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MATINEE CONCERT

STRAUSS' AUS ITALIEN

New Auditorium,
Glasgow Royal Concert Hall
Wed 22 Feb 2023 2pm

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STRAUSS' AUS ITALIEN

Richard Strauss once joked that he could depict even a knife and fork in music! So now imagine the Roman Campagna, a moonlit Mediterranean and a carnival in Naples, all painted in glowing orchestral colours by a youthful genius – off the leash and loving it. For former RSNO Assistant Conductor Junping Qian, Strauss' *Aus Italien* is a passion, and that goes double for today's Shakespeare-inspired first half: Nicolai's comedy overture, plus a modern movie classic from Scotland's own Craig Armstrong.

NICOLAI Overture from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* [8']

CRAIG ARMSTRONG Balcony Scene
from Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* [5']



CRAIG ARMSTRONG Slow Movement for String Orchestra [20']

INTERVAL

R STRAUSS *Aus Italien* Op16 [47']

Junping Qian Conductor
Royal Scottish National Orchestra

NEW AUDITORIUM,
GLASGOW ROYAL CONCERT HALL
Wed 22 Feb 2023 2pm

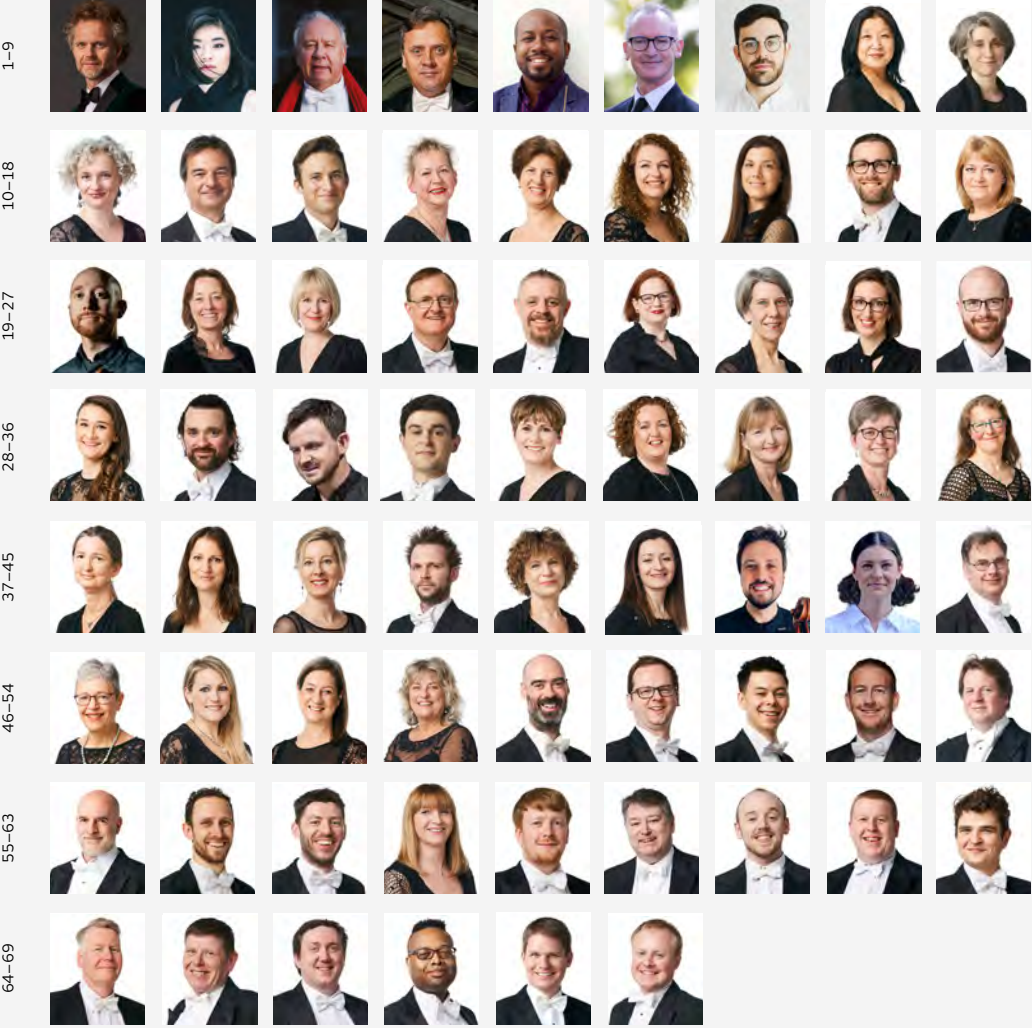
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Otto Nicolai (1810-1849)

OVERTURE from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*



FIRST PERFORMANCE

Full opera: Berlin, 9 March 1849

DURATION Overture: 8 minutes

The history of music is full of what-ifs, the result of tragedies more or less familiar. Everyone knows about Mozart, Schubert, Chopin, Donizetti dying long before their time, and we wonder (longingly but rather uselessly, to be sure) what might have been. One man who really ought to be on that list is Otto Nicolai, now really remembered only for his 'comic-fantastic' opera based on Shakespeare's *Falstaff*, premiered in 1849 a couple of months before his death following a stroke at the age of 38.

