



RSNO

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL
ORCHESTRA

Tchaikovsky's
**Fourth
Symphony**

Caird Hall, Dundee
Thu 19 Mar 2026 7.30pm

Usher Hall, Edinburgh
Fri 20 Mar 7.30pm

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall
Sat 21 Mar 7.30pm

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Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony

Caird Hall, Dundee Thu 19 Mar 2026 7.30pm

Usher Hall, Edinburgh Fri 20 Mar 7.30pm

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall Sat 21 Mar 7.30pm

Beauty, passion and the miracles of nature – there's no tale that an orchestra can't tell, and there's definitely no symphony quite like Tchaikovsky's shattering Fourth: raw tragedy and roof-raising triumph, it's explosive stuff, so guest conductor Kristiina Poska begins with something a little more tranquil. Arvo Pärt's haunting *Cantus* is the perfect complement to a wonderful new set of songs from Elena Langer, inspired by the songs of birds and the nature poetry of Glyn Maxwell.

ARVO PÄRT Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten [6']

ELENA LANGER The Lives of Birds [21'] *WORLD PREMIERE*

Commissioned by the RSNO. Generously supported by
Javan Herberg KC and Jessica Boyd KC

INTERVAL

TCHAIKOVSKY Symphony No4 in F Minor Op36 [43']

Kristiina Poska Conductor

Anna Dennis Soprano

Royal Scottish National Orchestra



The Dundee concert is supported by Leisure and Culture Dundee, Leng Charitable Trust, Northwood Charitable Trust and Tay Charitable Trust.

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.

RSNO

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL
ORCHESTRA

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Welcome

Thank you for joining the RSNO for this very special concert.

It's a rare pleasure to welcome back soloist, composer and conductor this evening. Many of you will remember soprano Anna Dennis joining us last Season to give the world premiere of a piece by Neil T Smith, *Hidden Polyphony*. Tonight Anna gives another world premiere, *The Lives of Birds*, a setting of poems by Glyn Maxwell, composed by the brilliant Elena Langer, whose concerto/cantata *The Dong with a Luminous Nose* went down a storm in our 2024:25 Season. I am certain this new work will be a success too, especially with Kristiina Poska at the helm, returning to the Orchestra for the first time since 2023.

We open tonight's concert with one of the most distinctive and atmospheric contemporary composers, Arvo Pärt, in slightly belated celebration of his 90th birthday last year. *Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten* features on one of our many recordings with Neeme Järvi, which helped establish our reputation as a top recording orchestra. Most recently, we recorded Lorne Balfe's fantastic score for Netflix's *The Dinosuars*. With massive Hollywood names involved in the production, including executive producer Steven Spielberg and narrator Morgan Freeman, our Orchestra and recording studio continue to cement our reputation internationally. *The Dinosuars* is on Netflix now, and you can listen to the soundtrack on the usual streaming platforms or on YouTube.

I hope some of you in Edinburgh and Glasgow came along to our pre-concert showcases from St Mary's Music School and Douglas Academy respectively. It's a great privilege that we are able to support both of these schools from which generations of Scottish musicians have benefited, and which gave me such a fabulous musical education. I feel sure there will have been future RSNO musicians in their ranks tonight!

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

FIRST VIOLIN

Maya Iwabuchi
LEADER
Lena Zeliszewska
ASSOCIATE LEADER
Tamás Fejes
ASSISTANT LEADER
Patrick Curlett
Caroline Parry
Ursula Heidecker Allen
Elizabeth Bamping
Susannah Lowdon
Alan Manson
Liam Lynch
Veronica Marziano
Joana Rodriguez
Lorna Rough
Helena Quispe
Sharon Haslam

SECOND VIOLIN

Ricky Gore
GUEST PRINCIPAL
Jacqueline Speirs
Marion Wilson
Paul Medd
Anne Bünemann
Sophie Lang
Robin Wilson
Kirstin Drew
Colin McKee
Helena Rose
Emily Nenniger
John Robinson

VIOLA

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

CELLO

Pei-Jee Ng
PRINCIPAL
Betsy Taylor
Kennedy Leitch
Rachael Lee
Sarah Digger
Robert Anderson
Gunda Baranauskaitė
Susan Dance

DOUBLE BASS

Nikita Naumov
PRINCIPAL
Michael Rae
Moray Jones
Alexandre Cruz dos Santos
George Podkolzin
Kirsty Matheson

