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Brahms' Violin Concerto

Music Hall, Aberdeen
Thu 22 Oct 2026 7.30pm

Usher Hall, Edinburgh
Fri 23 Oct 7.30pm

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall
Sat 24 Oct 7.30pm


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Brahms' Violin Concerto

Music Hall, Aberdeen Thu 22 Oct 2026 7.30pm
Usher Hall, Edinburgh Fri 23 Oct 7.30pm
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With some pieces, you just want to close your eyes and let your imagination paint a picture. For our Finnish guest conductor Emilia Hoving, it's all about the landscape of the far North: lakes, forests, midnight sunlight and the shimmering wonder of the Northern Lights. So let your ears do the gazing in Finnish classics by Saariaho and Sibelius – and join RSNO Leader Maya Iwabuchi on an autumn getaway to the Austrian Alps, in Brahms' magnificent Violin Concerto.

JOËLLE BROAD Saturn [4']
Side by Side with Big Noise Torry (*Aberdeen only*)
BRITTA BYSTRÖM A Walk to Brahms' Violin Concerto [6']
SCOTTISH PREMIERE
BRAHMS Violin Concerto in D Major Op77 [40']

INTERVAL

SAARIAHO Ciel d'Hiver [10']
SIBELIUS Symphony No6 in D Minor Op104 [33']

Emilia Hoving Conductor
Maya Iwabuchi Violin
Big Noise Torry
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.


RSNO
SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL ORCHESTRA
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Philippe Quint Violin
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Welcome

It's a special concert this evening, with our Leader Maya Iwabuchi taking the solo spot for Brahms' Violin Concerto.

I've worked with Maya for over 30 years, from back when we were two of the youngest members of the Philharmonia in London. I remember the first time we went on tour, and hearing her play the massive violin solo in Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* after a gruelling day of travel to Sicily – I was completely in awe. It's great to celebrate one of our own!

We're so pleased to have Emilia Hoving back with us for these concerts – some of you will remember her appearance in the 2024:25 Season alongside cellist Senja Rummukainen. Emilia had tremendous reviews from our players and critics alike, so we knew we had to get her back. I am certain that Emilia and Maya performing together will be a rare treat.

To our Aberdeen audience, welcome for the first time this Season, and welcome too to the young musicians of Big Noise Torry who open the Music Hall concert with Joëlle Broad's *Saturn*. These side-by-side performances with the Orchestra give so much joy to the Big Noise musicians, to our players and to our audiences. Those of you in Edinburgh and Glasgow can look forward to Big Noise Wester Hailes and Big Noise Govanhill taking to the stage on Friday 23 April and Saturday 8 May 2027 respectively.

Our recent Glasgow performance with Principal Guest Conductor Patrick Hahn and violist Lawrence Power was broadcast on BBC Radio 3's *In Concert* on Tuesday 13 October, recorded by our fantastic team of in-house sound engineers. You can listen back to the concert, which featured Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony and Schnittke's Viola Concerto, on BBC Sounds.

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, 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. In May 2026, Giedrė Šlekytė was announced as the RSNO's Music Director Designate and will formally become Music Director from the beginning of the 2027:28 Season, with Thomas Søndergård taking on the new position of Music Director Emeritus.

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, Scotland's Studio. In 2026 the RSNO was the first professional orchestra since 2014 to be awarded the Royal Philharmonic Society's Ensemble Award. The award recognises musical ensembles for outstanding quality and scope of performances and work.

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 Choruses 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
Igor Yuzefovich
LEADER
Lena Zeliszewska
ASSOCIATE LEADER
Tamás Fejes
ASSISTANT LEADER
Patrick Curlett
Mabelle Park
Caroline Parry
Ursula Heidecker Allen
Elizabeth Bamping
Lorna Rough
Susannah Lowdon
Alan Manson
Liam Lynch
Veronica Marziano
Wen Wang

SECOND VIOLIN
Cheryl Crockett
GUEST PRINCIPAL
Marion Wilson
Joana Rodrigues
Paul Medd
Anne Bünemann
Sophie Lang
Robin Wilson
Kirstin Drew
Colin McKee
Flora Yeung
Fiona Stephen
Seona Glen

