



RSNO

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL
ORCHESTRA

Mendelssohn's

Scottish Symphony

Caird Hall, Dundee
Thu 2 Oct 2025 7.30pm

Dedicated to the **RSNO Dundee Circle Committee**
in recognition of their generous support of the RSNO

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Mendelssohn's Scottish Symphony

Caird Hall, Dundee Thu 2 Oct 2025 7.30pm

When Francesco Piemontesi performs Brahms' epic First Piano Concerto, you can expect grandeur, beauty, and piano playing that's simply off the scale. This opening concert of the 2025:26 Dundee Season is also filled with romantic vistas and elemental forces as Music Director Thomas Søndergård conducts Mendelssohn's stirring love letter to Scotland. Expect big tunes and whole worlds of emotion.

BRAHMS Piano Concerto No1 in D Minor Op15 [43']

INTERVAL

MENDELSSOHN Symphony No3 in A Minor Op56 *Scottish* [44']

Thomas Søndergård Conductor
Francesco Piemontesi Piano
Royal Scottish National Orchestra

Dedicated to the **RSNO Dundee Circle Committee**
in recognition of their generous support of the RSNO



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If viewing these notes at the concert, please do so considerately and not during performances.

Please silence all mobile telephones and alerts, and refrain from taking photographs, without flash, until the end of each piece.

RSNO

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL
ORCHESTRA



Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto

THU 4 DEC: 7.30pm
CAIRD HALL,
DUNDEE

Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto
Mahler Symphony No1 *Titan*

Giedrė Šlekytė Conductor
Nemanja Radulović Violin
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Welcome

A very warm welcome to the first concert of the 2025:26 Season.

Although you've not seen us during the summer, the Orchestra has been busy in the studio working on a variety of exciting projects, both classical and film, which will start to appear soon. We recently won the Art & Culture Award at the Inspiring City Awards 2025 in Glasgow for our recording studio, and we are incredibly grateful to have been recognised for our contribution to the city.

Alongside recordings, the Orchestra has been on an extensive Schools Tour, taking our animated film *Yoyo & The Little Auk* to over 1,500 primary pupils across Scotland, as well as performing at the Opening and Closing concerts of the Edinburgh International Festival and at Fringe by the Sea in North Berwick.

The music you hear tonight forms part of the repertoire the Orchestra is taking to Europe next week on a 10-day tour with Music Director Thomas Søndergård and tonight's wonderful soloist, Francesco Piemontesi. This tour is the first of several in the next year and we are proud to be cultural ambassadors for Scotland in Europe and beyond.

We have some new and returning faces to the Orchestra: Amadea Dazeley-Gaist (Principal Horn), Jason Lewis (Associate Principal Trumpet), Cillian Ó Ceallacháin (Associate Principal Trombone) and Asher Zaccardelli (Assistant Principal Viola) have all joined the ranks recently. I'm sure you'll join with me in giving them a warm welcome to the RSNO.

Tonight's concert is dedicated to the RSNO Dundee Circle Committee in acknowledgement and appreciation of their invaluable support. A special thanks goes to Ken Murray and Donald Gordon, Committee Chair and Secretary/Treasurer respectively, for all they do organising meetings, fundraisers and concerts. And I would like to thank you, our dedicated audience, for continuing to support the RSNO. I look forward to sharing the rest of the Season with you.

Alistair Mackie

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

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Royal Scottish National Orchestra



Formed in 1891 as the Scottish Orchestra, the company became the Scottish National Orchestra in 1950 and was awarded Royal Patronage in 1977. Many renowned conductors have contributed to its success, including Sir John Barbirolli, Walter Susskind, Sir Alexander Gibson, Neeme Järvi, Walter Weller, Alexander Lazarev and Stéphane Denève.

The Orchestra's artistic team is led by Danish conductor Thomas Søndergård, who was appointed Music Director in 2018. In March 2024, Austrian-born conductor, composer and musician Patrick Hahn became the Orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor.

The RSNO is supported by the Scottish Government and is one of the Scottish National Performing Companies. The Orchestra performs across Scotland, including concerts in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, Perth and Inverness, and appears regularly at the Edinburgh International Festival and BBC Proms. The RSNO has made recent tours to China and Europe.

