

BBC

**Scottish
Symphony
Orchestra**

**17.04.2026
7.30PM
ABERDEEN
MUSIC HALL**

**BARTÓK
BLUEBEARD'S
CASTLE** (ONE-ACT OPERA)

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**CONCERT
PROGRAMME**

Thursday
17.04.2026
7.30pm
Music Hall, Aberdeen

BBC
Scottish
Symphony
Orchestra

Bartók's Bluebeard's Castle in Aberdeen

Benjamin Britten

Four Sea Interludes from 'Peter Grimes'

Dmitry Shostakovich

Hamlet – suite

Interval

Béla Bartók

Duke Bluebeard's Castle

Dorottya Láng Judith (mezzo-soprano)

Gábor Bretz Duke Bluebeard (bass-baritone)

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra

Elim Chan conductor

This concert ends at approximately 9.30pm

Yesterday's performance in Glasgow of this programme was recorded by BBC Radio 3 for future broadcast in *Radio 3 in Concert* and is available to stream or download for 30 days via BBC Sounds, where you can also find podcasts and music mixes.

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During the performance, please don't film or take any photographs.

Latecomers will be admitted at a suitable break in the performance.

Welcome



Reuben Paris

Good evening. It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra concert at the Music Hall tonight, our final visit to Aberdeen of this season.

We are thrilled to work again today with conductor Elim Chan, no stranger to Scotland following her tenure as Principal Guest Conductor with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra from 2018 to 2023. Last year Elim conducted the Last Night of the BBC Proms, and she continues to work with leading orchestras around the world.

Elim brings a striking programme of music from the first half of the 20th century, all with a theatrical DNA. In Britten's Four Sea Interludes from *Peter Grimes* we'll experience contrasting sea states that perhaps resonate well in Aberdeen. In the suite from *Hamlet* we'll hear some of Shostakovich's most accomplished music for film; and finally, in *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, Bartók's foreboding operatic masterpiece, we'll explore the Duke's dark secrets with our star singers, Dorottya Láng and Gábor Bretz.

Thank you for your support of the BBC SSO's concerts in Aberdeen during this season. Our 2026/27 season is now on sale! Please do pick up a brochure and explore the wonderful music we'll be bringing you this Autumn and beyond.

Until then, thank you for joining us, and we hope you enjoy all the music this evening.

Dominic Parker

Director, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra

Four Sea Interludes from ‘Peter Grimes’

(1943–5) c.16 minutes

Benjamin Britten

(1913–76)

1 Dawn

2 Sunday Morning

3 Moonlight

4 Storm

It was in the small Californian town of Escondido that the travel-weary Benjamin Britten stumbled upon a magazine profile of the Suffolk poet George Crabbe. Reading the accounts of Crabbe’s early life in Aldeburgh, Britten (also Suffolk-born) became both insatiably fascinated and intensely homesick. Soon the composer and his partner Peter Pears set sail back to England, bringing their three-year American adventure to an end. On a homebound Swedish freighter in April 1942 Britten and Pears sketched the scenario for *Peter Grimes*, the Crabbe-based opera that would prove pivotal in both their careers.

Britten’s image of the fisherman Grimes described in Crabbe’s poem *The Borough* was that of an outsider, a man hardened by a brutal society. ‘The more vicious the society, the more vicious the individual,’ commented the composer in 1948 as the opera was preparing to travel back across the Atlantic for its American debut after its June 1945 premiere in London. The title character, written for performance by Pears, was battered by a hostile community and an equally hostile ocean, eventually – and not entirely guiltlessly – taking his own life.

The four orchestral interludes that permeate the opera depict the sea as it meets the Suffolk coast (Britten’s later opera *Billy Budd* would provide an altogether different sonic depiction of the sea – that of the wide expanse of ocean experienced from a large vessel far from land). They also mirror the unfolding drama. In *Peter Grimes* the sea – like the inhabitants of the small fishing village clearly based on the town of Aldeburgh – is by turns threatening and welcoming, murderous and compassionate.

...

‘Dawn’ is stark, with woodwinds awaking to a gentle flutter above thick, undulating blocks of brass and low

strings – these are the grey-blue colours of first light on the Aldeburgh beach, punctuated by the searching large leap (a minor ninth) that becomes one of the fisherman’s musical mottos.