One odd thing about Nicolai was that this thoroughly Prussian gentleman was best known in his life as a composer of Italian operas: *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* (The Merry Wives of Windsor) was actually his only German one. He had run away from an unhappy home at the age of 16, and by his

early 20s was living in Rome as a composer in the Prussian Embassy there, writing lyric dramas in the *bel canto* style familiar to us from Bellini, and becoming rather famous in due course – certainly as well known as the young Verdi, for example – as both composer and conductor. His conducting took him to Vienna, where he became music director of the opera, and was instrumental in founding the Vienna Philharmonic.

The Merry Wives is performed too rarely outside Germany but its Overture, familiar as a concert piece, gives a good idea of how Nicolai (who idolised Mozart) blended German schooling with Italian facility, and its grace, generosity, ebullience and lyricism reminds us of the astonishing wealth of European music at this time, with its echoes of Weber, Mendelssohn and many others.

The Overture is made up of themes from the opera, beginning with moonrise over Windsor Great Park, the opera's final scene, where Falstaff (dressed as Herne the Hunter) is tormented in the dark by children and townsfolk whom he takes for sprites and fairies – explaining the gossamer-breathed fast passages that recall Mendelssohn's overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Next comes the merry swaying tune of the merriest wife, Mistress Page, followed by a plunge into the minor for Falstaff's own theme, galumphing along but not without a certain full-bodied grace of its own. Nicolai weaves the themes together to build up to the Overture's climax, a boisterous, rushing coda that raises the curtain on a hugely likeable and warm-hearted opera.

© Robert Thicknesse

Craig Armstrong (Born 1959)

BALCONY SCENE from Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*



FILM PREMIERE

Los Angeles, 27 October 1996

DURATION Balcony Scene: 5 minutes

The Balcony Scene was written while I was working with the director Baz Luhrmann on his version of William Shakespeare's *Romeo + Juliet*. This was my first time collaborating with Baz; it's been a very creative partnership since then, including scores for *Moulin Rouge!* (2001) and *The Great Gatsby* (2013).

We worked together on the *Romeo and Juliet* score at George Lucas' Skywalker Ranch near San Francisco and spent time working in detail on what became the Balcony Scene. When we recorded it in London in 1995, we had a very large string orchestra of 60 musicians but I asked the orchestra to play very, very softly to create the shimmering effect you hear on the recording.

© Craig Armstrong

Craig Armstrong

Slow Movement for String Orchestra

FIRST PERFORMANCE

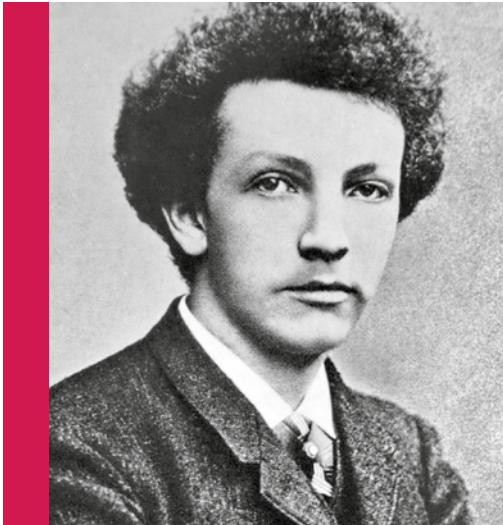
1994

DURATION 20 minutes

Slow Movement had its first performance as part of the 1994 BT Scottish Ensemble tour. Armstrong had written it prior to starting work on *Romeo + Juliet*. Director Baz Luhrmann heard it and really liked it, and Armstrong ended up using parts of it for Romeo's theme. The score for the film, produced by Armstrong alongside Nellee Hooper and Marius de Vries, was recognised with both a BAFTA for Achievement in Film Music and an Ivor Novello Award.