The RSNO has a worldwide reputation for the quality of its recordings, receiving a 2020 Gramophone Classical Music Award for Chopin's Piano Concertos (soloist: Benjamin Grosvenor), conducted by Elim Chan, two Diapason d'Or awards (Denève/Roussel 2007; Denève/Debussy 2012) and eight GRAMMY Award nominations. In recent years, the RSNO has increasingly recorded soundtracks for film, television and video games, with notable titles including *Horizon: An American Saga* (Warner Bros), *Life on Our Planet* (Netflix), *Star Wars Outlaws* (Ubisoft) and *The Woman King* (Sony Pictures). The Orchestra records at its award-winning in-house facility, Scotland's Studio, in Glasgow.

The RSNO believes that music can enrich lives, and aims to inspire, educate and entertain people throughout Scotland and beyond with its performances, recordings and engagement programmes. Supporting schools, families, young professionals and wider communities, the RSNO delivers high-quality initiatives for all ages and abilities.

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Tamás Fejes
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Stuart McDonald
Lorna Rough
Veronica Marziano
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Fiona Stephen

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Marion Wilson
Paul Medd
Anne Bünemann
Helena Rose
Sophie Lang
Colin McKee
Nigel Mason
Kirstin Drew

VIOLA

Jessica Beaston
GUEST PRINCIPAL
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Francesca Hunt
Katherine Wren
Maria Trittinger
Lisa Rourke
Beth Woodford
Nicola McWhirter

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Pei-Jee Ng
PRINCIPAL
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Yuuki Bouterey-Ishido
Rachael Lee
Robert Anderson
Gunda Baranauskaitė

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Moray Jones
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PRINCIPAL

Thomas Søndergård

Conductor



Danish conductor Thomas Søndergård has been Music Director of the RSNO since 2018, following six seasons as Principal Guest Conductor, and is Music Director of the Minnesota Orchestra. Between 2012 and 2018, he served as Principal Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales (BBC NOW), after stepping down as Principal Conductor and Musical Advisor of the Norwegian Radio Orchestra.

He has appeared with many notable orchestras in leading European centres, such as Berlin (Berliner Philharmoniker, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Konzerthausorchester Berlin), Munich (Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunk), Zurich (Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich), Leipzig (Gewandhausorchester), Paris (Orchestre National de France), London (London Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, London Symphony, Philharmonia Orchestra) and Amsterdam and Rotterdam (Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Netherlands Philharmonic, Rotterdam Philharmonic), and is a familiar figure in Scandinavia, with such orchestras as the Oslo Philharmonic, Gothenburg Symphony,

Danish National Symphony, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Swedish Radio Symphony, Finnish Radio Symphony and Helsinki Philharmonic. North American appearances to date have included the symphony orchestras of New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Baltimore, St Louis, Toronto, Atlanta, Montreal, Vancouver, Houston and Seattle, and the LA Philharmonic.

Following his acclaimed debut for Royal Danish Opera (Poul Ruder's *Kafka's Trial*), he has since returned to conduct *Die Walküre*, *Elektra*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *La bohème*, *The Cunning Little Vixen* and *Il viaggio a Reims*. He has also enjoyed successful collaborations with Norwegian Opera and Royal Swedish Opera. His Stockholm productions of *Tosca* and *Turandot* (both with Nina Stemme) led to his Bayerische Staatsoper debut, conducting main season and Opera Festival performances of *Turandot* with Stemme. He made his Deutsche Oper Berlin debut with the world premiere of Scartazzini's *Edward II* and has since returned for Berlioz's *Romeo and Juliet* and Strauss' *Elektra*.

His discography covers a broad range of contemporary and mainstream repertoire, including Nielsen, Sibelius symphonies and tone poems (with the BBC NOW), Lutosławski and Dutilleux cello concertos (with Johannes Moser and the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin) and violinist Vilde Frang's celebrated debut recording (with the WDR Köln). With the RSNO on Linn Records Thomas has recorded works by Richard Strauss, Prokofiev, Bacewicz, Lutosławski and Szymanowski.

