



RSNO

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL
ORCHESTRA

Tchaikovsky's
Fifth
Symphony

Usher Hall, Edinburgh
Fri 6 Feb 2026 7.30pm

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall
Sat 7 Feb 7.30pm

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Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony

Usher Hall, Edinburgh Fri 6 Feb 2026 7.30pm

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall Sat 7 Feb 7.30pm

‘With desire and passion,’ wrote Tchaikovsky on the score of his Fifth Symphony. From its stirring opening to its triumphant finale, this is music that comes from the heart and speaks to the heart. RSNO Music Director Thomas Søndergård won’t hold back, as we also welcome not one but two charismatic soloists – violinist Noah Bendix-Balgley and cellist Bruno Delepelaire – to play a masterpiece inspired by friendship: Brahms’ nostalgic, intensely emotional Double Concerto.

BRAHMS Double Concerto for Violin and Cello
in A Minor Op102 [32’]

INTERVAL

TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony No5 in E Minor Op64 [47’]

Thomas Søndergård Conductor

Noah Bendix-Balgley Violin

Bruno Delepelaire Cello

Royal Scottish National Orchestra

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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Tchaikovsky Romeo and Juliet

Fantasy Overture

Rachmaninov Rhapsody on a

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Welcome

Welcome to this evening's performance. It's a pleasure to be back with you after the festive season. We kept busy with plenty of Christmas concerts across the country as well as our annual performance of Handel's *Messiah* in Glasgow with the fantastic RSNO Chorus. In January we headed off on tour, first to Germany for a long weekend in Ludwigsburg and Dortmund, and then around Scotland with our Viennese Gala concerts.

This week some of the team have been down in London at the Association of British Orchestras Conference. As part of this, RSNO Associate Principal Viola Felix Tanner was invited to perform in an ensemble representing six UK orchestras at an event hosted by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 11 Downing Street – an honour for both Felix and the whole RSNO.

We are delighted to have been shortlisted in the 2026 Royal Philharmonic Society Awards' Ensemble category, which recognises musical ensembles for outstanding quality and scope of performances and work. We are proud to be shortlisted alongside some wonderful organisations and individuals across 12 categories, including Nordic Music Days, who we worked with in 2024 to deliver their five-day festival; *Uprising*, the community opera co-commissioned by Glyndebourne, the Saffron Hall Trust and the RSNO; our Engagement Conductor Ellie Slorach; pianist Ethan Loch and conductor John Wilson, who perform with us in March and April; and composer David Fennessy, who mentored on our previous Composers' Hub programme. We are in very good company indeed!

Those of you in Edinburgh will notice that we are missing a well-kent face in the Usher Hall team, Irene Heggie. We were deeply saddened to hear of Irene's passing last month. She was a welcoming and warm presence – and always went out of her way to get to know our staff, musicians and, most importantly, our supporters. She will be remembered fondly by all who knew her, and we plan to dedicate a concert to Irene later this year.

This evening, we are joined by Music Director Thomas Søndergård and two fantastic soloists – Noah Bendix-Balgley and Bruno Delapelaire. Both principals in the Berliner Philharmoniker, we are in for a real treat hearing Noah and Bruno perform Brahms' Double Concerto. I'm sure you'll join me in giving them a warm welcome!

Alistair Mackie

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Keep in touch with the RSNO

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Royal Scottish National Orchestra



Formed in 1891, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (RSNO) is one of Europe's leading symphony orchestras. Awarded royal patronage by Her Late Majesty The Queen in 1977, its special status in the UK's cultural life was cemented in 2007 when it was recognised as one of Scotland's five National Performing Companies, supported by the Scottish Government.

Led by Music Director Thomas Søndergård, 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 tours internationally, most recently visiting 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 cultivated an international reputation for world-class film, television and videogame soundtrack recording. The Orchestra has recorded for BAFTA-winning

series *Silo* (Apple TV) and worked with the likes of GRAMMY Award-winning composer Lorne Balfe on *Life on Our Planet* (Netflix). Other notable titles include *Nuremberg* (Sony Pictures), *Now You See Me: Now You Don't* (Lionsgate), *Horizon: An American Saga* (Warner Bros) and *Star Wars Outlaws* (Ubisoft). The Orchestra records at its bespoke in-house facility 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. The RSNO's engagement offering includes its singing strand, encompassing a Buggy Choir and Chorus Academy in both Dundee and Glasgow and a lunchtime Workplace Choir, which complements the well-established and highly respected RSNO Youth Chorus and RSNO Chorus. The community choruses are designed with the benefits of group singing for health and wellbeing at their core and are open to all.