VIOLA
Jane Atkins
GUEST PRINCIPAL
Felix Tanner
Asher Zaccardelli
Susan Buchan
Claire Dunn
Katherine Wren
Maria Trittinger
Francesca Hunt
Beth Woodford
David McCreadie

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

DOUBLE BASS
Nikita Naumov
PRINCIPAL
Ted Merritt
Michael Rae
Yat Hei Lee
Moray Jones
Alexandre Cruz dos Santos

FLUTE
Katherine Bryan
PRINCIPAL
Oliver Roberts
Janet Richardson
PRINCIPAL PICCOLO

OBOE
Adrian Wilson
PRINCIPAL
Peter Dykes

CLARINET
Timothy Orpen
PRINCIPAL
William Knight
Duncan Swindells
PRINCIPAL BASS CLARINET

BASSOON
Matthew Kitteringham
ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL
Paolo Dutto
PRINCIPAL CONTRABASSOON

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

TRUMPET
Christopher Hart
PRINCIPAL
Ben Jarvis
Jason Lewis Goodwin

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

TUBA
John Whitener
PRINCIPAL

TIMPANI
Tom Lee
GUEST PRINCIPAL

PERCUSSION
Simon Lowdon
PRINCIPAL
Stuart Semple

HARP
Pippa Tunnell

PIANO/CELESTE
Lynda Cochrane
Judith Keaney

Orchestra list and programme details correct at time of going to print.

Emilia Hoving

Conductor



Finnish conductor Emilia Hoving is Associate Conductor of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, appearing annually with them in their London subscription season and on tour throughout the UK.

She is also a popular guest across the UK, the Nordic countries and Benelux in particular, as well as in Australia; concerts in 2026/27 include her debut with the Melbourne Symphony and returns to the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic, Hallé Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony, RSNO, Swedish Radio Symphony, Malmö Symphony, Sinfonia Lahti, Turku Philharmonic, Stavanger Symphony and Trondheim Symphony. She conducts a Betsy Jolas celebration at Stockholm Royal Concert Hall with the Norrköping Symphony, debuts at the Paris Philharmonie with the Orchestre National de l'Île-de-France, and further afield will premiere Augusta Holmes' rediscovered *Ode Triomphale* on her return to the São Paulo Symphony.

In the past couple of seasons she has debuted with the Bamberg Symphony, Belgian National, Strasbourg Philharmonic, Nagoya Philharmonic, Tasmania Symphony and New Zealand Symphony, and returned to the Finnish Radio Symphony, Helsinki Philharmonic, Gothenburg Symphony, Lausanne Chamber and Adelaide Symphony. She made her main-stage opera debut in 2025 conducting Opera North in several performances of *The Magic Flute*.

Hoving regularly conducts works by living (especially Finnish) composers. In 2024 she conducted the BBC Scottish Symphony in the prestigious Nordic Music Days festival and has been closely involved with the Helsinki Philharmonic's ongoing project to revive works by neglected Finnish composers from the last century.

Hoving's career began as Assistant to Hannu Lintu at the Finnish Radio Symphony (2019) and to Mikko Franck at Radio France (2020-22). Both posts led to important jump-ins which catapulted her into the limelight, notably when she took over a concert with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France in the Berlin Philharmonie at only a few hours' notice. She went on to make significant debuts at Tokyo's Suntory Hall with the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony (2022), at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic (2024) and at London's Royal Festival Hall with the Philharmonia (also 2024).

Born in 1994, Hoving studied at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki with Professors Sakari Oramo and Atso Almila, having begun conducting studies in 2015 with Jorma Panula. She previously studied piano (from age six) as well as the clarinet. In 2021 she won the Finnish critics' prize for the Best Newcomer in the Arts.



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Our Chair Patrons support the musicians at the heart of our performances

'Although I never learned to play an instrument (apart from trying to teach myself to play the piano), I have always been attracted to the double bass – the foundation of the orchestra. I love its mellifluous tone whether within an orchestra, jazz group or another type of musical ensemble. It was not unexpected, then, for me to choose to sponsor a chair in that section of the Orchestra back in 2014.'