FLUTE

Katherine Bryan
PRINCIPAL
Oliver Roberts
Janet Richardson
PRINCIPAL PICCOLO

OBOE

Adrian Wilson
PRINCIPAL
Peter Dykes
Henry Clay
PRINCIPAL COR ANGLAIS

CLARINET

Timothy Orpen
PRINCIPAL
William Knight
Duncan Swindells
PRINCIPAL BASS CLARINET

BASSOON

David Hubbard
PRINCIPAL
Hugo Mak
Paolo Dutto
PRINCIPAL CONTRABASSOON

HORN

Amadea Dazeley-Gaist
PRINCIPAL
Alison Murray
Andrew McLean
David McClenaghan
Martin Murphy

TRUMPET

Jason Lewis
ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL
Katie Bannister

TROMBONE

Dávur Juul Magnussen
PRINCIPAL
Cillian Ó Ceallacháin
Jonny Lovatt
GUEST PRINCIPAL BASS TROMBONE

TUBA

John Whitener
PRINCIPAL

TIMPANI

Mark MacDonald
GUEST PRINCIPAL

PERCUSSION

Simon Lowdon
PRINCIPAL
Stuart Semple
Jonathan Herbert
Noah Chalamanda

CELESTA

Lynda Cochrane

Kristiina Poska

Conductor



Acclaimed for her artistry and versatility, Kristiina Poska has served as Music Director of the Orchestre Français des Jeunes since 2025, and as Principal Guest Conductor of the Latvian National Symphony Orchestra since the 2021/22 season.

This season, Poska debuts with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Essen Philharmonic, Sinfonia Varsovia, Orquesta Sinfónica del Principado de Asturias, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. She also returns to the Orchestre National de Metz, Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, Minnesota Orchestra and RSNO. As Music Director of the Orchestre Français des Jeunes, she leads two European tours, with performances at the Opéra de Dijon, BOZAR Brussels and Philharmonie de Paris, including a special concert for the Biennale des Quatuors à cordes.

Recent highlights include her debuts with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Colorado Symphony Orchestra in North America; Orquesta Nacional de España, Orquesta Sinfónica de

Euskadi and Orquesta Sinfónica de Bilbao in Spain; the Swedish and Norwegian Radio Symphony orchestras in Scandinavia; as well as the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre National de Montpellier, Lahti Symphony Orchestra, Grazer Philharmoniker, and the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo.

Equally prolific in opera, Poska's current season features a return to Norwegian National Opera with Barrie Kosky's production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. Her recent operatic engagements include her debut at the Opéra de Dijon conducting Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* and Strauss' *Metamorphosen*; a return to the Staatsoper Berlin for *The Magic Flute*; Mozart's *Così fan tutte* at both Norwegian National Opera and the Royal Danish Theatre; Puccini's *La bohème* at Opera Ballet Vlaanderen; Bizet's *Carmen* at the Staatsoper Stuttgart; and Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* at the Sächsische Staatsoper Dresden.

Poska's musical foundation was shaped at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre in Tallinn, where she studied choral conducting, and at Berlin's Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler, where she honed her orchestral conducting skills. Her remarkable talent was recognised early through her finalist placements at the prestigious Donatella Flick LSO Competition (2010) and the Malko Competition (May 2012), where she was also awarded the Audience Prize. In April 2013 she won the esteemed German Conductors' Prize.

Her previous appointments include Chief Conductor of the Flanders Symphony Orchestra (2019-25), Principal Conductor of Cappella Academica (2006-11), Kapellmeister at the Komische Oper Berlin (2012-16) and Music Director for Theater Basel (2019/20). With the Flanders Symphony Orchestra, Poska continues her recording of the complete Beethoven symphony cycle for the Fuga Libera label.



RSNO CIRCLE

Do you wish to support the Orchestra on a regular basis, hear behind the scenes news, and attend open rehearsals? Becoming a Circle member is for you.

Donate

This year we launched our *Every Child, Every Community* appeal, with funds directly supporting our work in musical education, from early years to young professionals. If you would like to support the next generation of young professionals please donate at rsno.org.uk/every-child



Supporting the RSNO

By becoming an RSNO Circle Member or Patron, donating to our appeal or leaving a gift in your Will, you are helping to keep Scotland's National Orchestra on stage and in communities across the country.