On Stage

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Shlomy Dobrinsky
ASSOCIATE LEADER
Tamás Fejes
ASSISTANT LEADER
Patrick Curlett
Elizabeth Bamping
Caroline Parry
Veronica Marziano
Ursula Heidecker Allen
Liam Lynch
Lorna Rough
Susannah Lowdon
Alan Manson
Gill Risi
Daniel Stroud

SECOND VIOLIN

Molly Mason
GUEST PRINCIPAL
Marion Wilson
Paul Medd
Anne Bünemann
Sophie Lang
Robin Wilson
Kirstin Drew
Colin McKee
Helena Rose
Tom Greed
Joe Hodson
Seona Glen

VIOLA

Tom Dunn
PRINCIPAL
Felix Tanner
Asher Zaccardelli
Lisa Rourke
Nicola McWhirter
Claire Dunn
Katherine Wren
Maria Trittinger
Francesca Hunt
Beth Woodford

CELLO

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PRINCIPAL
Betsy Taylor
Kennedy Leitch
Yuuki Bouterey-Ishido
Sarah Digger
Robert Anderson
Gunda Baranauskaitė
Rachael Lee

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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.

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Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Double Concerto for Violin and Cello

in A Minor Op102



FIRST PERFORMANCE

Cologne, 18 October 1887

DURATION 32 minutes

1. Allegro

2. Andante

3. Vivace non troppo

Brahms' prime motivation for composing the Double Concerto was to make a gesture of reconciliation with the violinist Joseph Joachim. The two men became close friends in 1853 and established a long and exceptionally fruitful creative partnership, which reached its high point in 1877 when Brahms composed his Violin Concerto for Joachim. But in the 1880s their friendship was seriously ruptured after Joachim became convinced that his wife was having an affair with the publisher Fritz Simrock. Since Brahms had taken the side of Joachim's wife during divorce proceedings, the violinist decided there and then to sever all connections with the composer.

After years of non-communication, Brahms was anxious to heal the rift. He hatched a plan to write a work that would not only feature a solo part for Joachim but also involve Robert Hausmann, the cellist in Joachim's string quartet who was largely responsible for promoting the composer's two Cello Sonatas.

With some trepidation, Brahms sent a letter to Joachim announcing that he had composed the Double Concerto in the hope that he could patch up their relationship. At the same time, he claimed that he would not be at all surprised or embarrassed if Joachim simply declined the invitation. Fortunately, this situation didn't arise, and in 1887 Joachim and Hausmann appeared together in Cologne to perform the Double Concerto for the first time, with Brahms conducting.

Somewhat unexpectedly, the Double Concerto met with a rather cool reception at its premiere. Critical reactions were somewhat negative, even suggesting the work was dry, unapproachable and lacking in warmth. These denigrating

remarks, emanating from some of the composer's staunchest advocates, almost certainly resulted in Brahms abandoning any plans for writing more orchestral works.

Nowadays, of course, it seems incomprehensible that the Double Concerto could have provoked such a response. Admittedly, Brahms' conception eschews conventional gestures of instrumental virtuosity that would normally feature in a concerto, and instead offers a more intellectual and symphonically integrated relationship between soloists and orchestra. On the other hand, there is no decline in the strength and expressive beauty of the work's main melodic ideas.

The opening *Allegro* is the most substantial and weighty movement. It begins in the most dramatic manner with a terse statement of the main thematic idea in the full orchestra, which is followed by an extended unaccompanied recitative for both violin and cello that builds to a passionate climax. Thereafter, the movement moves along more conventional structural lines, with some wonderfully subtle thematic interplay between the two soloists.

In comparison, the following two movements are far simpler in design: a meditative *Andante* featuring a gloriously warm melody played by solo violin and cello an octave apart, and a witty and occasionally sardonic finale, its main themes displaying more than a hint of the Hungarian style that Brahms favoured in so many of his other works.

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What was happening in 1887?

28 Jan The largest-ever snowflake, 38 cm wide and 20 cm thick, was recorded at Fort Keogh, Montana

2 Feb The first Groundhog Day, on which a groundhog 'predicts' the arrival of spring, was observed in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania

5 Feb Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Otello* premiered at La Scala, Milan

20 Jun Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee was celebrated throughout the British Empire

23 Jun The Rocky Mountains Park Act created Canada's first national park at Banff, Alberta

13 Aug Hibernian FC defeated Preston North End FC to win the 'Championship of the World', after both teams had won their respective domestic Cup competitions

