



EDINBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Conductor: Alistair Gibson

Leader: Sheena Jardine

Summer Concert

**Saturday 30th May 2026
7.30pm Greyfriars Kirk**

Programme Notes

www.edinburghsymphonyorchestra.co.uk

Train Music for the Orient Express - Richard Rodney Bennett

(1936-2012)

1. Overture 2. Waltz 3. Finale

In 1974 Sidney Lumet produced a film based on Agatha Christie's famous novel Murder on the Orient Express. Albert Finney played the Belgian Detective Hercule Poirot, and the cast included Sean Connery, Ingmar Bergman and Lauren Bacall. Richard Rodney Bennett was commissioned to write the film music and later on extracted three movements to form the current suite. Stylistically the music combines jazz with waltz music. The overture introduces the main theme used throughout the film. A waltz evocative of high class 1930's society follows, then a finale brings the themes together.

Viola Concerto – William Walton (1902-1983)

Soloist – Richard Montgomery

1. Andante comodo. 2. Vivo con molto preciso. 3. Allegro moderato.

In 1929 Walton had developed a reputation as an avant-garde composer with works such as Façade (1923) and the edgy concert overture Portsmouth Point (1926). It was suggested to him by the conductor Thomas Beecham that he should write a concerto for the violist Lionel Tertis. Walton agreed and wrote the concerto whilst wintering in Amalfi, Italy. It was completed in February 1929 and Walton considered it his finest work to date. Tertis was sent a copy of the manuscript and initially rejected it as it was too modern for his taste. Hindemith agreed to give the first performance and the work was premiered at the Queens Hall, London on 3 October 1929 by the Henry Wood Symphony Orchestra conducted by the composer.

After a three-bar introduction, which establishes the tonality of A minor, the viola enters with a melancholy theme in 9/8. The pace quickens and a series of viola chords leads to the second subject, a tranquil theme in D minor. The themes are developed with varying speeds and dynamics. There is no formal cadenza and after a vigorous tutti the movement ends quietly with the opening

theme. A harmonic clash between A Major and A minor unsettles the listener before the movement dies quietly away. The second movement has the character of a scherzo, with a climatic section for the full orchestra. Although there are many harmonic and rhythmic changes, the movement suggests an E minor tonality. The finale begins with a lively theme introduced by the bassoon followed by the viola over a pizzicato bass line. A second subject in the minor key is related to a theme from the first movement. In the development section much use is made of counterpoint. A fugal treatment of many of the themes introduced earlier leads to a climactic synthesis of the themes. After the premiere Tertis withdrew his earlier criticisms and championed the work. It is now considered to be one of the three major concertos for the viola in the repertoire today.

INTERVAL

Fantasia on a theme by Thomas Tallis – Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

Whilst Vaughan Williams was collecting material for the English Hymnal he came across a setting of some psalms by Thomas Tallis. The third setting of a verse from Psalm 2 ‘*Why fumeth in sight. The Gentiles spite, In fury raging stout.*’ better known as “*Why do the nations so furiously rage together*” inspired Vaughan Williams to write this Fantasia. It is scored for a double string orchestra and a string quartet. It makes use of modal music.

The various groups frequently play in antiphon with each other. Tallis’s theme is divided into four phrases and is combined with a folk music theme that acts as a transition between the phrases. The fantasia opens with five descending mystical chords, then the Tallis theme is introduced by pizzicato fragments. A big climax ensues which dissolves away in mystical chords. This pattern is repeated with statements of the Tallis theme interspersed with the folk theme, each section culminating in a climax. Finally a full statement of the Tallis theme is given by the lower strings in pizzicato. A short coda based on the folk music theme ends the piece. The Fantasia was

first performed at the Three Choirs Festival, Gloucester, in 1910 and enabled Vaughan Williams to find his unique voice.

Symphony in F Op 8 “The Cotswolds” – Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

1. Allegro con brio 2. Elegy 3. Scherzo 4. Finale

Holst's Cotswold Symphony was composed between the end of 1899 and early 1900. It is Holst's first major work for orchestra. At the time Holst was supporting himself by playing the trombone for various orchestras and he carried the manuscript with him. The first movement is a march in F major and evokes the English countryside. It makes use of English folk music themes, an interest that he shared with Vaughan Williams. The second and most substantial movement is an Elegy for the socialist William Morris, whom Holst claimed was an influence on his political views. It is a funeral procession that makes substantial use of the brass and has a Wagnerian feel about it. The music reaches a major climax and then fades away. It has been suggested that this may represent Holst's reaction to the Boer War. The third movement is a light scherzo, reminiscent of a country fair. It combines a Mendelssohnian light touch in the outer sections, with rustic 'clodhopping' rhythms in the middle section. The final movement combines folk-inspired melodies with influences from Brahms and Holst's teacher Charles Villiers Stanford. It is a celebratory 'harvest hymn' celebrating the cyclical joys of rural life and concludes the symphony with exuberance and orchestral brilliance. The work was premiered on 24 April 1902 at the Winter Gardens, Bournemouth conducted by Sir Dan Godfrey and the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra. Probably due to its structural imbalance and its youthful origins, it is only performed occasionally.

Chris Finlay – May 2026

Next concert

Saturday 28th November 2026

Greyfriars Kirk 7:30pm

Conductor – Tim Espin

Rachmaninov, Ginistera, MacCunn, Williams

RICHARD MONTGOMERY



Richard Montgomery was born in Glasgow and had his first violin lesson aged four. He studied at St Mary's Music School with Andrea Gajic before moving to London to take up his place at the Royal Academy of Music. There, he studied with Richard Ireland and, upon graduating with first class honours, received a Regency Award for outstanding studentship.