To find out more please contact polly.lightbody@rsno.org.uk

Patron Programme

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Arvo Pärt (Born 1935)

Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten

FIRST PERFORMANCE

Tallinn, Estonia, 7 April 1977

DURATION 6 minutes

It was in late 1976 that Arvo Pärt heard of the death of the composer Benjamin Britten, aged just 63, on the radio. It was news that profoundly shocked him. 'Why did the date of Benjamin Britten's death – 4 December 1976 – touch such a chord in me?' he wrote. It had come, certainly, at a time in his musical development, 'where I could recognise the magnitude of such a loss. Inexplicable feelings of guilt, more than that even, arose in me. I had just discovered Britten for myself. Just before his death I began to appreciate the unusual purity of his music ... And besides, for a long time I had wanted to meet Britten personally – and now it would not come to that.'

These feelings of loss and connection saturate the work that he would premiere – not without much trouble from Estonia's Soviet government – a year later in 1977. *Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten* is one of Pärt's earliest experiments with the musical style he called tintinnabulation, a word that takes its root from the Latin word for 'bell'.

An outlying devotee of Arnold Schoenberg's highly structured compositional mode of 12 note serialism, Pärt felt he had reached a musical dead-end in the early 1970s. After a decade struggling against the tightening fist of Soviet cultural restrictions, and the structures of serialism, he took a four-year hiatus from composing to find his own way forward.

It was a chance hearing of Gregorian plainchant that set Pärt, searching for musical purity and meaning, on his new course. Newly adherent to the Russian Orthodox Church, he spent the early 1970s rigorously researching medieval

and Renaissance church music. The bell, which was so much a part of Russian Orthodox liturgy and ritual, became a key focus. Pärt strived to create musical notation echoing the complex sonority of bells, albeit more as metaphor than imitation.

Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten is deceptively simple. The bell gives an underlying structure to the music, a symbolic tolling for the dead. It begins in a created silence, the bell ringing thrice on the pitch of A, before each of the strings enters in turn, from the violins to the double basses, working their way slowly down the scale of A natural minor, a lament in canon. Each new instrumental introduction overlaps the previous at half the speed, with each in turn converging on a particular note in the scale – the first violins on C, the double basses on A – then repeating that note until all the other parts have reached their own place in a final loud chord. The strings weep an intensity of grief. The bell tolls continuously, its resonance heard in the silence beyond the suddenly extinguished final chord.

© Sarah Urwin Jones

Listen again to the RSNO

Music from Estonia,
including ***Cantus in Memoriam
Benjamin Britten***

Neeme Järvi Conductor

More information

rsno.org.uk/recordings

Elena Langer (Born 1974)

The Lives of Birds



WORLD PREMIERE
DURATION 21 minutes

Maybe the lives of birds are not really all that different from the lives of people ... The RSNO audience already knows Elena Langer's music from the 2024 performance of her concerto/cantata based on Edward Lear's *The Dong with a Luminous Nose*, a tale of lost love that went beyond the enjoyable nonsense and fantasy of Lear's poem to the sad romantic tale of the poor deserted Dong behind it. In the same sort of way, *The Lives of Birds* may well be about more than we see and hear on the surface.

Elena and the poet Glyn Maxwell (who have worked together for over 20 years) had the idea of writing this cycle of eight poems after reading the 1952 book *Birds as Individuals* by the musician and naturalist Len (Gwendolen) Howard, detailing her life at a Sussex cottage observing the birds in her garden (and inside the house, too). But the poems are very different from that documentary book, providing

instead a meditation on love, time, ageing and mortality, told by a narrator who appears as a sort of immortal bird spirit, observing her fellow creatures, feeling for their joys and sorrows.

The stories are simple: the proud Ashleaf, more attached to the possessions he has won than to any other birds; the chap whose new girlfriend spent the whole time looking at her reflection in the window (then flew away), Robin who pushes his son out of the nest, a bird who dances a kind of threnody for her dead father ... their lives are short – and jeopardised every instant 'by rat and cat and fox and car' – but not uneventful or petty.