In 2023, Thomas was a recipient of the Carl Nielsen and Anne-Marie Carl Nielsen's Foundation award for his outstanding contribution to Danish musical life. In 2022, he was decorated with a prestigious Royal Order of Chivalry, the Order of Dannebrog (Ridder af Dannebrogordenen), by Her Majesty Margrethe II, Queen of Denmark.

Scotland's National Orchestra
invites you to the

RSNO Centre Tenth Anniversary Winter Party

Sat 1 Nov 2025, 7pm
New Auditorium, Glasgow Royal Concert Hall

Join us for a unique celebration of Scotland's National Orchestra marking the tenth anniversary of our New Home in Glasgow.

Enjoy spectacular music performed by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, drinks with canapés showcasing the best of Scottish produce and a charity auction with prizes generously donated by the New York

Philharmonic, Kimpton Blythswood Hotel, Moira Patience and many more. The rest of the evening will be spent dancing the night away at our celebratory ceilidh, with music performed by the fantastic RSNO Ceilidh Band.

All funds raised at this event will support the activity of the RSNO.

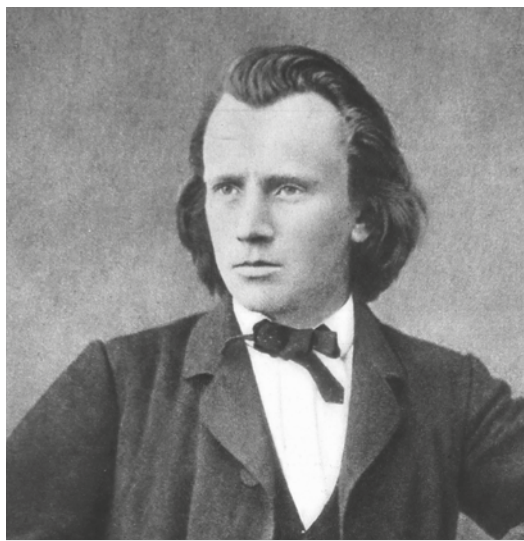
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Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Piano Concerto No1

in D Minor Op15



FIRST PERFORMANCE

Hanover, 22 January 1859

DURATION 43 minutes

1. *Maestoso*

2. *Adagio*

3. *Rondo: Allegro non troppo*

‘My Concerto was a brilliant and decisive – failure,’ wrote Brahms to his friend, the virtuoso violinist and composer Joseph Joachim, the morning after the Leipzig premiere of his First Piano Concerto in January 1859. He wasn’t exaggerating. A performance in Hanover a few days earlier had been received politely, but with little enthusiasm. However, this performance, in Germany’s unofficial musical capital, had been a disaster. ‘At the conclusion three pairs of hands were brought together very slowly,’ wrote Brahms, ‘whereupon a perfectly distinct hissing from all sides forbade any such demonstration.’ One prominent critic dismissed the Concerto as having ‘nothing to offer but hopeless desolation and aridity ... Not only must one take in this

fermenting mass; one must also swallow a dessert of the shrillest dissonances and most unpleasant sounds.’

However much the Leipzigers may have prided themselves on their musical sophistication, it seems they simply weren’t prepared for what Brahms was offering them. Here was a piano concerto conceived in much grander terms than most contemporary symphonies, and while the piano writing may have been hugely challenging, it wasn’t the kind of dashing display-piece audiences had come to expect. The orchestral contribution was much weightier than normal in a concerto, and the harmonic language must have seemed exceptionally harsh to its first hearers.

Perhaps the main problem lay in the work’s conception. Initially Brahms’ plans were for a symphony – a massively ambitious orchestral work that would justify the composer Robert Schumann’s prophecy that Brahms would be Beethoven’s great successor. But Brahms was plagued by doubts and insecurities: was this an orchestral work at all, or might it be more effective as a sonata for two pianos? And Beethoven’s shadow was just too intimidating: ‘You’ve no idea how discouraging it is’, Brahms confessed, ‘with such a giant marching behind you.’

Eventually the last two movements were discarded, and Brahms realised combining piano and orchestra might be the ideal compromise. The first movement was reworked with Joachim’s assistance, and a new slow movement and finale were composed. But Brahms could with justice have called the result ‘Symphony for Piano and Orchestra’. This is deeply serious music, far removed from conventional virtuoso acrobatics, and behind it all was almost certainly a deeply traumatic memory.