Maureen Michie,
Chair Patron and Circle Member

Maureen supported Tutti Double Bass John Clark for eight years, until his passing in 2022, and has supported Principal Double Bass Nikita Naumov since his appointment in November 2024, now with the title of 'The Gregor Forbes John Clark Chair'.

If you have a passion for a particular instrument or seek an insight into the life of an orchestral musician, find out more about becoming a Chair Patron by contacting Constance Fraser, Head of Development at *constance.fraser@rsno.org.uk*

Joëlle Broad

Saturn



Benedetti Foundation.

FIRST PERFORMANCE
Big Noise Wester Hailes and RSNO, Usher Hall, Edinburgh, 8 March 2024
DURATION 4 minutes

Saturn was originally written by Joëlle for the Benedetti Foundation, and is being performed with their permission. Nicola Benedetti has worked closely with both the RSNO and Big Noise, and has been Big Noise's 'Big Sister' for many years. This is the first time that *Saturn* has been performed in Aberdeen. The piece depicts an intergalactic disco taking place on the planet's rings.

Joëlle Broad **Composer**

Joëlle Broad is a musician, teacher, composer, mentor and workshop leader. She learned violin through the peripatetic music service on the Wirral. Participating in a rich experience of youth ensembles and orchestras led to her pursuing music as her career.

Joëlle studied at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and has worked with many Scottish arts organisations, including the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Drake Music Scotland. She was one of the original team members at Big Noise Raploch in Stirling, the first Big Noise programme which began work in 2008, and worked as Curriculum Leader (Strings) across Sistema Scotland's Big Noise programmes until February of this year.

Joëlle's music has musical development at its heart and is committed to creating pieces that are musically interesting at the early stages of playing. She also teaches violin for the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's Junior Department in the primary instrumental programme.

Big Noise Torry





Aaron Davidson CELLO
Aiden Dey PERCUSSION
Amanda Naczas VIOLIN
Amber Cardozo VIOLIN
Amira Adebayo VIOLIN
Archie Young VIOLIN
Aria Ross VIOLIN
Azeem Adesima VIOLIN
Benjamin Jamikorn VIOLIN
Catherine Stephen VIOLIN
Chichi Ojukwu VIOLA
Cody Duncan PERCUSSION
Daniel Sanders VIOLA
Derrick Osakwe VIOLIN
Dylan Collins VIOLIN
Elizabeth Ajimisinmi VIOLA
Goodness Obineche CELLO
Israel Amao PERCUSSION
Julian Chiduziem Onyewuchi VIOLIN
Khadija Isiaq PERCUSSION
Kimberly Anderson VIOLIN
Livi Angus CELLO
Louis He VIOLA
Madisyn Miskimmons VIOLA
Olivia Campbell CELLO
Olivia Potts VIOLIN
Peniel Osibajo DOUBLE BASS
Precious Oladapo CELLO
Rena Orbue CELLO
Stephanie Osakwe DOUBLE BASS
Veronika Chernobai VIOLA
Volodymyr Kozachuk CELLO
Yolanda Osibajo VIOLIN
Zlata Aleksejeva VIOLA

Britta Byström (Born 1977)

A Walk to Brahms' Violin Concerto



SCOTTISH PREMIERE
FIRST PERFORMANCE Västerås Concert Hall, Västerås, Sweden, 15 October 2026
DURATION 6 minutes

My *Walks* form a series of – up to now – more than 20 pieces, all of them composed since 2016. The first two *Walks*, for string orchestra, were written for a concert in which my Violin Concerto was combined with Britten's *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* and Biber's *Battaglia*. On that occasion, I wrote *A Walk to Britten* and *A Walk to Biber* – one-minute pieces which, on a background of 'wandering' pizzicato playing, included small quotes from the piece that was to come.