The songs are varied musically as well as in mood, using the orchestra with great imagination to evoke emotions and events, always bathed in sounds of birdsong. The otherworldly narration of the start is invaded by the baleful 'white cat' of death, then Ashleaf battles a virtuosic autumn leaf-storm to secure his prize, with a calm orchestral interlude to suggest the passing years. The story of Moss, with little owl-like interjections, turns noisily catastrophic as his girlfriend flies off.

In the fourth song the clock of life ticks inexorably towards the end, and the fifth is a kind of serene continuation as the spirit watches the birds vanish off to who knows where. 'Robin Red' is full of chirruping birdsong, then comes the angular death-dance, with a quiet prayer in the middle. A short interlude brings back the clock, and the spirit returns with its message: 'Be not afraid.'

© Robert Thicknesse

Commissioned by the RSNO. Generously supported by Javan Herberg KC and Jessica Boyd KC.

Elena Langer

Composer

Elena Langer is a prolific composer of colourful, dramatic and often humorous music, familiar to audiences across Europe and America through her operatic, vocal and orchestral pieces. Elena's 2016 hit for Welsh National Opera, *Figaro Gets a Divorce*, was described by Rupert Christiansen in the *Daily Telegraph* as 'that rare thing: a modern opera that exerts an immediate emotional impact'. Her WNO follow-up, the 2018 vaudeville *Rhondda Rips It Up!*, was wildly popular with audiences across the UK. Her recent cantata *The Dong with a Luminous Nose* was warmly reviewed in *The Times*: 'Langer manages to uncover the sadness of lost love lurking beneath the poem's whimsy.' In November 2024 the RSNO gave its Scottish premiere.

Elena studied at the Tchaikovsky Conservatoire in Moscow and at the Royal Academy of Music in London. Her works have been performed at Zurich Opera, New York's Carnegie Hall, the Grand Theatre Geneva, Opéra National du Rhin Strasbourg, Welsh National Opera, Shakespeare's Globe, Hong Kong Academy of Arts, the Linbury Theatre at Covent Garden, the Tokyo Theatre, London's Royal Festival Hall and Boston Symphony Hall.

Landscape with Three People, a CD of Elena's vocal and chamber pieces, was released by Harmonia Mundi in 2013. The titular song cycle, a setting of poems by Lee Harwood, was performed in 2022 at the Oxford International Song Festival, and in January 2026 at Another Music Festival in London.

Three new song cycles were premiered in 2025: *Nice Weather for Witches*, for mezzo, piano and dancers, and *Two Mandelstam Songs*, for tenor and piano, at the Oxford International Song Festival; and *Fabulous Beasts*, sung by the countertenor Hugh Cutting at London's Wigmore Hall in December.

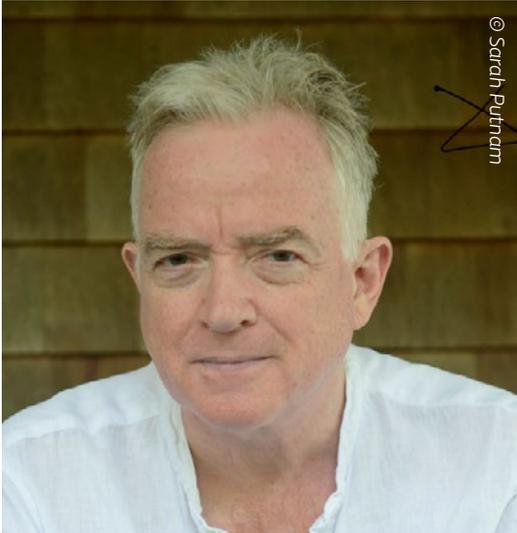
Elena's new opera *To Die For* will be produced by the Netherlands Reisopera in April. Based on the (banned) 1928 play *The Suicide* by Nikolai Erdman, it is an exuberant black farce whose message is that while life may be chaotic and cruel, the alternative is almost certainly worse. *To Die For* will be performed at the London Coliseum in November 2026.

A new version of Elena's comic opera *Four Sisters* is to be performed at Covent Garden in spring 2026. English Touring Opera is reviving her mono-opera *Ariadne* in the autumn.

Elena is currently working on a new violin concerto for Julian Rachlin and the Philharmonisches Staatsorchester Hamburg, to premiere in 2027.

