Strauss and Mahler notwithstanding." (Classical Source, 4 star review)*

## BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra - News

Several congratulations are in order in this edition of the Newsletter. Firstly, on 11 May, Graeme Brown (Bassoon) married Gareth Robertson and is now Graeme Robertson-Brown. Next, on 26 May Rik Evans (Viola) and Maria Evans welcomed their baby boy Albert into the world. More recently, Alberto Menéndez Escribano (Section Principal Horn) and Anna had a baby boy, Hugo, born on 4 October.

Stop press (as this is being given its final proof read on 22 October)! Warm congratulations to Gent Kocho (First Violins, and former liaison with the Club) and Jenny Stephenson on arrival of their daughter Tefta!

Two new players have recently joined the BBC SSO, Ana do Vale (Second Violins) and Morag Robertson (Violas), and their profiles follow. We extend a warm welcome to both!

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### Player Profile - Ana do Vale



In June 2019 Ana was appointed as Tutti 2<sup>nd</sup> Violin.

Born in Barcelos, Portugal, Ana started to play the violin at the age of six. Between 2007 and 2010 she attended ARTAVE, a leading school of young musicians in Portugal, where she studied with José Ricardo Reis.

In 2010 Ana moved to London to study at the Royal College of Music where she learned from Lutsia Ibragimova, before completing a Masters degree in 2015 at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama under the guidance of Krzysztof Smietana.

Prior to her appointment with the BBC SSO, in 2016-2017 Ana was a member of the Southbank Sinfonia. Alongside this, Ana developed a busy freelance career with various orchestras, including the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Glyndebourne Tour Orchestra, London Contemporary Orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic, Orquestra XXI and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

Aside from her orchestral career, Ana is also in demand as both a chamber musician and a soloist, giving performances regularly in both the UK and Portugal.

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### Player Profile - Morag Robertson



at the Royal College of Music in London. Once she had completed her undergraduate degree she moved north to Manchester where she continued her studies at the Royal Northern College of Music on the Hallé String Leadership Training Scheme. She was awarded the Charles Hallé Award for that year.

Morag has worked with many orchestras around the UK including the Hallé, the BBC SSO, the Scottish Ensemble, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the London Chamber Orchestra. From 2015 to 2017 she was a member of the European Union Youth Orchestra.

As a chamber musician, she enjoyed success with the Manon Quartet during her studies in London and has performed as guest violist with the Edinburgh Quartet.

Originally from Glasgow, Morag Robertson attended St Mary's Music School in Edinburgh and went on to study

She is also a member of Explore Ensemble, a group of six core players specialising in performing new music.

## Concert Report Monday 13 May 2019

Mark O’Keeffe (trumpet) and Sasha Savaloni (guitar)



Sasha Savaloni and Mark O’Keeffe (Jim McGrath)

This was the second and final concert of season 2018-2019 and it featured these two master musicians. The combination of trumpet and guitar (or something similar) is by no means unique (one only has to think of mariachi music and Tex-Mex bands like Calexico) but in the classical sphere it is more unusual. For one thing there are issues of volume and tone – the unamplified acoustic classical guitar is no match for the trumpet in full flight. Thus it was that in this superb recital by these talented musicians the eye eventually noted a very discreet pick-up and cable attached to the body of Sasha’s guitar, leading to an almost equally discreet amplifier positioned behind his seat. The resulting sound and balance was almost perfect, the tone gentle or robust as required and the guitar only occasionally (and at that, only very briefly) being overwhelmed by the trumpet.

I have concentrated on the guitar thus far, simply because at Club events I am usually faced with instruments I could not begin to play. The guitar is

perhaps the most versatile, portable and forgiving of instruments, allowing professionals and amateurs alike to sound good. It is an instrument I play, but in a completely different style and at nothing like the level demonstrated by Sasha. It was a pleasure to occasionally (all too occasionally) recognise a fleeting chord shape and marvel at his stretch, not to mention the magic achieved by the dexterity required of his right hand, though that was generally obscured by the music stand.