‘Sunday Morning’ prefaces the scene outside the church at which Grimes’s confidante, Ellen Orford, entertains the fisherman’s apprentice with knitting; the sunlit sea is sharp, bright and choppy, with the peal of church bells calling the villagers to worship.

‘Moonlight’ begins calmly as quiet strings move in search of tectonic stability; a xylophone and flute reflect like moonlight on the still orchestral waters before brass and drums colour a huge folding-outwards like an oceanic yawn.

‘Storm’ is appropriately turbulent, the loud passages surrounding a no-man’s-land of brittle instrumental exchanges, like the storm’s ominous lull.

Programme note © Andrew Mellor

Andrew Mellor is a freelance journalist and critic, and author of *The Northern Silence: Journeys in Nordic Music and Culture* (Yale UP, 2022)

Hamlet – suite, Op 32a (1932) c.23 minutes

**Dmitry
Shostakovich**
(1906–75)

- 1 Introduction and Night Watch (*Allegro non troppo – Moderato. Poco allegretto*)
- 2 Funeral March (*Adagio*)
- 3 Flourish and Dance Music (*Allegro*)
- 4 The Hunt (*Allegro*)
- 5 Actors’ Pantomime (*Presto*)

William Shakespeare occupies a unique place in Russian cultural life. Though his work was initially popularised during the reign of Catherine the Great (1762–96), it was in the early 19th century that he became especially beloved. *Hamlet* in particular became a touchstone for Russian theatrical and intellectual life. With his introspection and struggle against social and moral authority, Hamlet fit in neatly alongside many similar heroes of 19th-century Russian literature. Far from abandoning this legacy after the 1917 Revolution, Lenin’s government actively sought to extend Shakespeare’s reach, publishing five million copies of his plays between

- 6 Procession (Moderato)
- 7 Musical Pantomime (Allegro)
- 8 Banquet (Allegro)
- 9 Ophelia's Song (Allegro)
- 10 Lullaby (Andantino)
- 11 Requiem (Adagio)
- 12 Tournament (Allegro)
- 13 Fortinbras' March (Allegretto)

1917 and 1939 throughout the territories of the Soviet Union. But Shakespeare also became a way for artists to symbolically address forbidden issues. As one of the few alternatives to Socialist Realist tales of earnest Soviet heroes, Shakespeare – and especially *Hamlet* – became an avatar for a quiet pushback against the prevailing ideology.

It was into this charged atmosphere that the 25-year-old Shostakovich stepped in 1931, when he was commissioned to write incidental music for a Moscow production of *Hamlet*. Though the production was terribly received (the director, Nikolai Akimov, interpreted the play as a farce), Shostakovich presented one of his finest sequences of incidental music: a long, rich and mercurial score that flickers between laughter and outrageous pomposity, with echoes of Offenbach and cabaret music alongside moments of genuine pathos.

The suite the composer drew from it presents 13 of those numbers in concentrated form. Among them, you will hear the brooding opening of the 'Introduction and Night Watch' give way to a stately 'Funeral March'. Later, in the 'Actors' Pantomime', a *Presto* romp evokes the comic relief travelling players. The gentle 'Ophelia's Song' and rocking 'Lullaby' provide moments of fragile tenderness, while the suite closes with the iron tread of 'Fortinbras' March', as if power simply reasserts itself over the wreckage.

Shostakovich was simultaneously at work on his opera *The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, and he likely used the *Hamlet* music to test dramatic ideas he would develop there. In both works we hear a young composer stretching his wings – though soon to be clipped by a repressive Stalinist hand.

Programme note © Margaret Frainier

Margaret Frainier earned her PhD from the University of Oxford, studying 19th-century Russian music and culture. She has worked as an opera singer, academic and teacher, including as a researcher for the Library of Congress in Washington DC.

c.20 minutes

Interval

Duke Bluebeard's Castle

(1911, rev. 1912, 1917–18) c.55 minutes

Béla Bartók

(1881–1945)

Dorottya Láng Judith
mezzo-soprano

Gábor Bretz Duke Bluebeard
bass-baritone

Béla Bartók wrote his only opera in 1911. Its text is a short 'mystery play' by the poet and aesthetician Béla Balázs. Balázs conceived this as a libretto for his former roommate Zoltán Kodály, but it was their mutual friend Bartók who became fascinated by it. He completed the score within seven months and entered it into both the Ferenc Erkel Prize competition and a one-act opera competition organised by the publisher Rózsavölgyi. It failed to win either, was declared unperformable, and only received its premiere in May 1918, following many revisions and the triumph in 1917 of the composer's ballet *The Wooden Prince*.