Glyn Maxwell

Poet



Glyn Maxwell's recent poetry books include *How The Hell Are You*, *The Big Calls*, *Pluto* and *Hide Now*, all of which were nominated for either the Forward or T S Eliot prizes; and *The Nerve*, which won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize in 2003. In 2014 he received the Cholmondeley Prize from the Society of Authors in recognition of his achievement in poetry, and in 1997 the E M Forster Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 2021 he was Chair of Judges for the T S Eliot Prize.

His libretti for opera include *The Lion's Face* (for Elena Langer), co-commissioned by ROH2 and The Opera Group, 2011, winner Argus Angel Award, Brighton Festival; *The Firework-Maker's Daughter* (for David Bruce), co-commissioned by ROH2 and The Opera Group, 2013, nominated for Best New Opera, Olivier Awards 2014; *Nothing* (for David Bruce), co-commissioned by Glyndebourne and ROH, nominated for Best New

Opera, Sky Arts Awards 2016; *Seven Angels* (for Luke Bedford), commissioned by ROH2, 2013, and *The Birds* (for Edward Dudley Hughes), commissioned by The Opera Group and *I Fagiolini*, 2008. His other libretti include *Ariadne* (2002) and *It's Not You, It's Me* (2019), both for Elena Langer.

Glyn's many plays include *Liberty* (Shakespeare's Globe), *The Lifeblood* (Riverside Studios and Edinburgh Fringe, British Theatre Guide's Best Play of 2004) and adaptations of *Alice in Wonderland*, *Wind in the Willows*, *The Beggar's Opera* and *Jekyll and Hyde* (all Grosvenor Park Theatre, Chester). Also *Cyrano de Bergerac* (Southwark Playhouse, 2016), *Babette's Feast* (Coronet, 2017), *Boatmantown* (Oxford Everyman, 2023) and several plays for the Phoenix Theatre Ensemble in New York City, for whom Glyn is Resident Playwright.

Glyn's other writings include the travel book *Moon Country* (with Simon Armitage, 1996), the verse narrative *The Sugar Mile* (2005), the novel *Blue Burneau* (1994, shortlisted for the Whitbread First Novel Award), the popular critical guidebook *On Poetry* (2012) and the comic novel *Drinks With Dead Poets* (2016).

Glyn has taught at Amherst, Columbia, Princeton, New York University and The New School in the US, and in the UK at the universities of Warwick and Essex. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He is currently Head of Studies on the Poetry MA at The Poetry School at Somerset House, and writes a Substack platform called *Silly Games To Save The World*.

The Lives of Birds

i **be not afraid**

I sit so high
 I see you all
I sit so long
my blue eyes open
 like the skyway
noon and night and day no matter
though the white cat come in time
how everlasting
 is your heyday

be not afraid
 I see you born
I sit so long
you pass before me
 in your peacetime
frost and fall and spring no matter
though the white cat by and by
how everlasting
 is the meantime

ii **ashleaf**

ashleaf
his only name was ashleaf
he went among a thousand leaves
the autumn dead
in search of one
ashleaf

*I go by
and now I go by ashleaf*

he held it
proudly in his yellow beak
as if among a thousand leaves
the autumn dead
this leaf alone
is living

*I go by
and now I go by ashleaf*

he conquered
all the garden, all the world
and fought among a thousand leaves
the autumn dead
to be the lord
his only song

*I go by
and now I go by ashleaf*

old now
and all alone and old now
he goes among a thousand leaves
the autumn dead
all he can see
are ashleaves

iii moss

moss was cross
 he lost his love
 his true love somehow
 who knows who, do I look like I do?
 a new love came
 came from nowhere
 knew he needed someone

how though
 how did she know
 know he needed someone
 who knows how, it's a long time now
 all light long
 all darkness long
 peering at the window

her own face
 peering at her face
 her own face in the window
 who knows why, I might tell you a lie!
 moss did not know
 did not know why
 why come at all he wondered

one long day
 she flew away
 and flew away forever
 who knows where, do I look like I'm there?
 and left behind
 moss with her face
 in the window to remember