Perhaps one day the music stand can be dispensed with, as this new duo has only been playing together for a comparatively short while and I suspect the repertoire may have been comparatively new to Sasha – though not to Mark who played throughout from memory. Sasha and Mark had met late last year in the Conservatoire and, after some deliberation on Mark’s part as to whether to form a duo of this unusual nature at all, they started rehearsing in January, exploring repertoire that might work for a recital programme. The combination is an unusual one, but at least one precedent, and one cited by Mark, is that of Urban and Sabina Agnas, a husband

and wife duo from Sweden (several videos of their performances can be found via Google).



**Mark O'Keeffe** (Norman McGadie)

Mark is, of course, very well known to Club members, having played many an entertaining concert for us, but without disrespecting those earlier entertainments, this had the feel of something special, the beginnings of an act that will see many more such recitals and many more audiences. As ever Mark provided informative and sometimes amusing commentaries for each piece.



**Sasha Savaloni** (Norman McGadie)

The recital, all essentially arrangements for trumpet and guitar rather than pieces composed for the combination, began with John Dowland's beautiful 'Flow My Tears' which segued into a movement from J S Bach's cantata 'Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland' BWV 61. Mark explained that this latter had special meaning for him, being associated with his musical confrère, the pianist and organist John Langdon who had died in 2018. Mark told us that John had been a remarkable musician, cherished by all at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and whoever came into contact with him. John and Mark had played many concerts together around Scotland, including Oban, Paisley Abbey and Culzean Castle. The

Bach 'Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland' ("now come the Gentile church") had been one of their favourite pieces.

The theme of Mark's Christmas 2017 Club recital had been songs and the trumpet's ability to correspond to the human voice, and the third item in this later recital was an arrangement based on Franz Schubert's famous lieder piece, 'Ständchen' (Serenade).

Next came the wistful and very beautiful Spanish Dance No 5, 'Andaluzá' by the ill-starred Enrique Granados (he and his wife and many others died in March 1916, victims of a German torpedo attack in the English Channel). Hereafter, a thread emerged in the programme, with the composers whose pieces we heard afresh in arrangements for these two complementary instruments being individuals who had passed through Paris in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, often meeting each other. Manuel de Falla's suite of Seven Spanish Songs, variously sultry or energetic, was executed with sensitivity and flair as required ('The Moorish Cloth', 'Murcian Seguidilla', 'Asturian', 'Jota', 'Nana', 'Song', 'Pole').

These Spanish composers, Granados and Falla, were followed by a piece by Maurice Ravel, born close to the Basque region (in Ciboure) and a composer often attracted to things Spanish. But, on this occasion, the piece had no such connections. Instead it was 'Kaddish', originally a song with piano and violin accompaniment whose text was part of the Jewish prayer sequence of the same name.

Another arrangement of a song followed, Kurt Weill's "Je ne t'aime pas", before a fresh theme emerged in the recital, that of composers who had at one point or another had been taught by that most famous of music teachers in Paris, Nadia Boulanger. One such was the Brazilian composer Heitor Villa Lobos, and it was his famous *Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5*, more closely associated with ranks of cellos but also, significantly, the human voice, that we now heard effectively transposed for trumpet and guitar. Next came two compositions by the Argentinian master of the bandoneon, Astor Piazzolla, 'Oblivion' and 'Libertango', another of Boulanger's pupils drawn from South America to Paris.

And to conclude, and influenced by the BBC SSO's planned visit to the St Magnus Festival, Mark and Sasha treated us to 'The Rose of St Magnus', a piece by the contemporary folk artist, Ivan Drever.

All in all, this was a most enjoyable performance and one can only hope that this duo will continue to give pleasure with their splendid playing and thoughtful programming.

Quite simply, as if they were in any doubt, the combination works.