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

AUS ITALIEN Op16



FIRST PERFORMANCE

Munich, 2 March 1887

DURATION 47 minutes

1. Auf der Campagna

2. In Roms Ruinen

3. Am Strande von Sorrent

4. Neapolitanisches Volksleben

Long before Richard Strauss matured as a composer, European theorists had been pitting the contrasting ideologies of 'pure music' and 'programme music' against one another. As a talented young man, Strauss was instructed by his musician father to avoid programme music at all costs – to steer clear, in other words, of music which recounted some sort of narrative without recourse to words or dance.

Strauss' father went so far as to forbid his son from reading any scores other than those of the pure classicists and their successors (in other words, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms). But it was futile. When Strauss junior eventually discovered Wagner, Liszt and Berlioz, it proved a revelation. He knew which path he was destined to tread. Literally, in the case of the pivotal work that veritably turned Strauss towards programme music – *Aus Italien*. Ironically, the composer's father was indirectly to thank for its genesis. In the spring of 1886, in between resigning his conducting job at the Meiningen Orchestra and starting another at the Munich Court Opera (where his father played the horn), Strauss embarked upon a parent-funded trip around northern and central Italy in the footsteps of Mendelssohn and Liszt.

In Italy, Strauss was inspired by landscape, architecture and artworks. 'I never really believed in inspiration through the beauty of nature,' confessed the composer to his mentor Hans von Bülow, 'but in the Roman ruins ... ideas just came flying to me.'

The result, written back in Germany that summer, was the only work for which Strauss himself published an explanatory programme: a four-movement symphonic fantasy 'From Italy'. It was the composer's first step into programme music and also his first depiction of

landscape in music – a gesture echoed nearly 30 years later by his last, the musical journey up an Alpine mountain, *Eine Alpensinfonie*.

In the sense that it foreshadows the magnificent series of orchestral tone poems that preceded Strauss' immersion in opera, *Aus Italien* is a transitional work. Yet it sits on the structural foundation stones of the classical Romantic symphony. The composer himself referred to it as 'a first step towards independence', including a possible reference to his father's strict dictates on the thorny issue of programme music. Precursors include, most obviously, Hector Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*.

But it is Franz Liszt whose influence hangs most heavily over Strauss' opening movement, conceived as an awakening prelude in which a metaphorical musical sunrise prepares us for the journey ahead. It was, according to the composer, inspired by the view of the Roman Campagna – the low-lying plains surrounding Rome – as seen from the Villa d'Este. As well as the sense of a landscape opening up, we hear a faster, thrusting passage brimming with anticipation.

The middle movements present Strauss' impressions of two more landscapes – respectively, the Roman ruins and a beach on the Neapolitan coast at Sorrento. In both, the aim was quite literally an 'impression' – in the composer's words, 'feelings at seeing the majestic natural beauties of Rome and Naples, not descriptions of the same'. The Roman movement betrays the influence of Brahms; the Neapolitan movement, Strauss' first attempts at painting a detailed nature picture, birdsong and the distant sound of the sea included.

Strauss believed the main theme of his final movement to be a Neapolitan folksong. But he was wrong: the tune was, in fact, Luigi Denza's popular song *Funiculì, funiculà*, composed to publicise the new funicular railway at Mount Etna (the words are easily sung over the tune). Denza sued Strauss and won, forcing him to pay royalties on performances. Still, it's unlikely any of Strauss' audience would have known the piece when the Munich Court Orchestra, Strauss' father included, gave the first performance on 2 March 1887.

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Aus Italien

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More information

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CRAIG ARMSTRONG Composer

Craig Armstrong is a Scottish-born composer. Through his orchestral writing and wide-ranging artistic collaborations in classical and film music, his distinct compositional voice has received worldwide acclaim.

Armstrong's concert works include commissions from the RSNO, Hebrides Ensemble, Cappella Nova and Scottish Ensemble, to name a few. *Visconti* was a commission from the London Sinfonietta and the Barbican Centre, premiered at the Stockhausen Festival in 2001, and is an homage to both the film director Luchino Visconti and the composer Gustav Mahler. The violin concerto *Immer*, for Clio Gould, was recorded by Virgin Classics and premiered at the Saint-Denis Festival in Paris in 2008. Armstrong's second Scottish Opera commission, *The Lady From The Sea*, premiered at the Edinburgh International Festival in 2012 and won a Herald Angel Award. For a recent commission for Union Chapel's Organ Reframed festival, Armstrong composed *Painted In White* for Organ and Strings, performed by the London Contemporary Orchestra.