iv the gates

they go
 you know
 by rat and cat and fox and car
 they go

they're born
 this dawn
 and then by hook or crook or clock
 they're gone

and still
 I sing
 though you must think me mad if you think
 anything

but when
 you're gone
 I'll sing of you I'm singing now your
 only song

v a meadow beyond

over the trees to a meadow beyond
 they fly away

and I am always here to sing them
 on their way

mine is the final song of the night
 now darkness grieves

and you hear nothing but the song
 that still believes

that over the trees to a meadow beyond
 they fly away

vi red and sunset

Robin Red was a robin, Robin
Red one day
Said *Goodbye!* to his son, the son
Of Red, his name
Was Sunset, there they sat on a branch
And Robin cried
Goodbye Sunset! Sunset sat there
Peacefully
In summer with his father, Robin
Red once more
Said *Goodbye there Sunset*, Sunset
Wondered where
His father meant to go, his father's
Breast began
To turn an even redder red, *Your
Time has come,*
Sunset! Sunset learned that day that
Time could come
And Sunset learned that day that time
Could also go
He learned it as he flew away, though
I don't know
How far he flew, I only know
That Robin Red
Still sits there with his red-breast fading
All alone

vii the dance

I dance the dance I never
Danced before

In the wild wind at dawn I
Dance it for

Old Ashleaf with his dead leaf
Trembling there

O watching me old Ashleaf

Who long ago
Felled my father here did
Lay him low

In the wild wind at dawn he
Knows I know

So I dance the dance I'll never
Dance again

For what can not be done nor
Be undone

I dance though all is gone till
He is gone

viii be not afraid [reprise]

be not afraid
begin afresh
live out the life
you have no name for
only plainsong
sun and wind and rain no matter
though the white cat come tomorrow
everlasting
was the morning

With thanks to James Dacre, who introduced us
to Len Howard's books and suggested the idea
of composing a piece about birds ...

Megan Bousfield
SURTITLES OPERATOR

Anna Dennis

Soprano



Anna Dennis studied at the Royal Academy of Music and was the recipient of the 2023 Royal Philharmonic Society's Singer award.

Her opera performances include Katie Mitchell's *New Dark Age* at the Royal Opera House, Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* at Drottningholms Slottsteater in Stockholm, Queen of the Night in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* at Opera North, Handel's *Rodelinda* at the Göttingen Handel Festspiel, Mozart's *Idomeneo* at Birmingham Opera Company, and roles in all three Monteverdi operas during Sir John Eliot Gardiner's world tour of the trilogy. She recently created the title role of Violet in Tom Coult's debut opera, premiered at the Aldeburgh Festival, and multiple roles in Sir David Pountney's Purcell *Masque of Might* for Opera North.

In concert she has sung with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of St Luke's in New York, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Orquestra Gulbenkian, Les Violons du Roy, Britten Sinfonia, Akademie Alte Musik Berlin and Sinfonietta Riga. She has sung Britten's

War Requiem at the Berlin Philharmonie and Thomas Ades' *Life Story*, accompanied by the composer, at New York's White Light Festival. Recent concert highlights have included performing Boulez's *Pli selon pli* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican's centenary celebration of the composer, Bach's *Mein Herze Schwimmt im Blut* with Kristian Bezuidenhout in Riga, Haydn's *Jahreszeiten* with the Düsseldorfer Symphoniker under Adam Fischer, and Handel's *Orlando* with the Academy of Ancient Music under Laurence Cummings.

Her numerous recordings include Elena Langer's *Landscape with Three People*, the GRAMMY-nominated *Kastalsky Requiem* with the Orchestra of St Luke's under Leonard Slatkin, two orchestral song cycles on composer Tom Coult's debut disc *Pieces that Disappear* with the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, and Handel's *Amadigi di Gaula* with the Early Opera Company under Christian Curnyn.

In the 2025/26 season she sings Thomas Ades' *America (a Prophecy)* with the New York Philharmonic and Mahler Chamber Orchestra, both conducted by the composer; a programme of Mozart concert arias at the Wigmore Hall; Elena Langer's *The Lives of Birds* with the RSNO; the premiere of Tansy Davies' *Passion of Mary Magdalene* at the Barbican and the Edinburgh International Festival; and a midsummer programme with Helsinki Baroque Orchestra at the Potsdam Festspiele.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

Symphony No4

in F Minor Op36



FIRST PERFORMANCE

Moscow, 22 February 1878

DURATION 43 minutes

- 1. Andante sostenuto – Moderato con anima**
– Moderato assai, quasi Andante
– Allegro vivo
- 2. Andantino in modo di canzona**
- 3. Scherzo: Pizzicato ostinato – Allegro**
- 4. Finale: Allegro con fuoco**

Tchaikovsky spent most of his life attempting to reconcile the scorching inspiration and confidence of his finest music with a sensitive nature overwhelmed by insecurity and anxiety. His emotional intuitiveness was to prove both a blessing and a curse, for while it helped facilitate some of the most treasurable music of the Romantic era, the lukewarm and often downright hostile reception that greeted many of his finest scores resulted in periods of creative paralysis.