After a year spent studying in the Netherlands at Conservatorium Maastricht with Yuzuko Horigome, Richard eventually returned to Glasgow and began working as a freelance violinist. In 2024, he started playing viola for fun before deciding to pursue it in earnest in a master's degree at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, taking lessons with Fiona Winning. He is supported by the prestigious Leverhulme scholarship and during his first year has won both the Mabel Glover string quartet competition and the Governor's Prize for chamber music.

Richard balances being a student with performing professionally and can be heard playing both violin and viola with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and Royal Northern Sinfonia, as well as performing chamber music recitals around the country. He also enjoys teaching and works as a coach for NYOS and Young Chamber Music.

ALISTAIR GIBSON



Alistair is an accomplished conductor, educator, and trombonist whose musical journey spans a diverse and distinguished career. He trained at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester and the prestigious Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen. Over the years, he has established himself as a conductor of various styles, having conducted an array of esteemed ensembles, including the Broxburn and Livingston Band, Glasgow Orchestral Society, Kingdom Brass, and the Wallace Collection.

Currently, Alistair serves as Associate Conductor of the Dunbartonshire Concert Band as well as guest conducting a number of ensembles across Scotland. He is also the founder and driving force behind his "Come and Play" series in central Scotland, which attracts musicians from across the UK to engage with challenging repertoire such as Pictures at an Exhibition, Mahler's First Symphony, and Star Wars in an encouraging, collaborative environment.

In 2025, Alistair completed his Master's in Conducting for Community and Youth Ensembles at the Royal Northern College of Music, graduating with distinction under the expert tutelage of Mark Heron, Dr Robert Gardiner and Dr Melvin Tay. His conducting education has been further enriched through masterclasses with world-renowned figures such as Bernard Haitink, Rudolfo Saglimbeni, Bjorn Sagstad, and Robert Guy. In 2024, Alistair advanced to the second round of the prestigious Frederick Fennell Conducting Competition, following a successful track record as a semi-finalist in the Brass Band Conductors Association Competition.

Also in 2025, Alistair established his own chamber orchestra, Towpath Camerata, dedicated to performing high-quality chamber music in venues across Scotland's central belt. Building on his passion for nurturing musical leadership, he has also developed his own conducting courses—beginning in October 2025 with an Introduction to Conducting course and with plans to expand into more advanced offerings in the near future.

In addition to his conducting work, Alistair contributes to the pioneering Sistema Scotland project as a brass educator and serves as a dedicated brass teacher for West Lothian Council. Outside of his professional commitments, he resides in Falkirk with his wife, Kirstin, and their two cats, or can often be found on a squash court.

For more information, visit www.alistairgibson.co.uk

THE EDINBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The Edinburgh Symphony Orchestra was the brainchild of its first conductor, Donald James – then the Head of Music at Edinburgh Academy – and gave its first concert in aid of Oxfam at the Reid Concert Hall in June 1963. Since then, for over 60 years, it has given amateur players the opportunity to perform a symphonic repertoire to a high standard under the batons of Donald James (1963-67), Henry McGlone (1967-72), Neil Butterworth (1972-73), Leon Coates (1973-85), Alasdair Mitchell (1985-2004) and Gerard Doherty (2005-2025).

Many young soloists in the early stages of their professional careers have been given the opportunity to play with the ESO, and the work of local composers has been commissioned. The repertoire includes not only the best-known pieces, but also music which is not so regularly performed. The Orchestra has, on occasion, combined with choral societies and in May 2005 was invited to accompany a huge choir of volunteers from all of Scotland in a charity performance of Verdi's Requiem in the Usher Hall. There are usually 3 or 4 performances each year: normally in Greyfriars Kirk. ESO is a subscription orchestra managed by an elected

committee. Please contact esoenquiries@gmail.com for any queries regarding the orchestra.

ORCHESTRAL PLAYERS

Violin 1

Sheena Jardine
Helen Adamson
Sheila Beattie
Karen Campbell
Claire McLean
Caroline Mortimer
Arthur Moss
Andrew Rushworth
Verena Schwarze
Claire Shortt
Iain Scott
Graeme Wilson

Violin 2

Nigel Hambly
Morven Baker
Barbara Bell
Kaye Brewster
Helen Downes
Jessie Jungels
Song-Su Oh
Ute Skiba
David Scott
Charlotte Vermeren

Timpani

Russell Wilson

Percussion

Ian Munro
Matthew Rankin

Viola

Kay Smith
Pascal Bak
Gillian Cloke
Naomi Freeman
John Halliday
Alberto Ibanez
Alison Lucas
Anne Parker

Cello

Gerard Delaney
Liz Burgess
Mike Evans
Murdo Homewood

Alison McMillan
Bea Quinn
John Tanner
Emma Veitch

Double Bass

John Wilkinson
Margaret Christie
Ray Leonard
Patrick Sturt

Flute and Piccolo

Stella Henzell
Catriona Crosby

Piano

Barbara Bell

Guitar

Duncan Findlay

Oboe

Jo Watts
Anne Wilson

Cor Anglais

Anne Wilson

Clarinet

Andrew Sweeney
Nadine Thompson

Bass Clarinet

Nadine Thompson

Bassoon

Rainer Thönnnes
Minjee Kang

French Horn

Marian Kirton
Hamish McRitchie
Gary Nichol
Victoria North

Trumpet

Elliot Longworth
Abby Bailey
Rhona Carse

Trombone

Ruth Andrew
Murray Campbell

Bass Trombone

Ronald Sellar

Tuba

Andrew Colville