Armstrong has composed scores for both Hollywood and independent films, from Peter Mullan's directorial debut *The Close Trilogy* to the BAFTA, Ivor Novello and Golden Globe award-winning scores for Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* and *Moulin Rouge!* Many films have benefited from Armstrong's music, including *Love Actually*, *World Trade Center*, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Snowden* and the GRAMMY Award-winning score for *Ray*. In 2018 he completed work on the critically acclaimed *Mrs Lowry and Son*, directed by Adrian Noble. Armstrong has since composed scores for Norman Stone's drama

about C S Lewis, *The Most Reluctant Convert*, as well as for *Dirt Music* and *The Burnt Orange Heresy*, with new films being scored for release in 2023.

Armstrong's releases on Modern Recordings (BMG Germany) include *The Edge Of The Sea*, the culmination of his interest in Gaelic psalm-singing from the West Coast of Scotland. Developed over several years and in close collaboration with the Hebridean composer Calum Martin, the album is a unique recording of this traditional a cappella singing and also features the Scottish Ensemble. Armstrong's second release on Modern Recordings, *Nocturnes: Music For 2 Pianos*, was released in September 2021.

Working primarily from his studio in Glasgow, Armstrong continues to work in composition internationally.

JUNPING QIAN Conductor



Junping Qian served as Assistant Conductor of the RSNO from 2018 to 2020 and was a visiting faculty member at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. He won First Prize at the 2017 Bucharest International Conducting Competition, and was also a prize-winner in the 2019 International Competition of Young Conductors Lovro von Matačić in Zagreb, the 2021 Hans von Bülow International Conducting Competition and the 2022 Princess Astrid Competition in Trondheim.

He graduated from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and the Hochschule für Musik Hanns Eisler in Berlin. His teachers and mentors include Daniel Harding, Sir Roger Norrington, Thomas Søndergård, Christoph Eschenbach, Christian Ehwald, Hans-Dieter Baum, Mark Stringer, Mark Gibson and Otto-Werner Mueller.

Since making his European debut at the Verbier Festival in 2012, Junping has conducted on four continents, with orchestras such as the Konzerthausorchester Berlin, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris (where he assisted Music Director Klaus Mäkelä earlier this season), Danish National Symphony Orchestra, Hungarian State Opera, Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Roma Sinfonietta, Minnesota Orchestra, Croatian National TV & Broadcast Orchestra, Silesian Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra Bucharest, St Petersburg Chamber Philharmonic, Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra and Orquesta Sinfónica del Sode Montevideo, as well as orchestras in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Macau.

Junping's tenure as RSNO Assistant Conductor was generously supported by the Solti Foundation.

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. The Orchestra's artistic team is led by Danish conductor Thomas Søndergård, who was appointed RSNO Music Director in October 2018, having previously held the position of Principal Guest Conductor. Hong Kong-born conductor Elim Chan succeeds Søndergård as Principal Guest Conductor.

The RSNO performs across Scotland, including concerts in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, Aberdeen, Perth and Inverness. The Orchestra appears regularly at the Edinburgh International Festival and the BBC Proms, and has made recent tours to the USA, China and Europe.

The Orchestra is joined for choral performances by the RSNO Chorus, directed by Stephen Doughty. The RSNO Chorus evolved from a choir formed in 1843 to sing the first full performance of Handel's *Messiah* in Scotland. Today, the RSNO Chorus is one of the most distinguished large symphonic choruses in Britain. The Chorus has performed nearly every work in the standard choral repertoire, along with contemporary works by composers including John Adams, Howard Shore and Sir James MacMillan.

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 for Symphonic Music (Denève/Roussel 2007; Denève/Debussy 2012) and eight GRAMMY Awards nominations. Over 200 releases are available, including Thomas Søndergård conducting Strauss (*Ein Heldenleben*, *Der Rosenkavalier Suite*) and Prokofiev (Symphonies Nos 1 and 5), the complete symphonies of Sibelius (Gibson), Prokofiev (Järvi), Bruckner (Tintner) and Roussel (Denève), as well as further discs championing the music of William Grant Still (Eisenberg), Xiaogang Ye (Serebrier) and Thomas Wilson (Macdonald).

The RSNO's pioneering learning and engagement programme, Music for Life, aims to engage the people of Scotland with music across key stages of life: Early Years, Nurseries and Schools, Teenagers and Students, Families, Accessing Lives, Working Lives and Retired and Later Life. The team is committed to placing the Orchestra at the centre of Scottish communities via workshops and annual residencies.

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Thomas Søndergård
MUSIC DIRECTOR, RSNO

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If you would like to discuss this further, please contact Torran McEwan, Individual Giving and Partnerships Officer, in the strictest confidence, at torran.mcewan@rsno.org.uk

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To find out more about joining the Circle please visit rsno.org.uk/circle or get in touch with Torran McEwan, Individual Giving and Partnerships Officer, at torran.mcewan@rsno.org.uk

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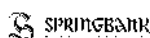
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