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Also sprach Zarathustra

Classics at the Movies

Usher Hall, Edinburgh
Fri 14 Nov 2025 7.30pm

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall
Sat 15 Nov 7.30pm

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Also sprach Zarathustra

Classics at the Movies

Usher Hall, Edinburgh Fri 14 Nov 2025 7.30pm

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall Sat 15 Nov 7.30pm

Death in Venice, Platoon, 2001: A Space Odyssey ... picture those classic movies and you can already hear the music of Gustav Mahler, Samuel Barber and Richard Strauss. But there's no cinema on earth that can beat the sound of a full symphony orchestra playing these masterpieces live. That's what we're doing tonight, and there's a bonus feature too, as star violinist James Ehnes premieres a brand-new showpiece by Hollywood legend James Newton Howard (*The Sixth Sense, The Hunger Games*).

LAURA SHIGIHARA Grasswalk from *Plants vs. Zombies* [3']

Side-by-Side with Big Noise Govanhill (*Glasgow only*)

MAHLER Adagietto from Symphony No5 in C sharp Minor [9']

JAMES NEWTON HOWARD Violin Concerto No2 [25']

CO-COMMISSIONED BY THE RSNO AND NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

WASHINGTON: UK PREMIERE

INTERVAL

BARBER Adagio for Strings Op11 [7']

R STRAUSS Also sprach Zarathustra Op30 [34']

Alexander Shelley Conductor

James Ehnes Violin

Big Noise Govanhill

Royal Scottish National Orchestra

Recommended by
CLASSIC *fm*

The Glasgow performance will be recorded for the RSNO Archive.

Supported by the Iain and Pamela Sinclair Legacy.

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.**

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ORCHESTRA

Gershwin & Rachmaninov

ABERDEEN

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EDINBURGH

FRI 21 NOV: 7.30pm

GLASGOW

SAT 22 NOV: 7.30pm

Antheil A Jazz Symphony (1955 version) *†

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Rachmaninov Symphony No3

Patrick Hahn Conductor/Piano*

Frank Dupree Conductor†/Piano‡

Jakob Krupp Double Bass

Obi Jenne Percussion

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Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

Welcome

Welcome to this evening's concert. Those of you in Glasgow will notice some extra faces on the stage opening the performance – we have the young musicians of Big Noise Govanhill with us. Seeing these young musicians take to the stage is always such a joy, and I know our musicians get as much out of the experience as the young people themselves. Those of you in Edinburgh can look forward to Big Noise Wester Hailes joining us at next week's concert.

We've welcomed tonight's soloist, James Ehnes, many times over the years and each time is as spectacular as the last. I am certain that tonight will be no different, particularly with the UK Premiere of James Newton Howard's new concerto. In my past life as a player, I worked on some of James' movie soundtracks, and I'm so pleased he's been able to join us this week and bring some of that Hollywood magic to us.

You'll notice a movie theme running throughout this evening. The RSNO's reputation in the film industry is going from strength to strength. In fact, two movies for which we recorded the soundtracks were released this week – *Now You See Me: Now You Don't* and *Nuremberg* – featuring some of the biggest names in Hollywood, including Morgan Freeman, Isla Fisher, Rami Malek and Russell Crowe.

Many of you will know how passionate I am about what the RSNO can bring to both the Scottish cultural community and the Scottish economy, and our recording work plays a large part in that. Last week we published our Economic and Social Impact Assessment, which highlights the RSNO's economic value to Scotland – £17.2 million last year – and the impact that flatlining government funding is having on us. I encourage you to read the report on our website; it is very digestible yet hugely important in highlighting the fantastic work we do at the RSNO.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this evening's performance.

Alistair Mackie

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Keep in touch with the RSNO

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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.

On Stage

FIRST VIOLIN

Maya Iwabuchi
LEADER
Tamás Fejes
ASSISTANT LEADER
Patrick Curlett
Caroline Parry
Ursula Heidecker Allen
Elizabeth Bamping
Lorna Rough
Susannah Lowdon
Alan Manson
Liam Lynch
Veronica Marziano
Helena Rose
Daniel Stroud
Annabelle Stevens

SECOND VIOLIN

Jacqueline Speirs
ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL
Marion Wilson
Nigel Mason
Paul Medd
Sophie Lang
Robin Wilson
Kirstin Drew
Colin McKee
Catherine James
Jane Lemoine
Seona Glen
Sophie Hamilton
Kate Miguda