*Jim McGrath*

## Concert Report Monday, 7 October 2019

### The Doune Bassoon Quartet (Graeme Robertson-Brown, Kath Nagl, Peter Wesley and Anthea Wood)



The Doune Quartet (Barry Deacon)

The Club Concerts resumed on 5 October with a recital by the Doune Bassoon Quartet which was warmly received by an appreciative audience, to most of whom much of the music, though familiar in its original form, would be being heard for the first time in its current arrangements. The Quartet had assembled a programme of generous length which was notable for its tunefulness and catchiness – just the thing to enliven a dull October evening.

An arrangement of Bernstein's Overture to *Candide* got the evening off to a cracking start and kept all four players busy as they delivered with aplomb the music's athleticism, lyricism, effervescence and wit. It was immediately evident that the combination of four bassoons had more going for it than might have seemed likely on paper. Next came an arrangement of "A Whiter Shade of Pale", a song made popular by the UK group Procul Harum (it was No1 for 6 weeks in 1967). It owes not a little to J S Bach's famous *Air on the G String*, but was apparently the cause of some dispute among members of the group, who made rival claims as to who deserved the credit for its composition. No such acrimony

was in evidence in this performance in which Graeme Robertson-Brown's cantabile playing was admirably supported by his colleagues.

The members of the quartet took it in turns to introduce the various items on the programme and it fell to Anthea Wood to speak about the next one, Almirena's aria from Handel's *Rinaldo*, which is such a favourite of hers that it was performed on the accordion at her wedding. Given that Almirena is singing "Lascia ch'io pianga la cruda sorte" ("let me weep for raw fate", or words to that effect) and is clearly not happy with the hand which fate has dealt her, it might seem a daring choice for a wedding, but on the day the bride calls the shots!

Elgar's famous *Chanson de Matin* followed. Originally for violin and piano, and later orchestrated by the composer, this bassoon version was in an arrangement by Peter Wesley, which showcased the lyrical potential of the instrument in its upper register.

Kath Nagl introduced the following item with a measure of self-confessed apprehension, as she was required not

only to play the bassoon, which is not a problem for her, but to sing, which she suggested might be! In the event she had nothing to be worried about. Her singing was mellifluous, well-tuned and noted for the clarity of her diction – virtues which many more experienced singers would do well to imitate. The song itself, which was one of the “hits” of the evening, was *The Bassoon Song*, a music hall ditty by the improbably-named Quenton Ashlyn, who in real life may have been Frank Kennedy, an early twentieth century government employee who abandoned that calling in favour of becoming a ‘society entertainer’. The text, which contains a number of what would have been naughty rhymes were it not for the intervention of the bassoon, extols the virtues of the instrument, its value as an aid to seduction and its usefulness as a household accessory. It was a real discovery, a knock-out!

An arrangement by Peter Wesley of *Tea for Two* (with apologies to Vincent Youmans and Dmitri Shostakovich) brought the first half of the concert to an apt conclusion.

The second half began with two pieces by Prokofiev, a jaunty scherzo with a more soulful trio, and the *Gavotte* from the *Classical Symphony*, the former of which may well have been the only piece in the programme originally written for four bassoons. At one stage in the evening Anthea Wood had asked, “What doesn’t go for four bassoons?” and by the end she could well have claimed to rest her case. The Prokofiev pieces were followed by another Peter Wesley arrangement – of the *Cakewalk* from *Children’s Corner* by Debussy in which Peter played contrabassoon to impressive effect.

Peter Maxwell-Davies’s *Farewell to Stromness*, which came next, proved ideally suited to its new guise, a really interesting alternative to the usual piano version with which we are familiar. *Sousa for Bassoons*, which provided a striking contrast was yet another arrangement, this time by Andrew Balent, of six of John Philip Sousa’s stonkingly good tunes, namely ‘The Thunderer’, ‘Washington Post’, ‘El Capitan’, ‘Liberty Bell’ (well known to admirers of ‘Monty Python’s Flying Circus’), ‘Semper Fidelis’, ‘The Stars and Stripes Forever’. During this tour de force Peter Wesley treated us to a piccolo descant played on contrabassoon. The penultimate number was *Oblivion* by Astor Piazzolla, a languid boss nova in which Graeme Robertson-Brown demonstrated some breath-taking breath control in its song-like main theme. Film music in the form of *The Dambusters* by Eric Coates brought the official programme to a rousingly patriotic conclusion.