Since then, many other *Walks* have followed, from one to ten minutes in length and written for a range of forces from viola and double bass duet to symphonic wind orchestra. The concept, though, has remained the same: it is always a rhythmical, wandering music which serves as an introduction to another composer's work. The idea is to take a musical stroll and catch a glimpse of the next work on the programme, similar to when, from far away, one can begin to make out the silhouette of an approaching town.

A Walk to Brahms' Violin Concerto (2023) was, as the title indicates, commissioned as an introduction to Brahms' beautiful Concerto. It is mainly material from the first movement that can be discerned in my piece – written for exactly the same orchestral forces but without the soloist. And as in all my *Walks*, the piece begins with small steps from nowhere and dies away quietly at the end, as if the music is passing by like a marching orchestra.

© Britta Byström

Britta Byström

Composer

Britta Byström has become one of the most performed Nordic composers alive and is enjoying burgeoning relationships with some of the world's great performers. In 2024, Janine Jansen, Sakari Oramo and the NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchestra gave the world premiere of her new violin concerto *Shortening Days*, while orchestras in the USA, Great Britain, Central Europe and beyond continue to take up her orchestral works as they are celebrated around Sweden.

Byström is a composer whose boundless imagination is tethered by fastidious care. Her work list already contains a number of beguiling orchestral scores and she is known for engaging ensemble, vocal and stage works. Despite its noble beauty, residual melancholy and occasional sparse elegance, her music has a tendency to ensnare both audiences and musicians.

Byström was raised in Sundsvall on Sweden's east coast, starting out as a trainee trumpeter. She was soon drawn to writing music and was lured into the universe of orchestral sound by her hometown's professional orchestra. 'I was lucky to be able to hear my music being played professionally from an early age,' she says. By 18, she was a student at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm. She graduated with the orchestral work *Sera* (2002), a seductive journey through assorted landscapes imagined under the light of an Italian evening.

By the time of *Persuasion* (2004), Byström was refining her music's textures, shaping themes more distinctly and lengthily, and sharpening focus with a minimalistic tendency to spin a work's entire discourse out from a single entity (shape, chord, theme). That characteristic is felt in the more than 20 works to Byström's name that form part of her *A Walk to* ... series, taking the form of musical strolls that offer glimpses of landscapes, ideas or the works of other composers alongside which some are designed to be played.

Voyages extraordinaires (2019) extends the principle of the 'walk' with the concept of recurring transformation. *Shortening Days* journeys continuously from time-constrained day to time-loosened night and back again.

A chamber opera, *The Play of the Night* (2024), a setting of the story of Odysseus and Penelope to a libretto by Peter Bäckström, was first performed in Copenhagen in 2025. Previous theatre works include the bijoux existential opera *If You Lose Your Luggage* (2003), and *Gállábártnit* (2015) for choir, soloists and ensemble, based on a Sámi myth and with a libretto in Sámi by Rawdna Carita Eira.

Byström has been a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music since 2016 and was awarded the Academy's Järnåkerstipendium in 2024 for her work *Alfabet* for soprano and septet, based on the Danish writer Inger Christensen's poem and applying the same principles of the Fibonacci sequence to the music as Christensen does the poem. Byström's music has been the subject of festivals mounted by the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic and Swedish Radio Symphony orchestras, and in 2021 her work *Parallel Universes* marked 150 years of the Royal Albert Hall at the BBC Proms.

© Andrew Mellor

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Violin Concerto

in D Major Op77



FIRST PERFORMANCE
Leipzig, 1 January 1879
DURATION 40 minutes

1. Allegro non troppo

2. Adagio

3. Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo vivace

Given its central position in the 19th-century concerto repertoire, it seems strange that Brahms' Violin Concerto could have excited controversy at any stage in its career. But far from achieving universal acceptance, although it soon became popular after its premiere on New Year's Day 1879, many an authority found fault with its fundamental nature. Brahms' symphonic intentions, which gave the orchestra a far more extensive role than that of mere accompanist, excited the violinist Josef Helmesberger, the Emperor's Kappelmeister, to describe it as a concerto 'not for, but against the violin'. Others felt that Brahms had produced a work that ignored the interests of the soloist unduly.