Like Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1893–8) and Richard Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten* (1914–17), *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* explores the human psyche through the prism of a fairy tale. Its text was largely inspired by Maurice Maeterlinck's 1899 play *Ariane et Barbe-bleue*, which in turn was loosely based on Charles Perrault's bloodthirsty 1697 fairy tale *Barbe-bleue* ('Bluebeard'). However, while Maeterlinck focused on Ariane's heroic escape from her tyrannical husband, Balázs portrayed the relationship between Bluebeard and Judith as a potentially loving one, undermined at least in part by her insatiable curiosity.

The entire opera takes place in the hall of Bluebeard's gloomy castle. Its seven locked doors make his bride Judith uneasy, and she orders her husband to open them. Bluebeard allows her to unlock two, which reveal a torture chamber and a bloodstained armoury. He then offers her the keys to three more doors, behind which are a treasure house, a beautiful garden and a magnificent view of his kingdom. However, there is blood on the jewels and in the flowers' sap, and blood-red clouds gather over the landscape. An increasingly perturbed Judith insists on unlocking the sixth door, and beholds a still lake. Bluebeard tells her it is made of tears. He begs her to kiss him and forget

Duke Bluebeard's Castle Béla Bartók

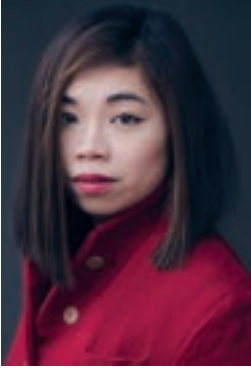
the seventh door. But Judith is now convinced that her husband has murdered his previous wives, and compels him to open it. Three beautiful, magnificently dressed women emerge, and Bluebeard hails them as his wives of dawn, noon and evening. Despite Judith's pleas he dresses her in similarly splendid style and declares her his wife of midnight. She mutely follows the other women back into the seventh room, leaving the tragic Bluebeard alone.

The opera's musical style is unmistakably Hungarian. Balázs's libretto follows the rhythmic structure of Hungarian folk ballads, while Bartók's distinctive harmonic language – which draws on archaic pentatonic and modal scales – highlights his fascination with his country's traditional music. Although the opera is essentially a sung play, with no formal songs or arias, the two roles are highly individual. Bluebeard's slow, declamatory style reflects his nobility and reserve; Judith's restless and wide-ranging line underlines her volatility and passion. Throughout, the large orchestra conveys visual, narrative and emotive elements of the drama. Striking effects include high woodwind and xylophone for the torture chamber, shimmering celesta, gleaming trumpet and solo violins for the treasure house, a glorious chant-like melody for full orchestra – including organ – as Judith opens the fifth door, and a dark-hued woodwind threnody to introduce Bluebeard's past wives. The opera ends with the same mournful melody with which it opened, suggesting Bluebeard is trapped in an endless cycle of renewal and disappointment.

Programme note © Kate Hopkins

Kate Hopkins has written widely on music from the Classical period to the late 20th century, including for the Royal Opera, Covent Garden, Salzburg Festival and London Symphony Orchestra. She commissions and edits the English-language programme notes for the Salzburg Festival.

Elim Chan conductor



Simon Pauly

Born in Hong Kong, Elim Chan studied at Smith College in Massachusetts and at the University of Michigan. In 2014 she became the first female winner of the Donatella Flick Conducting Competition and went on to spend her 2015/16 season as Assistant Conductor at the London Symphony Orchestra, where she worked closely with Valery Gergiev. In the following season she joined the Dudamel Fellowship programme of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. She also owes much to the support and encouragement of Bernard Haitink, whose masterclasses she attended in Lucerne in 2015. She has served as Principal Conductor of the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra (2019–2024) and Principal Guest Conductor of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (2018–23).

Having conducted the First Night of the BBC Proms with the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 2024, she returned last year to conduct the renowned Last Night of the Proms. The summer period also saw her reunite with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Cleveland Orchestra, as well as making her debut at the Musikfest Berlin with the Staatskapelle Berlin.