VIOLA

Felix Tanner
ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL
Jessica Beeston
Asher Zaccardelli
Lisa Rourke
Claire Dunn
Susan Buchan
Maria Trittinger
Francesca Hunt
Beth Woodford
David McCreadie
Elaine Koene

CELLO

Pei-Jee Ng
PRINCIPAL
Betsy Taylor
Kennedy Leitch
Yuuki Bouterey-Ishido
Niamh Molloy
Sonia Cromarty
Sarah Digger
Rachael Lee
Gunda Baranauskaitė
Neil Slid
Ruari Woodsend
Emily Brockett

DOUBLE BASS

Nikita Naumov
PRINCIPAL
Kate Brooke
Michael Rae
Filipe Dandalo
George Podkolzin
Olaya Garcia Alvarez
Alexandre Cruz dos
Santos
Moray Jones

FLUTE

Katherine Bryan
PRINCIPAL
Adam Richardson
Janet Richardson
PRINCIPAL PICCOLO

OBOE

Adrian Wilson
PRINCIPAL
Fraser Kelman
Henry Clay
PRINCIPAL COR ANGLAIS

CLARINET

Timothy Orpen
PRINCIPAL
William Knight
Aaron Hartnell-Booth
Duncan Swindells
PRINCIPAL BASS CLARINET

BASSOON

David Hubbard
PRINCIPAL
Jamie Louise White
Grant McKay
Paolo Dutto
PRINCIPAL CONTRABASSOON

HORN

Amadea Dazeley-Gaist
PRINCIPAL
Alison Murray
Andrew McLean
David McClenaghan
Martin Murphy
Neil Mitchell
Zachary Hayward

TRUMPET

Christopher Hart
PRINCIPAL
Gideon Brooks
Jason Lewis
Robert Baxter

TROMBONE

Dávur Juul Magnussen
PRINCIPAL
Cillian Ó Ceallacháin
Alastair Sinclair
PRINCIPAL BASS TROMBONE
Owen Pickering

TUBA

John Whitener
PRINCIPAL
Sophie Smart

TIMPANI

Adrian Bending
GUEST PRINCIPAL

PERCUSSION

Simon Lowdon
PRINCIPAL
Tom Hunter
Colin Hyson

HARP

Pippa Tunnell

PIANO/CELESTE

Lynda Cochrane

ORGAN

Michael Bawtree

Alexander Shelley

Conductor



Alexander Shelley performs across six continents with the world's finest orchestras and soloists. He is known for the clarity and integrity of his interpretations and for the creativity and vision of his programming. He has led over 40 major world premieres, highly praised cycles of Beethoven, Schumann and Brahms symphonies, operas, ballets and innovative multimedia productions.

Since 2015 he has served as both Music Director of Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra and Principal Associate Conductor of London's Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. In 2023 he was also appointed Artistic and Music Director of Artis-Naples in Florida, providing artistic leadership for the Naples Philharmonic and the entire multidisciplinary arts organisation. In 2024 he was named the third Music Director of the Pacific Symphony, beginning in the 2026/27 season. Alexander succeeds Carl St Clair, who has directed the orchestra for 35 years. In 2017 Alexander concluded his eight-year tenure as Chief Conductor of the Nürnberger Symphoniker, a period that was hailed by press and audiences alike as a golden era for the orchestra.

Highlights of Alexander's 2024/25 season included performances with the Seattle Symphony, Civic Orchestra of Chicago, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Colorado Symphony, Warsaw Philharmonic and National Symphony Orchestra Ireland.

Alexander's operatic engagements include *The Merry Widow* and *Roméo et Juliette* (Royal Danish Opera); *La bohème* (Opera Lyra/National Arts Centre), *Louis Riel* (Canadian Opera Company/National Arts Centre), *Iolanta* (Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen), *Così fan tutte* (Opéra National de Montpellier), *The Marriage of Figaro* (Opera North), *Tosca* (Innsbruck) and both *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* in semi-staged productions at the NAC.

Winner of the ECHO prize and the Deutsche Grunderpreis, in 2023 Alexander was conferred with the Cross of the Federal Order of Merit by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in recognition of his services to music and culture.

Through his work as Founder and Artistic Director of the Schumann Camerata and their pioneering 440Hz series in Düsseldorf, as founding Artistic Director of the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen's Zukunftslabor and through his regular tours leading Germany's National Youth Orchestra, inspiring future generations of classical musicians and listeners has always been central to Alexander's work.