Looked at with less partisan eyes, there is more than enough virtuosity for the solo violin, even if it is not of the dazzling variety beloved of many composers of violin concertos whose works have not survived beyond their day.

Brahms had spent much of his time around violinists, both listening to them and accompanying them; before his celebrated friendship with Joseph Joachim, he had partnered the Hungarian violinist Eduard Reményi in an extensive tour of Germany. Curiously enough, although Brahms collaborated with Joachim over the solo part of his Violin Concerto, he quite often did not accept his friend's advice, although he did him the honour of allowing him to compose the cadenza for the first movement. If Brahms had any doubts about the work, they were ironed out in the months after the work's premiere as the composer made refinements to the score in advance of publication in October 1879.

In style and melodic content, the Concerto has much in common with Brahms' Second Symphony, also in D Major, composed only a year before. The first movement opens with a gesture of supreme confidence in an age where introductions to a main motif were almost de rigueur: the principal melody of the movement is stated by the bassoons and lower strings (later joined by the horns) and concludes with a simple cadence. What follows is one of Brahms' most inspired moments of fantasy: slipping down a tone from the main key of the movement, the oboe intones a reply to the main theme before the full orchestra enters. The movement unfolds with effortless logic. There are many points of meditation and reverie, not least after the cadenza, but Brahms never loses his grip on a clear sense of progress, shifting the proceedings along with business-like dotted rhythms where necessary.

At one stage Brahms considered having two middle movements in his Violin Concerto, one of which eventually found a home as the scherzo of his Second Piano Concerto. In the end he opted for a single, as he described it, 'feeble' *Adagio*. In fact, this is one of his most exquisitely lyrical slow movements, in which the sweetness of the opening melody, and the soloist's elaboration of it, is balanced by a more intense central section.

The equally successful finale pays tribute to the 'Hungarian' style practised by Joachim and often adopted by Brahms himself. Full of daring bravura and infectious melody, the movement still observes some rigorous symphonic development before the rollicking coda sweeps all before it.

© Jan Smaczny

Maya Iwabuchi
Violin



Maya is Leader of the RSNO. She began violin lessons at the age of two, and since her concert debut at age five, she has enjoyed an international career as a solo violinist, chamber musician, orchestral leader and teacher. Her performances have taken her to the major concert halls of Europe, the Americas, Australia and Asia. Highlights include concertos with the Los Angeles and New York Philharmonic orchestras, Philharmonia Orchestra and RSNO, and performances at the BBC Proms and Edinburgh and Salzburg festivals.

Maya is Artistic Director of the Hellensmusic Chamber Music Festival. She is regularly invited as guest concertmaster to many European orchestras, and as Leader of the Philharmonia Orchestra from 1994 to 2012, she led for legendary conductors such as Kurt Sanderling, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Riccardo Muti, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Andris Nelsons and Gustavo Dudamel.

Maya moved to Scotland in 2010, has served as Leader of the RSNO since 2011, and joined the faculty at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in 2015. Her violin was made by Fabrizio Senta in Turin, c1685.

Kaija Saariaho (1952-2023)

Ciel d'hiver



FIRST PERFORMANCE
Paris, 7 April 2014
DURATION 10 minutes

When Kaija Saariaho died following treatment for brain cancer in 2023, *The Guardian* remembered her as 'a leading, perhaps the leading, musical modernist of her generation'. Famed for her lush, ethereal soundscapes that married live electronics and spectral sound textures, she rose to international fame in the 1980s, spending the next four decades redefining orchestral and operatic music on the global stage.

She, along with fellow Finnish composers including Esa-Pekka Salonen and Magnus Lindberg, founded the Korvat auki (Ears Open) society for contemporary music in the late 1970s. She then moved to Paris to work at Pierre Boulez's research institute IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique), where her early artistic direction was defined by the exploration of computer-assisted composition. Here, she buried herself in the art of spectralism, a musical technique that uses the acoustic properties and frequency of sound as the main building blocks for composition.