In response to the enthusiastic reception of the audience, the four musicians performed *Bassoonist’s Holiday*, better known in its guise as *Bugler’s Holiday* by the American Leroy Anderson, which sent the well-contented listeners away with a smile on their faces and one of those tunes that you just can’t forget in their ears.

In his closing remarks, Jim McGrath paid tribute not only to the performers but to Gillian de Groote, the new orchestral rep, whose arm-twisting had no doubt had more than a little to do with the re-launch of the Club Concerts.

*Daniel Divers*



Graeme Robertson-Brown, Kath Nagl, Peter Wesley and Anthea Wood (Jim McGrath)

## CLUB NEWS

### Mary Lawson – an Honorary 100<sup>th</sup>

Regular BBC SSO concertgoers in Glasgow may recognise Mary Lawson, while readers of this Newsletter will know her name because for five editions her fascinating memoirs of her time with the BBC in wartime graced our pages. Her memoirs were even 'syndicated', appearing also on the website 'Old BBC Radio Broadcasting Equipment and Memories' (<http://www.orbem.co.uk/index.htm>). In recognition of Mary's hard work in producing her memoirs for us, the Club has made her an Honorary Member. And, as if that's not enough excitement for one year, here she is celebrating her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday with Provost Alan Brown of East Dunbartonshire! (Picture: Kirkintilloch Herald)



### Web Site

The Club's web site has recently been enhanced by several additions. First, there is now a Privacy Notice compliant with the General Data Protection Regulations which tells you how we use the personal data that you give us when you become a Club member. This can be accessed via a button on the Home page.

Next, a new page has been added that provides links to past Newsletters. At the time of writing this goes back to spring 2016 but it is hoped that it will eventually encompass all Newsletters that were produced in the present format. Note also that that these links will only appear once the following Newsletter has been produced. So, this autumn 2019 edition will be exclusively hard-copy to members or buyers until the spring 2020 edition appears, and so forth.

The web site's CDs page lists all the BBC SSO recordings that the Club holds. The CDs are only £5 each and are often sold at Club events, but you can order them from us using the list on the CDs page. The innovation is that on the Links page, direct links are now provided to the Hyperion and Chandos pages dedicated to the BBC SSO.

And don't forget – concert reports usually appear first on the Club's web site, and that is also where you will find many more photographs from the concerts than can be fitted into the Newsletter.

You'll find the web site address on page 2.

## Club Calendar 2019-2020

Monday 9 December 2019 at 7.30 pm in the Recital Rooms, City Halls, Glasgow

Featuring the Trombone Department of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland with Simon Johnson and Jonathan Hollick of the BBC SSO playing music by Mascagni, Nelhybel, Gabrieli and others - plus some Christmas Crackers!