Born in London in 1979 to celebrated concert pianists, Alexander studied cello and conducting in Germany and first gained widespread attention when he was unanimously awarded first prize at the 2005 Leeds Conductors' Competition.

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Laura Shighihara

Grasswalk from *Plants vs. Zombies*

DURATION 3 minutes

Grasswalk is one of the pieces of music that forms the soundtrack to a game called *Plants vs. Zombies*. The soundtrack plays while the gamer is protecting their home from a zombie attack by using the power of plants!

This piece contains short, memorable melodies that are repeated by different instruments. They are distinct so that the gamer remembers them, but not so complicated that they distract the gamer from their game!

Laura Shighihara

Composer

Laura Shighihara is the mastermind creative behind the popular game *Plants vs. Zombies*. As well as a composer, Laura is a video game developer and singer-songwriter.

Laura has created audio on over 35 video game titles, working independently and for video game companies. She runs her own studio, where she developed the highly acclaimed game *Rakuen*, and is director of the animated series *Farmer in the Sky*.

As a composer, Laura's music has attracted over 500 million combined views on YouTube, and can be heard on television shows and in films like *Minecraft: The Story of Mojang*.

Big Noise Govanhill



Adam Niedzwiedz Viola
Ailsa Robson Trombone
Al Monzer Ahmed Clarinet
Angel Masih Viola
Aniss Muhammad Raja Trumpet
Asmaa Ahmed Flute
Cristabel Amoatang Trombone
Daniel Ferar Clarinet
David Marius Plumbas
Double Bass
Denis Alin Gabor Cello
Dishant Kumar Violin
Duval Josuel Noukwe Noukwe
Double Bass
Duygu Kaya Violin
Eliane Fernanda Candiario
Cante Real Tuba
Feldya Noukwe Double Bass
Florian Hendre Clarinet
Gopal Bhandari Percussion
Grace Miller Flute
Hanna Li Violin
Harmandeep Singh Violin
Janael Neto Percussion

Jason Malek Viola
Manel Noukwe Cello
Merieme Boumeghadia Violin
Mohammad Jibran Ali Euphonium
Mohit Parmar Double bass
Molly Winarski Violin
Nadhin Ramachandran Violin
Nakshathra Ramachandran Violin
Oliver Luszczuk Violin
Patrik Horvath Percussion
Rares Nikolas David Cello
Răzvan Stancu Percussion
Rehan Azher Oboe
Reinhardts Tomsons Clarinet
Ruben Walsh Violin
Sara Noor Mahmood Cello
Sean Malek Violin
Solomon Lacatus Percussion
Soraya Neto Cello
Thrisha Kanda Viola
Wojciech Niedzwiedz Violin
Yasmin Marsay Viola
Zara Asif Violin
Zoya Khan Oboe



Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Adagietto from **Symphony No5** in C sharp Minor

FIRST PERFORMANCE

Full symphony: Cologne, 18 October 1904

DURATION *Adagietto*: 9 minutes

If the *Adagietto* from his Fifth Symphony is Mahler's best-known music, it is partly due to its regular appearance in film soundtracks. It features most prominently in Luchino Visconti's adaptation of Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice*, in which it comes to represent the main character and his increasing torment. It appears in other films about music, such as the Leonard Bernstein biopic *Maestro* and Todd Field's *Tár*, as well as – incongruously – in the bizarre *Moonfall*, in which the moon is knocked out of its orbit and comes hurtling towards earth. But it has also had an independent concert life: the tradition of extracting it from the larger symphonic work dates back even to Mahler's time.

Within the context of Symphony No5, which Mahler composed in 1901–2, it stands as something of an oasis after a stormy series of movements. While the Fifth does not have a 'programme' as such, there is certainly some kind of battle taking place throughout. It begins in darkness with a trudging, funereal spirit. This is followed by a turbulent second movement, and an unusually lengthy *Scherzo*. Then comes the *Adagietto*. Scored simply for strings and harp, a gradually unfolding melody gathers momentum in a series of wave-like phrases across the movement's running time. The more celebratory *Finale* that follows seems to take heart from the catharsis of the previous movement.

The emotional heft of the *Adagietto* led to later associations with grief and mourning. It was famously played at the funeral of Robert Kennedy in 1968, conducted by Bernstein. Jackie Kennedy, who attended the ceremony at St Patrick's Cathedral in New York, wrote an extraordinary thank-you letter to Bernstein afterwards:

When your Mahler started to fill (but that is the wrong word – because it was more this sensitive trembling) the Cathedral today – I thought it the most beautiful music I had ever heard. I am so glad I didn't know it – it was this strange music of all the gods who were crying ... your music was everything in my heart, of peace and pain and such drowning beauty. You could just close your eyes and be lost in it forever.