While her work remained rooted in the avant-garde throughout her career, Saariaho's sound gradually developed. She moved into opera, expanding her horizons beyond her modernist origins, translating historic tales and contemporary dramas into compelling narratives. She also became known for her dreamlike soundworlds, which often evoke the raw, elemental power of nature. Visions of the night, myths and quiet mysteries haunt much of her work.

Ciel d'hiver is a prime example of this in action. Translating as 'Winter Sky', the short piece is an arrangement of the second movement of Saariaho's 2002 *Orion*, her largest purely symphonic composition. At the heart of the piece is the central figure of Orion, the demigod son of sea god Poseidon, who is mortal. His figure – and accompanying constellation – is brought

to life across three movements: *Memento mori* (Remember that you will die), *Winter Sky* and *Hunter*.

In 2013, Saariaho decided to reorchestrate the work's central movement, scored for a large orchestra – although smaller in scale than *Orion*'s forces, which include two timpani sets, two harps and an organ. Orchestre Lamoureux gave the world premiere in 2014 at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, with Saariaho praised for her downsized arrangement, and the miniature commended for its vivid portrayal of the harsh winter elements.

Ciel d'hiver opens with a bed of cool, hollow string textures, from which a fragile piccolo appears in its highest register, as if from nowhere. A glittering, ominous atmosphere is created from the off, capturing the stinging cold clarity of a winter sky. The timbre shifts as the piccolo opens up a dialogue with the first violin, with the woodwind instruments then picking up new motifs and melodies, gradually evolving them as they go. The haunting strings remain, a base for the shimmering new textures. Extended techniques are used by several soloists, making their instruments growl.

The orchestra grows hauntingly in dynamic, motifs thrown across the ensemble creating continuous ripples. A darkness persists, a shimmering harp glissando sits atop a series of ominous, sustained notes, building tension. Occasional offbeat motifs create a sense of chaos among the ordered textures, representing the sounds of distant thunder, rain and wind, and undermining any possible sense of comfort.

A celestial atmosphere abounds, the orchestra's ethereal textures creating a contemplative mood that captures the broad sweep of a cool, winter sky. A piano motif is repeated endlessly, until it disappears into the darkness.

© Freya Parr

What was happening in 2014?

13 Feb Belgium became the first country to legalise euthanasia for terminally ill patients of any age

21 Mar Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula, part of Ukraine, with President Vladimir Putin signing a bill formalising the process

14 Apr The Nigerian militant group Boko Haram abducted over 270 mostly Christian girls and women from a school at Chibok and held them hostage

10 May The Eurovision Song Contest was won by Austrian entrant Conchita Wurst, with the song *Rise Like a Phoenix*

26 May Narendra Modi became the 14th Prime Minister of India

5 Jun The Sunni militant group later to be known as ISIS began an offensive through northern Iraq, aiming to take Baghdad and overthrow the Shiite government; on **8 Aug** the US led a military intervention in Iraq

19 Jun Felipe VI became King of Spain on the abdication of his father, Juan Carlos I

23 Jul-3 Aug Glasgow hosted the 20th Commonwealth Games

9 Aug African American Michael Brown was shot by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri

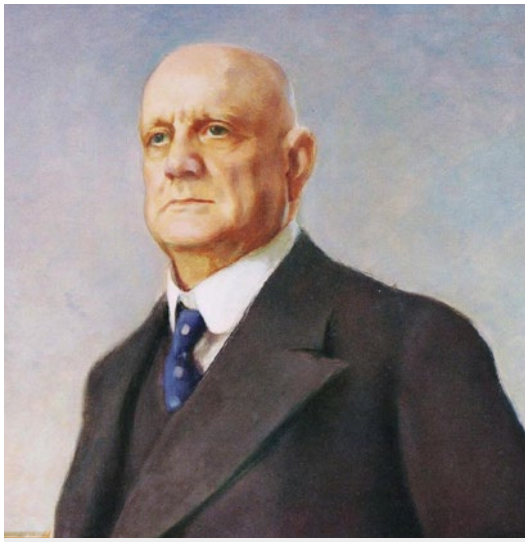
18 Sep Scotland voted against independence from the United Kingdom