The opening of the Concerto can startle audiences even today. A fortissimo growl from timpani, low horns and low strings introduces a darkly impassioned first theme, its harmonies clashing with the sustained timpani rolls: according to Joachim, it expresses Brahms' shock and anguish when his mentor Schumann tried to end the torment of his mental illness by throwing himself into the River Rhine. The piano's first entry is gentler, more soothing; for a while the soloist seems to offer consolation in the face of the orchestra's onslaughts. But as this long movement unfolds, the piano is drawn deeper and deeper into the conflict. The ending is as stormy as the beginning.

The slow movement is mostly peaceful and otherworldly. In his sketches, Brahms wrote the words 'Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini' (Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord) above the first theme. He said nothing further on this subject, but the movement's hushed ending has been heard by several commentators as a prayer for the repose of a soul.

The finale returns to action, beginning with a muscular theme that looks back to the first movement – and perhaps further still to the finale of Bach's Triple Harpsichord Concerto, also in D Minor. The sense of struggle from the first movement returns, but at the crucial moment an ardent piano solo turns the key from D Minor to Major, and from grim conflict to defiant hope.

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What was happening in 1859?

8 Mar Kenneth Grahame, author of *The Wind in the Willows*, was born in Edinburgh

30 Apr The first chapter of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* was published in the periodical *All the Year Round*

26 May/2 Jun Geologist Joseph Prestwich and amateur archaeologist John Evans reported on their investigations of Somme valley gravel pits, extending human history back to what would become known as the Palaeolithic Era

6 Jun The Liberal Party was formed in Britain

30 Jun Charles Blondin crossed Niagara Falls by tightrope for the first time

11 Jul The chimes of Big Ben at the Palace of Westminster rang for the first time

27 Aug Edwin Drake drilled the first oil well in the USA, near Titusville, Pennsylvania

28 Aug-2 Sep The most intense geomagnetic storm in recorded history, the Carrington Event, created widespread reported sightings of the Northern Lights and knocked out telegraph communications

24 Nov Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, which argued for the gradual evolution of species through natural selection

2 Dec US militant abolitionist leader John Brown was hanged for leading the 16 Oct raid on Harper's Ferry Armory, West Virginia, in an attempt to start a slave rebellion

Francesco Piemontesi

Piano



Swiss-Italian pianist Francesco Piemontesi, a native of Locarno, has over the years gained a reputation as one of the leading interpreters of the German Classical and Romantic repertoire. He appears as a regular guest with many of the world's leading orchestras in concert halls and music festivals around the globe, and was Artistic Director of the Settimane Musicali di Ascona from 2012 to 2024.

With his subtle but mesmerising interpretations of Schubert's piano sonatas as well as the solo works and piano concertos of Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms and Liszt, he has been acclaimed internationally by critics and audiences alike. His playing is characterised by sensitivity, intimacy and poetry, but also by power and brilliance. Above all, it is important to him to illuminate the scores from within: 'Making music is like a second language for me. It feels like an existential necessity. I don't want to entertain the audience, I want to let them participate in the deep dimensions of music.' Among his many important musical influences, he highlights his distinguished teachers Arie Vardi and Alfred Brendel, but above all French concert pianist Cécile Ousset.

The 25/26 season includes premiering Beat Furrer's Piano Concerto (dedicated to Francesco) with the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande and Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, as well as further solo appearances in Europe with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Leipzig Gewandhausorchester, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and RSNO; in North America with the Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Baltimore and Toronto Symphony orchestras; and with the Seoul Philharmonic.

A consummate recitalist, Francesco has recently appeared at the Auditorium Lyon, Prague's Rudolfinum Dvořák Hall, Tonhalle Zürich, Schubertiade Festival, and La Chaux-de-Fonds in Switzerland. This season he performs at Vienna's Musikverein, Paris' Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and London's Wigmore Hall, where he is a regular favourite.

Francesco's musical artistry is documented on numerous recordings that have received awards and critical acclaim, such as Schubert's last Piano Sonatas, Debussy's *Préludes*, Mozart Piano Concertos with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra conducted by Andrew Manze, and two of the most demanding pieces of the piano literature: Liszt's *Transcendental Études* and B Minor Sonata.