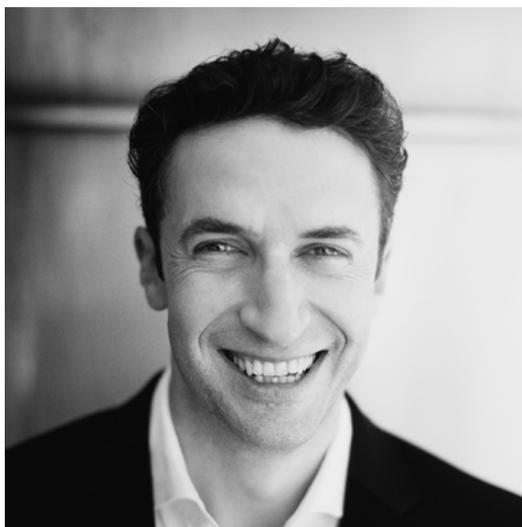
12 Oct Musical instrument maker Yamaha Corporation was founded as Yamaha Organ Manufacturing in Hamamatsu, Japan

6 Nov Celtic FC was founded in Glasgow's East End by Brother Walfrid to raise money for his Poor Children's Dinner Table charity

25 Dec Glenfiddich single malt Scotch whisky was first produced

Noah Bendix-Balgley

Violin



Noah Bendix-Balgley enjoys a wide-ranging musical life as a violinist. He is First Concertmaster of the Berliner Philharmoniker and tours both as a soloist and as a chamber musician.

Highlights include his concerto debut at New York's Carnegie Hall as the featured soloist on the Berliner Philharmoniker USA tour under Kirill Petrenko, a Japanese tour with the NHK Symphony Orchestra, and concerto appearances with the Philharmonic orchestras of Berlin, Dresden, Auckland and Nagoya. He has performed with the Verbier Festival Chamber Orchestra and the Shanghai, Utah, Quebec, Royal Danish and Pittsburgh Symphony orchestras, and toured with Apollo's Fire performing on period instruments. Noah curated and presented a week-long celebration of the violin as part of his Artist Residency with his hometown Asheville Symphony. His album, *Mozart/Sinigaglia*, with Petrenko and the Berliner Philharmoniker was released in 2024 to critical acclaim.

Noah is a renowned performer of traditional klezmer music, a musical style that has been part of his life since an early age. He has performed with groups such as Brave Old World, and has taught at many klezmer workshops. In 2016 he composed and premiered his own klezmer violin concerto, *Fidl-Fantazye*, with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, where he was Concertmaster from 2011 to 2015.

A passionate chamber musician, Noah performs in several fixed ensembles: in a trio with pianist Robert Levin and cellist Peter Wiley, with the Rosamunde String Quartet that includes members of the New York Philharmonic and Chicago Symphony, and with the multi-genre septet Philharmonix, which features members of both the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonic orchestras. Philharmonix tours worldwide, has an ongoing multi-year residency at Vienna's Konzerthaus, and has released three albums on Deutsche Grammophon.

Born in Asheville, North Carolina, Noah began playing the violin at age four. At nine, he played for Lord Yehudi Menuhin. He graduated from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music and the Munich Hochschule. A laureate of the 2009 Queen Elisabeth Competition, he also won top prizes at the Long-Thibaud Competition in France and the Postacchini Competition in Italy.

A gifted educator, Noah teaches at the Karajan Academy of the Berliner Philharmoniker. He has served on the juries of the Menuhin Competition and Indianapolis International Violin Competition, and as chair of the violin jury at the Carl Nielsen Competition.

Bruno Delepelaire

Cello



Bruno Delepelaire owes the fact that he became a cellist to his grandmother, an enthusiastic amateur cellist. As a five-year-old, he also wanted to learn the instrument. The cello lessons with his first cello teacher Erwan Fauré were formative experiences for him. Bruno later studied at the Paris Conservatoire under Philippe Muller. In 2012 he went to Berlin to continue his training under Jens Peter Maintz at the University of the Arts and under Ludwig Quandt at the Orchestra Academy of the Berliner Philharmoniker, before being appointed First Solo Cellist of the Berliner Philharmoniker in 2013.

Bruno gained orchestral experience with the Verbier Festival Orchestra and Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra, and as a student of the Orchestra Academy of the Berliner Philharmoniker. As a soloist, he has performed with the Berliner Philharmoniker, Bielefelder Philharmoniker, Deutsche Radio Philharmonie Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern, Bayerische Kammerphilharmonie, Berliner Barock Solisten, Württembergische Philharmonie Reutlingen, Münchner Rundfunkorchester, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre de l'Opéra de Nice, Aalborg Symfoniorkester and RSNO under conductors including Semyon Bychkov, Reinhard Goebel, Alexander Kalajdzic, Matthias Pintscher, Michael Sanderling and Thomas Søndergård.