12 Nov Rosetta's *Philae* probe landed on Comet 67P, the first time a spacecraft had landed on such an object

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)

Symphony No6

in D Minor Op104



FIRST PERFORMANCE
Helsinki, 19 February 1923
DURATION 33 minutes

1. Allegro molto moderato

2. Allegro moderato

3. Poco vivace

4. Allegro molto

The Finnish composer Jean Sibelius reimagined the structure and grammar of orchestral music. By imitating the cyclic, mutating patterns of the rune singers who recounted Finland's ancient stories in chanted songs, Sibelius moved the symphony away from the Germanic tradition of musical argument and gave the Nordic region a distinctive symphonic voice of its own.

The musical scores which resulted from that process sound as startling to the ear as they look unusual to the eye. Tunes emerge from streams of identical notes. Motifs are moulded gradually through repetition. Displaced rhythmic emphases induce gradual transformations. Foreground and background are merged.

Over time, Sibelius also freed himself from the European orthodoxy that a symphony had to arrive somewhere conclusive or 'win' an argument before it could end; that the symphonic circle must at all costs be closed, whether through triumph or exhausted collapse. By the time of his last three symphonies, 5-7 – work on each of which overlapped either side of 1920 – Sibelius had apparently concluded that a form of centrifugal energy, gently manipulated by rhythm, could take his music wherever it needed to go. The symphonic circle, therefore, might not close at all – even if a symphony ended in the same key with which it had started.

The kinetic playfulness that characterises Sibelius' sixth and penultimate symphony has its roots in the composer's idyllic childhood in the rural town of Hämeenlinna. By 1922, when Sibelius came to knit his sketches for the Symphony together, dark clouds had returned to his life. The composer was mourning the death of his brother Christian, while his financial situation seemed increasingly hopeless. Sibelius had been reunited with alcohol after a seven-year abstinence, despite the newly constituted Finland having prohibited the substance.

Nonetheless, his concentration on the Symphony remained steadfast: Sibelius would follow bouts of drinking with long, solitary days at work on the score. On 19 February 1923, the finished work was given its first performance, the composer himself conducting the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra.

The Symphony has an atmosphere all of its own that sits in contrast to that of its predecessor, the Symphony No5, despite the similarities in their construction. There is little overt drama in the Sixth, while many have heard in its textures a musical image of the distinctive, limpid Nordic light prevalent in Finland, especially in early spring and autumn. The Symphony sounds light and high, many instruments clinging to their upper registers, while a harp glistens on top. Much of the music sits in the Dorian mode – an elusive scale that lends the music a certain aloofness and mysticism while allowing Sibelius to exploit the inherent tension between elements rooted in D and the standard major scale in C.

Sibelius described the Symphony as a 'fantasy', reflected in its sense of free-falling momentum. The music is derived from a single cell, alluded to at various stages but heard most clearly when the oboe steps upwards through the five notes from D just over a minute into the first movement. Sibelius used the phrase 'pure, cold water' to describe the Symphony. It drifts into being courtesy of music the composer associated with winter; in the fluttering flute and darting harp that punctuate the first movement later on, we sense the more sunlit spirit of his childhood.

The denser second movement takes us a few steps deeper into the woods, while the third is a genial game fuelled by the gentle ragging of rhythms. Sibelius referred to elements of the final movement, notably the second theme, as 'the spirit of the pine tree'. There are passions in this final movement but no fortifying hymn to close. Instead, the Symphony drifts back into the silence from which it emerged.

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Sir Alexander Gibson, Principal Conductor and Artistic Director of the Scottish National Orchestra from 1959 to 1984, had a special affinity with the music of Sibelius, and championed the composer in concert programming and many recordings, including of all seven symphonies and all the tone poems. His work was recognised in 1978, when the Sibelius Society of Finland awarded him the Sibelius Medal. Other recipients of the award since it was inaugurated in 1965 include Sir John Barbirolli, Benjamin Britten, Leonard Bernstein, Sir Simon Rattle and Finnish violinist and composer Pekka Kuusisto.

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