Mahler would probably have been astonished by this, as the *Adagietto* had been intended as a love-gift to his new wife, Alma, whom he had met and married while writing the Symphony. The conductor Wilhelm Mengelberg, an early champion of Mahler, noted on his score: 'This *Adagietto* was Gustav Mahler's declaration of love to Alma! ... both of them told me this!' The enduring popularity of the *Adagietto* is perhaps, then, its ability to represent whatever is brought to it: love, loss, the 'drowning beauty' of music itself – even the falling of the moon.

© Lucy Walker

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to the RSNO**

**Mahler
Symphony No5**

Neeme Järvi Conductor

More information
rsno.org.uk/recordings

If you enjoyed the *Adagietto* from Mahler's Symphony No5, why not try his **Symphony No1 Titan** (4–6 Dec).

James Newton Howard (Born 1951)

Violin Concerto No2

**CO-COMMISSIONED BY THE RSNO AND
NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
WASHINGTON: UK PREMIERE
FIRST PERFORMANCE**
Washington DC, 12 June 2025
DURATION 25 minutes

One of Hollywood's most distinguished and versatile composers, James Newton Howard has spent more than three decades shaping the sound of modern cinema. A nine-time Oscar nominee and winner of both Emmy and GRAMMY awards, he has created the scores for over 140 films – from *The Sixth Sense*, *The Dark Knight* and *The Hunger Games* to *Fantastic Beasts* and *Raya and the Last Dragon*. His artistry bridges worlds: from pop collaborations with Elton John and Barbra Streisand to sweeping orchestral canvases for the concert hall.

Howard's Violin Concerto No2, completed in 2024, represents a new milestone in his evolution as a concert composer. It follows his First Violin Concerto, premiered in 2015 by James Ehnes and the Pacific Symphony, and continues the creative dialogue between composer and soloist that has deepened through their collaborations in both concert and chamber settings.

The Concerto unfolds in three continuous movements, exploring contrasts of intimacy and grandeur, lyricism and rhythmic vitality. While unmistakably symphonic in scale, the work bears the hallmarks of Howard's cinematic voice – rich harmonic language, vivid emotional pacing, and a gift for melody that speaks directly to the listener.

As with his acclaimed film scores, Howard's aim is storytelling through sound. Violin Concerto No2 evokes an expressive journey that is at once personal and universal – music of reflection, tension and release, written for tonight's soloist James Ehnes, one of today's most eloquent interpreters of the instrument.

James Newton Howard

Composer



Throughout his prolific career, James Newton Howard has scored films of all scales and genres, earning multiple award nominations. He began studying music as a child and went on to attend the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara, California, then majored in piano performance at the University of Southern California. After leaving college, he toured with Elton John and Toto as a keyboardist during the late 1970s and early 1980s before moving into film music.

By the 1990s he had hit his career stride, scoring the romantic comedy *Pretty Woman* (1990) and receiving his first Academy Award nomination for his score for the drama *The Prince of Tides* (1991). Setting the musical mood for numerous films throughout the decade, his skills encompassed a plethora of genres, including two more Best Original Score Oscar nominations – *The Fugitive* (1993) and *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997). In addition, he scored *Wyatt Earp* (1994), the legal drama *Primal Fear* (1996) and the suspense thrillers *The Sixth Sense* (1999), *Unbreakable* (2000), *Signs* (2002) and *The Village* (2004). His collaborations

on tunes for *Junior* (1994) and *One Fine Day* (1996) garnered Best Song nods. Along with scoring such smaller, character-driven films as *Five Corners* (1988), *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1992) and *American Heart* (1993), Howard proved equally skilled at composing for big-budget Hollywood spectacles, including *Space Jam* (1996), *Dante's Peak* – main theme (1997), *Dinosaur* (2000) and *Collateral* (2004). Though he concentrated primarily on films, Howard has also contributed music for TV series, earning an Emmy nomination in 1995 for his theme to NBC's *ER*.

Howard is now one of the most recognised composers for film. His work in 2004 on *The Village*, with violin solos by Hilary Hahn, earned him an Oscar nomination. Since then he has composed for more major films, notably the score for *Batman Begins* which he co-wrote with Hans Zimmer. His score for *King Kong* (2005) earned him his first Golden Globe nomination for Best Original Score.