Bruno has won several awards, including first prize at the Karl Davidov International Cello Competition in 2012 and the Markneukirchen International Instrumental Competition in 2013.

Bruno plays a cello made by Matteo Goffriller, on loan from the Karolina Blaberg Foundation.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Symphony No5

in E Minor Op64



FIRST PERFORMANCE

St Petersburg, 17 November 1888

DURATION 47 minutes

- 1. Andante – Allegro con anima**
- 2. Andante cantabile, con alcuna licenza**
- 3. Valse: Allegro moderato**
- 4. Andante maestoso – Allegro vivace**

The Fifth Symphony was composed at a time when Russian nationalism had reached fever pitch. There was constant bickering in the press over an apparent conflict between Tchaikovsky's own Muscovite school and the Kutchka (or Mighty Handful) – Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, Mussorgsky and Rimsky-Korsakov – of St Petersburg. The latter were perceived as true patriots, proudly upholding Russia's musical heritage, whereas Tchaikovsky was dismissed as a cosmopolitan. It was Igor Stravinsky who later rebalanced the situation, reasoning:

Tchaikovsky's music, which does not appear specifically Russian to everybody, is often more profoundly Russian than music which has long since been awarded the facile label of 'Muscovite picturesqueness'. While not specifically cultivating in his art the 'soul of the Russian peasant', Tchaikovsky drew unconsciously from the true, popular sources of our race.

For many years Tchaikovsky's three great ballet scores – *Swan Lake*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker* – struggled to gain full acceptance due to their epic symphonic sweep, while ironically his symphonies were derided for their balletic leanings. In a 1948 essay entitled *The Art of Judging Music*, the American composer Virgil Thompson dismissed Tchaikovsky's symphonies (alongside those of Shostakovich and Sibelius) as music that 'does not fully or long occupy an adult mind'. It was left to the distinguished musicologist Hans Keller to pose the provocative question, 'Where would Mahler's and indeed Schoenberg's symphonic structures be without Tchaikovsky's many formal innovations?'

Invariably plagued by self-doubt following the completion of a new score, Tchaikovsky appears to have been exceptionally gloomy regarding the Fifth Symphony, panicking in a letter to his patron Nadezhda von Meck: 'Am I really played

out as they say? Is the rehashing of old ideas and formulae all I am really capable of?' His despondency turned to paranoia following the 1888 premiere, after which he chose to interpret the rapturous standing ovation as 'motivated by my earlier work', and stupefyingly concluded that it 'didn't really please the audience'. It was only after the Symphony had been lavished with praise around the world that he grudgingly conceded to his nephew, Lev Davidov, that 'perhaps it is not so bad after all'.

The Fifth has proved the most enduringly popular of Tchaikovsky's seven symphonies (Nos 1-6 and the *Manfred*). Its captivating fusion of Germanic symphonic structure (via Schumann) and the French balletic tradition of Adam and Delibes, coupled with its indelible melodic charm, raw emotional power and overwhelming sense of a glorious triumph won in the face of extreme adversity, has guaranteed it an immortal place in the history of the genre.

Like its immediate predecessor, the Fifth Symphony's structural progress is articulated and inspired by an opening motto theme (first heard in the clarinet) symbolising Fate. In the manner of Berlioz's *Harold in Italy*, its many appearances are signalled in a way that suggests an underlying emotional narrative. This infinitely subtle technique allows Tchaikovsky to constantly reinvigorate his materials, providing the audience with a stream of apparently fresh ideas that yet possess an unerring sense of belonging together.

For example, during the slow movement the motto cries out with searing intensity towards the end, played by the brass, underpinned by thundering timpani. The clarinet steals in with the Fate motif at the close of the waltz-like third movement, and then, utterly transformed in the major key, it introduces the finale and caps it in a blaze of overwhelming affirmation. For some

commentators, this unrestrained outburst of triumphalism has an almost Shostakovich-like ring of a hollow victory about it, as though Tchaikovsky's pulverising of Fate into submission is laced with withering irony. Whatever the truth of the matter, judging by the brooding melancholy and inexorable despair of his Sixth (*Pathétique*) Symphony, the battle with his inner demons was certainly far from over.

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If you enjoyed Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony, why not try his **Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture** (12-14 Feb)?

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Felix Klieser Plays Strauss

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Thomas Søndergård Conductor

Felix Klieser Horn

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Tchaikovsky's **Fourth Symphony**

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Pärt Cantus in Memoriam

Benjamin Britten

Elena Langer The Lives of Birds*

World Premiere

Tchaikovsky Symphony No4

Kristiina Poska Conductor

Anna Dennis Soprano

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