Thursday 23 January 2020, at 4.00 pm in Metropolitan, Candleriggs, Glasgow

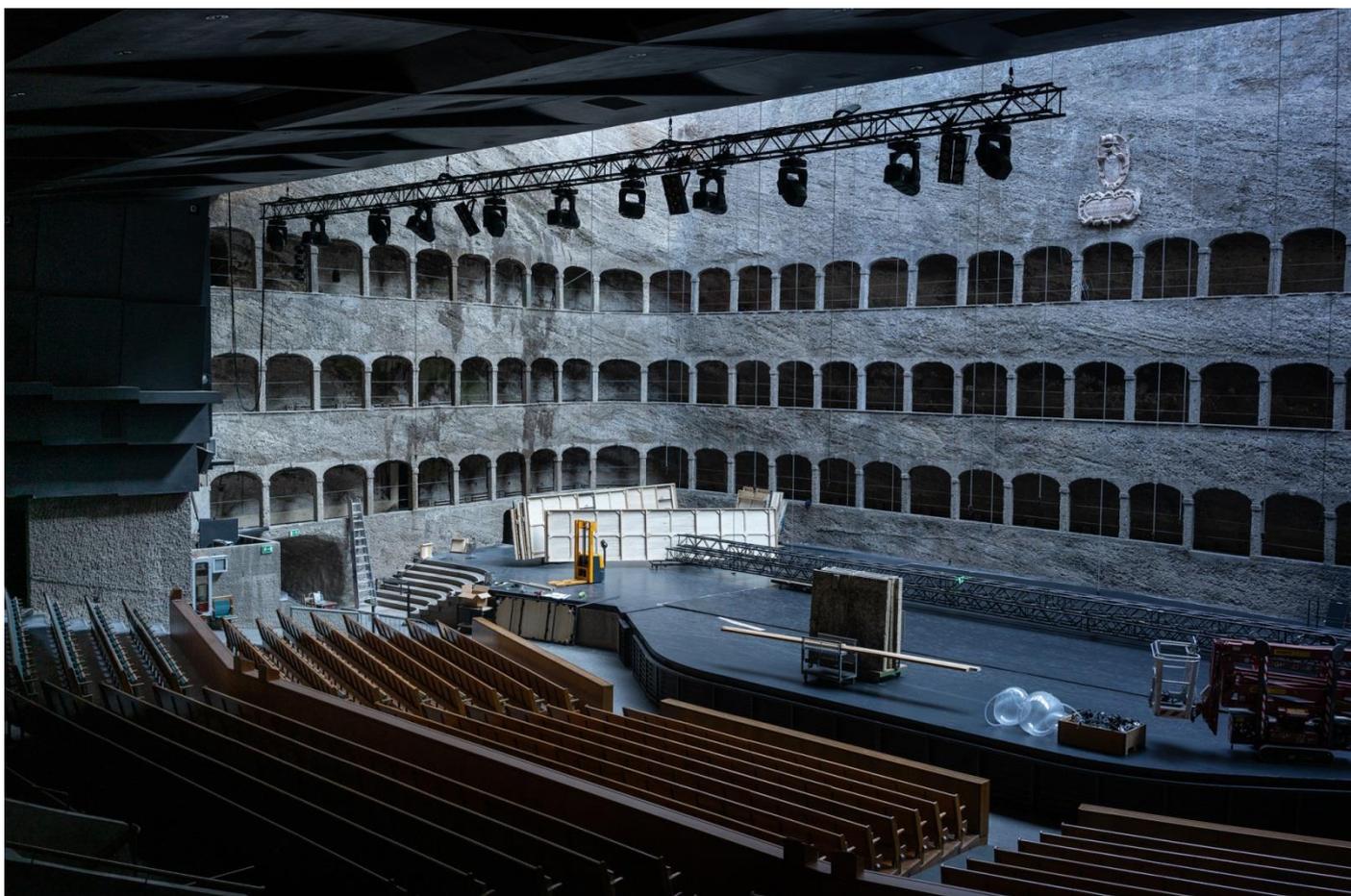
The Club's annual reception for the BBC SSO (please note, this is a members only event).

Monday 2 March 2020 at 7.30 pm in the Recital Rooms, City Halls, Glasgow (but to be confirmed, as the players' schedules for 2020 have not yet been published)

Featuring Andy Berridge (BBC SSO Principal Viola) Laura Samuel (Leader of the BBC SSO) and Charlotte Ashton (Section Principal Flute, BBC SSO). Programme to be announced.

May or June 2020 (tbc)

Again, the precise date cannot yet be confirmed for the reasons given above, but this concert will likely follow the Club's AGM. Works by Ravel, Debussy and Beethoven will be performed by a piano trio led by Barbara Downie (violin) that also comprises Claire Haslin (piano) and Rosie Townhill (cello).



**The Felsenreitschule, next door to the Grosse Festspielhaus. Made famous as a location in the Sound of Music film. On the orchestra's visit to Salzburg, see page 4. (Simon Butterworth)**

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