Since then he has been nominated for Best Original Score for the legal thriller *Michael Clayton* (2008) and the war film *Defiance* (2009), and has composed the music for *I Am Legend* (2007), *The Dark Knight* (2008) – with Hans Zimmer, all of *The Hunger Games* films and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2016). He gained a further Academy Award nomination in 2021 for his work on *News of the World*.

James Ehnes

Violin



James Ehnes has established himself as one of the most sought-after musicians on the international stage. Gifted with a rare combination of stunning virtuosity, serene lyricism and an unfaltering musicality, Ehnes is a favourite guest at the world's most celebrated concert halls.

Recent and upcoming orchestral highlights include the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, NHK Symphony, LA Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony and the Cleveland Orchestra.

A devoted chamber musician, Ehnes is the Artistic Director of the Seattle Chamber Music Society and the leader of the Ehnes Quartet. As a recitalist, he performs regularly at London's Wigmore Hall, New York's Carnegie Hall, Symphony Center Chicago, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Verbier Festival, Dresden Music Festival and Festival de Pâques in Aix-en-Provence.

During the 25/26 season, Ehnes embarks on his 50th birthday recital tour in his native Canada, with performances in every province and territory.

Ehnes has an extensive discography and has won many awards for his recordings, including two GRAMMYS, three Gramophone Awards and 12 Juno Awards, the most of any classical musician in history. In 2021 Ehnes was announced as the recipient of the coveted Artist of the Year award at the 2021 Gramophone Awards, which celebrated his recent contributions to the recording industry, including the launch of a new online recital series entitled *Recitals from Home* which was released in June 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent closure of concert halls. Ehnes recorded the six Bach Sonatas and Partitas and six Sonatas of Ysaÿe from his home with state-of-the-art recording equipment and released six episodes over a period of two months.

Ehnes began violin studies at the age of five, became a protégé of the noted Canadian violinist Francis Chaplin aged nine, and made his orchestra debut with L'Orchestre symphonique de Montréal aged 13. He continued his studies with Sally Thomas at the Meadowmount School of Music and The Juilliard School, winning the Peter Mennin Prize for Outstanding Achievement and Leadership in Music upon his graduation in 1997. He is a Member of the Order of Canada and the Order of Manitoba, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and an Honorary Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music, where he is a Visiting Professor. Since 2024 he has been Professor of Violin at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music.

Ehnes plays the 'Marsick' Stradivarius of 1715.

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Adagio for Strings

Op11

FIRST PERFORMANCE

NBC Studio 8H, New York, 5 November 1938

DURATION 7 minutes

The Last Night of the Proms on 15 September 2001 was a long way from the usual party jamboree. Four days earlier, New York's Twin Towers had been the target of the most ultra-violent, consequential terrorist attack in history, and Leonard Slatkin, the American conductor of the Last Night, chose to play the United States' semi-official elegy instead of the traditional British tunes – to unbearable emotional effect, as many will still remember.

You could hardly summarise the piece better than Slatkin:

It starts just with a single, very long melodic line in the violins which then goes over to the violas and then goes over to the cellos. It reaches a very strong climax, followed by what seems like an interminable silence. And then the music reappears for one last time and we hear, at the very end, two chords that might as well be saying 'Amen'.

It is simple without being simplistic: music reduced to essentials but given its power by the strong, song-like momentum and an artful chain of harmonic suspensions.

The *Adagio's* association with grief and mourning is now enshrined, but that doesn't actually seem to have been Samuel Barber's intention when writing it. The 28-year-old composer was staying in Austria with his life partner Gian Carlo Menotti when he wrote his String Quartet in 1938, its slow, four-minims-to-a-bar second movement inspired by an ancient poem from Virgil that uses the image of a slow-growing, vast wave out at sea, which finally crashes onto the rocky shore in monstrous turmoil, as a metaphor for

the irresistible animal urges unleashed by the springtime. This certainly casts the piece in rather a different light.

Barber arranged the *Adagio* for string orchestra when he heard that the conductor Arturo Toscanini was looking for new American music to play in his 1938 concert series with the NBC Orchestra. Toscanini loved it – 'semplice e bella', he called it, and premiered it along with another Barber piece, *Essay for Orchestra*, in a nationwide performance broadcast on 5 November that year. He also recorded it, the *Adagio's* length making it perfect for a 78rpm record.