Highlights of this season include return engagements with the London and Toronto Symphony orchestras, Los Angeles, Luxembourg and New York Philharmonic orchestras, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (Amsterdam), Cleveland Orchestra, Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, Staatskapelle Dresden and Orchestre de Paris. She also makes her subscription debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra and her debuts with the Bamberg and Montreal Symphony orchestras, Munich Philharmonic and Orchestra of Zürich Opera.

She has previously appeared with the Chicago, Pittsburgh, San Francisco and Vienna Symphony orchestras, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra and Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin.

Gábor Bretz Duke Bluebeard



László Emmner.

Since graduating from the Franz Liszt Music Academy in Budapest, Hungarian bass-baritone Gábor Bretz has regularly appeared at the Hungarian State Opera, singing the title roles in Boito's *Mefistofele* and Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, as well as Leporello (*Don Giovanni*), Basilio (*The Barber of Seville*), Banco (*Macbeth*), Escamillo (*Carmen*), Gurnemanz (*Parsifal*) and Orestes (*Elektra*).

In recent seasons he has appeared at leading houses in Berlin, Brussels, Geneva, Hamburg, London, New York, Paris and Tokyo in operas by composers including Beethoven, Martinů, Massenet, Offenbach, Puccini, Richard Strauss, Verdi and Wagner. Last month he sang the title-role in Hindemith's *Cardillac* at the Zürich Opera House. Further highlights of this season include Vogler (*Lohengrin*) under Omer Meir Wellber and Walter (*Luisa Miller*) under Henrik Nánási, both for Hamburg State Opera; Daland (*The Flying Dutchman*) at the Tirol Festival Erl under Asher Fisch; and Thibaud d'Arc (*The Maid of Orleans*) for Dutch National Opera. Concert performances include Rossini's *Stabat mater* as well as *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* with the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra.

In concert he has sung *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* with the Berlin Philharmonic and Houston Symphony, and appeared with the London, Oregon and Stavanger Symphony Orchestras, Helsinki and New York Philharmonic orchestras, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (Amsterdam). Other orchestral engagements include Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 with the Munich Philharmonic, as well as Verdi's *Requiem* with both the Staatsoper Hamburg and Orchestra of the Royal Opera, Covent Garden. Additional repertoire includes the major oratorios of Bach, Haydn and Mozart, Berlioz's *The Childhood of Christ* and Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*.

Among the conductors with whom he has worked are Alain Altinoglu, Daniel Barenboim, Gustavo Dudamel, Daniele Gatti, Sir Simon Rattle and Esa-Pekka Salonen.

Gábor Bretz is a vocal professor at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest.

Dorottya Láng Judith

Hungarian mezzo-soprano Dorottya Láng began her career as an ensemble member at the Hamburg State Opera. Now a guest on international opera stages, her repertoire includes Marguerite (*The Damnation of Faust*), Hansel (*Hansel and Gretel*), Adriano (*Rienzi*), Octavian (*Der Rosenkavalier*), Rosina (*The Barber of Seville*), Dorabella (*Così fan tutte*), the title-role in *La Cenerentola* and Judith (*Duke Bluebeard's Castle*), which has become a signature role.



Zsófia Pályi

Highlights of last season included debuts with the Berlin Philharmonic (in Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* under Daniel Barenboim) and the Nederlandse Reisopera (as the Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos*) as well as her BBC Proms debut (*Duke Bluebeard's Castle*) and her debut in the role of Venus (*Tannhäuser*) at Müpa Budapest, conducted by Ádám Fischer.

In recent weeks she has made her debut at the Zürich Opera House in Hindemith's *Cardillac* and returned to the role of Judith with the Danish National Symphony Orchestra in Copenhagen. Forthcoming highlights include Mahler's Symphony No. 3 with the Hungarian Radio Symphony Orchestra at Müpa, Elgar's *Sea Pictures* with the Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra at the Thessaloniki Concert Hall and further performances as Judith with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra at the Lowy Concert Hall in Tel Aviv.