In 2024, Francesco collaborated with director Jan Schmidt-Garre to create the documentary *The Alchemy of the Piano*. Filmed over one year, he talks with some of the world's leading performers, including his mentor, the late Alfred Brendel, Maria João Pires, Stephen Kovacevich and Sir Antonio Pappano.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Symphony No 3

in A Minor Op56 **Scottish**

FIRST PERFORMANCE

Leipzig, 3 March 1842

DURATION 44 minutes

1. Andante con moto – Allegro un poco agitato–

2. Vivace non troppo–

3. Adagio–

4. Allegro vivacissimo – Allegro maestoso assai

If you were to think that the introduction of Mendelssohn's 'Scottish' Symphony No3 sounds like the lifting of the curtain onto an extra-musical story, then you would be right. That sombre three-time theme intoned by oboes and violas is known as the 'Holyrood', Mendelssohn having 'found' it during his 1829 expedition to Scotland on a dusk visit to the ruins of Holyrood Palace, and specifically its old chapel. Head full of Queen Mary and her unfortunate secretary and perhaps lover Rizzio, Mendelssohn wrote a letter describing the winding staircase which Rizzio's murderers ascended, with a little room at the top: 'Three chambers away is a small corner where they killed him. Everything around is broken and mouldering.'

As with the *Hebrides Overture*, the Symphony's initial sketches happened very quickly but were then set aside. It was finally completed in 1842, making its numbering a red herring, given that it was in fact the last of the five symphonies to be finished and published. At this point Mendelssohn dedicated the Symphony to Queen Victoria, having in the interim struck up a mutually admiring friendship with her and Prince Albert – and indeed a no less fond relationship with the British public as a whole.

Structurally, the Symphony is cast in the usual four movements, albeit with the direction to proceed from one to the next without pause. The aforementioned atmospheric 'Holyrood' theme, played quietly, then darkened further by its winds and horn accompaniment, is shortly joined by a second, more plaintive theme in the violins. With the arrival of the main *Allegro un poco agitato*, the music tips into an urgent six quavers to a bar lilt for a main theme carried initially by clarinets and violins. After a secondary theme in the clarinets, the development comes tense and stormy, the writing often sounding not worlds away from that of the *Hebrides Overture*. Yet after the recapitulation of the main theme, it's the 'Holyrood' theme that has the movement's final say.

The Scherzo is an altogether more sun-flecked affair, featherlight nimbleness juxtaposed with weightier joyous bounding, the melodic line tossed colourfully from section to section, with a keen Scots flavour to the lot. More contrasts are at play over the songful *Adagio*, with long-lined lyricism set against more austere, march-like music. The finale opens urgent, sharp and warlike, Scotch snap rhythms adding to its fire. Towards the end comes a magical hush and slowing into a minor-keyed theme which recalls, without directly quoting, the 'Holyrood' theme. Yet rather than closing back in veiled darkness, Mendelssohn instead goes for glory, ending with a victorious, major-keyed hymn.

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Thank you to all our members of the Circle, including Overture members and those who wish to remain anonymous.



If you would like to discuss how you can become an RSNO Circle member, please contact Polly Lightbody, Individual Giving and Partnerships Officer, at polly.lightbody@rsno.org.uk

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Charitable trusts and foundations have a distinguished history of supporting the RSNO, both on and off the stage. From one-off donations for specific concerts and musicians' chairs, to multi-year funding for our community engagement initiatives, including our Schools Programme, every grant in support of our work is truly appreciated. We are grateful to the following trusts and foundations for their generosity:

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We are also grateful to a number of trusts that wish to stay anonymous.

If you would like more information about our work and how you can make a difference, please contact Niamh Kelly, Trusts and Projects Manager, at niamh.kelly@rsno.org.uk

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With thanks to Mr Hedley G Wright and the Springbank Distillery for their support of the RSNO

If you would like more information about sponsorships, corporate partnerships or fundraising events with the RSNO, please contact Constance Fraser, Head of Development (Individuals and Partnerships), at constance.fraser@rsno.org.uk

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