During the early 1870s, Tchaikovsky established his early reputation with a string of striking orchestral scores that included his Second

(*Little Russian*) and Third (*Polish*) symphonies, First Piano Concerto, the ballet *Swan Lake*, and the *Variations on a Rococo Theme* for cello and orchestra of 1876. That same year Tchaikovsky first began exchanging letters with a wealthy widower, Nadezhda von Meck, who went on to support him financially (and emotionally) on the condition that neither of them should ever meet.

The 1,100 or so intimate letters that passed between them over the next 14 years provide a unique insight into this most artistically and emotionally vulnerable of composers. The short-term effect was to inspire Tchaikovsky's creative urge on an almost unprecedented scale as he fired off three volatile masterworks in quick succession – the symphonic fantasia *Francesca da Rimini*, the opera *Eugene Onegin* and the Fourth Symphony, written especially for von Meck and referred to in their correspondence as 'our symphony'. Von Meck was beside herself with excitement: 'To tell you what ecstasies your work sent me into would be unfitting,' she enthused, 'since you are accustomed to praise and admiration from those much better qualified than a creature so musically insignificant as I. It would only make you laugh.'

She was so struck by the music's choreographic thrust and churning emotions that she asked Tchaikovsky for an explanatory note. Although such things should naturally be treated with a degree of caution, his response – reluctantly given – throws a fascinating light on his thought-processes after the event:

The introduction holds the key, the essence, the primary idea of the entire symphony. It is Fate, the inescapable power that stifles peace and contentment and ensures that the sky is always clouded ... The second movement encapsulates another form of sadness. It is the melancholic feeling that overpowers one when one sits alone at night, exhausted by the day's

labours ... The Scherzo suggests the fleeting glimpses and indistinct shadows that drift into the imagination after one has sipped some wine and become mildly intoxicated ... The Finale represents some jubilant celebration. Rejoice in the happiness of others and there is still some sense in being alive.

Whether or not one chooses to take Tchaikovsky's analysis at face value, the pervasive and at times subversive impact of the opening Fate motif is hard to ignore. Closer inspection reveals a wealth of subtle harmonic and thematic inter-relationships that owe much in essence to Tchaikovsky's beloved Mozart. Indeed, the main structural interfaces of the first movement are as carefully signposted (by means of the 'Fate' motif) as any symphonic *allegro* by the Austrian master.

As Tchaikovsky later reflected, 'Not one of my orchestral pieces was the result of such labour – on no other have I worked with so much love and with such devotion.' The Fourth Symphony is dominated by a fatalistic idea which is announced at the very opening and goes on to haunt the entire work in various forms – it is subtly insinuated into the textures of the emotionally volatile slow movement and bubbly, pizzicato Scherzo, before being hoisted aloft at the climax of the Finale, crowned by a bracing coda of surging optimism.

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What was happening in 1878?

28 Jan The world's first telephone exchange opened in New Haven, Connecticut

31 Jan Pius XI died after a 31.5-year pontificate, the longest confirmed

19 Feb The phonograph, the first 'record player', was patented by Thomas Edison

25 Apr Anna Sewell, the author of *Black Beauty*, died in Norfolk aged 58

25 May Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore* opened at the Opera Comique in London

1 Jun John Masfield, Poet Laureate and author of the children's novel *The Box of Delights*, was born in Ledbury, Herefordshire

15 Jun Eadweard Muybridge's pioneering stop-motion still photographs demonstrated that when galloping, all four of a horse's legs are off the ground at the same time

12 Sep Having arrived from Alexandria in Egypt on 21 Jan, Cleopatra's Needle was erected on the Embankment in London

21 Nov The Second Anglo-Afghan War started when British forces attacked and captured Ali Masjid fort in the Khyber Pass

26 Nov Artist James McNeill Whistler was awarded a farthing in damages and half the costs in his libel case against the critic John Ruskin; he was subsequently declared bankrupt

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