In concert Dorottya Láng has collaborated with leading orchestras including the Berlin and Vienna Radio Symphony orchestras, Düsseldorf and Vienna Symphony orchestras and Hamburg State Philharmonic Orchestra, working with conductors such as Teodor Currentzis, Thomas Dausgaard, Ingo Metzmacher, Kent Nagano, Andrés Orozco-Estrada and Markus Stenz. An acclaimed recitalist, she has appeared at London's Wigmore Hall, the Schubertiade in Austria, the Vienna Konzerthaus and at the Oxford Lieder Festival among many other international festivals.

Ryan Wigglesworth
Chief Conductor

Delyana Lazarova
Principal Guest Conductor

Ilan Volkov
Creative Partner

Lucy Drever
Associate Artist

Hans Abrahamsen
Composer-in-Association

Sir Donald Runnicles
Conductor Emeritus

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra



Across the 2025/26 season, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra celebrates 90 years as Scotland's national broadcasting orchestra. From Oban to Osaka, it has performed across Scotland and around the world, with concerts often featured on BBC Radio 3, Radio Scotland, BBC Sounds, and BBC TV and iPlayer. As Scotland's leading champion of new music it has, across nine decades, commissioned orchestral music by the most original voices and presents its annual Tectonics Festival of new and experimental music alongside its Creative Partner Ilan Volkov.

With Associate Artist Lucy Drever the orchestra runs projects across Scotland for families, schools and communities. And through a close association with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the orchestra mentors the next generation of conductors, composers and instrumentalists. It also supports young musical talent in BBC Radio Scotland's Young Classical Musician competition.

Ryan Wigglesworth began his tenure as Chief Conductor in 2022. He has directed a wide range of repertoire including the ballets of Stravinsky, major works of Elgar and UK premieres of works by György Kurtág and Hans Abrahamsen. Following her BBC Proms debut last year, Delyana Lazarova took up the role of Principal Guest Conductor.

The orchestra has received a Royal Philharmonic Society Award and four *Gramophone* Awards, and this year was named one of the UK's 10 Greatest Orchestras by *The Telegraph*.

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Alessandro Ruisi *guest leader*
Kanako Ito (associate leader)
David Routledge*
Iona McDonald †
Jane Mackenzie
Olivier Lemoine
Gent Koço
Cheryl Crockett
Wen Wang
Catherine James
Rachel Culpan
Maria Oguren
Elana Eisen
Annabel Stevens

Second Violins

Lise Aferiat*
Liza Johnson †
Brigid Leman
Paula Smart
Julia Norton
Julia Carpenter
Alice Rickards
Ben Norris
Ana do Vale
Julia Lungu
Feargus Hetherington
Sharon Haslam

Violas

Andrew Berridge †
Liam Brolly
Rik Evans
Mary Ward
Rhoslyn Lawton
Marsailidh Groat
Yvette Berridge
David McCreadie
Sasha Buettner
Susan Blasdale

Cellos

Rudi De Groote*
Siân Bell †
Nick Byrne ‡
Gill De Groote

Anne Brincourt
Feargus Egan
Jessica Abrahams
Harvey Kelly

Double Basses

Gyunam Kim*
Iain Crawford †
Genna Spinks ‡
Tom Berry
James Trowbridge
Lynette Eaton

Flutes

Matthew Higham*
Brontë Hudnott †
Luke Russell †
Adam Richardson

Oboes

Rosie Staniforth ‡
Mary James
Vanessa Howells

Clarinets

Yann Ghiro*
Emily Crook
Elaine Ruby

Bassoons

Georgina Powell ‡
Graeme Brown †
Jamie Louise White
Rhiannon Carmichael

Horns

Chris Gough*
Hector Salgueiro
Alec Ross
Nicole Linning
Abby Wilson

Trumpets

Hedley Benson †
Mark Calder
Mark Addison
Lloyd Griffin

Trombones

Cillian O'Ceallachain ‡
Huw Evans

Bass Trombone

Alexander Kelly †
Ed Hilton

Tuba

James Tavares ‡

Timpani

Gordon Rigby*
Robbie Bremner

Percussion

Joe Richards*
Patrick Nolan
Kate Openshaw
David Kerr
Robbie Bremner

Harps

Helen Thomson
Sharron Griffiths

Piano

Judith Keaney

Organ/Celesta

Michael Bawtree

* *section principal*

† *principal*

‡ *string sub-principal*

‡ *guest principal*

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time of going to print*

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