In April 1945 the *Adagio* was played during the radio announcement of the death of President Roosevelt, establishing its role in American life; later it was played at the funerals of Albert Einstein and President Kennedy, and its future as America's musical *in memoriam* was fixed for ever.

© Robert Thicknesse

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**Barber
Adagio for Strings**

Plus **Cello Concerto** and
Medea Suite

Marin Alsop Conductor

More information
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Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

Also sprach Zarathustra

Op30



FIRST PERFORMANCE

Frankfurt, 27 November 1896

DURATION 34 minutes

1. **Sonnenaufgang (Sunrise)**
2. **Von den Hinterweltlern (Of the Backworldsmen)**
3. **Von der großen Sehnsucht (Of the Great Longing)**
4. **Von den Freuden und Leidenschaften (Of Joys and Passions)**
5. **Das Grablied (The Song of the Grave)**
6. **Von der Wissenschaft (Of Science)**
7. **Der Genesende (The Convalescent)**
8. **Das Tanzlied (The Dance Song)**
9. **Nachtwanderlied (Song of the Night Wanderer)**

Towards the end of the 19th century, when Richard Strauss was making his name as a brilliant, provocative young modernist, the German-speaking world was coming to terms with the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, and particularly with Nietzsche's hugely ambitious philosophical poem *Also sprach Zarathustra* (Thus spake Zarathustra). Here the Persian prophet Zoroaster became the mouthpiece for Nietzsche's own radical brand of individualism. Zarathustra rejects religion, which he feels represses human intellect and healthy erotic urges and subdues the will. Nietzsche's Zarathustra teaches iconoclasm, defiance of moral codes and the comforting self-delusions of the masses. Central to his philosophy is the notion of the *Übermensch*, the 'Superman' – not the racist concept later espoused by Hitler, but a vision of what humanity as a whole might become if it can break its spiritual bonds: 'Humanity is something to be overcome ... What is the ape to man? A joke or an object of shame. So shall man be to the Superman – a rope across an abyss.'

Strauss was one of many young Germans who were enthralled by Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*, and soon he was thinking of giving form to his feelings in music. Strauss took phrases and images from Nietzsche's poem and used them as subtitles for his audacious new orchestral tone poem, which he completed in 1896. But it's unlikely that Strauss ever wanted his audiences to relate his music point by point to Nietzsche's ideas. Significantly, this was the first of his tone poems to dispense completely with traditional formal schemes – sonata form, rondo, variations, etc. – and Strauss was clearly looking to literary ideas and images to provide a new kind of formal framework. His *Also sprach Zarathustra* was, he said, composed 'freely after Nietzsche'. 'I did not intend to write philosophical music or portray Nietzsche's great work

musically,' he wrote. 'I meant rather to convey in music an idea of the evolution of the human race from its origin, through various phases of development, religious as well as scientific, up to Nietzsche's idea of the Superman.'

That idea of evolution, of humankind striving ever upwards, is crucial to Strauss' *Also sprach Zarathustra*. It begins with a stupendous musical sunrise – made famous by Stanley Kubrick in his film *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In Strauss' scheme it signifies the dawning of human consciousness – the moment when 'the ape' becomes 'man'. But then comes a step backwards: muted horns sound the plainchant phrase *Credo in unum deum* (I believe in one God) and the organ joins richly divided strings for a portrayal of the 'false' consolations of religion. Human joys and passions, suppressed by the church, burst out in a downward-sweeping harp glissando, silencing the organ and releasing turbulent orchestral figures.

There's a search for a new stability in *Of Science* – but this dryly methodical fugue, beginning deep in cellos and basses, only provokes more turbulence, culminating in a terrifying full-orchestral reminder of the work's opening theme. The tempo increases, with cockcrows on high trumpets (promise of a new dawn), leading to a luxuriously elegant waltz, *The Dance Song*. For Nietzsche the highest, freest human thought expressed itself in a kind of mental dance, the absolute opposite of the sombre, rigid gravity of the earlier *Of Science* section.

Twelve bell strokes sound midnight, the moment of ultimate revelation in Nietzsche's poem. But from this point onwards, Strauss' music can be heard as questioning Nietzsche's vision (just as Nietzsche himself did in his darker moments). The poem culminates with a celebration of the joy that is deeper even than the world's sorrow and pain, but Strauss ends with an eerie question mark: high woodwind, violins and harp harmonies clashing quietly but irreconcilably with deep pizzicato cellos and basses. Can humanity really 'overcome' itself? Can joy really be stronger than suffering? Strauss leaves room for doubt.

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