

**BBC**

**Scottish  
Symphony  
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**11.12.2025**

**7.30PM**

**GLASGOW  
CITY HALLS**

# **DEBUSSY, RAVEL & RARE GEMS**

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# ADVENTURES IN CLASSICAL



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Thursday  
**11.12.2025**  
7.30pm  
City Halls, Glasgow

**BBC**  
**Scottish  
Symphony  
Orchestra**

# Debussy, Ravel & Rare Gems

## **Elsa Barraine**

Symphony No.2

## **Maurice Ohana**

Piano Concerto

*Interval*

## **Maurice Ravel**

Valses nobles et sentimentales  
(orchestral version)

## **Claude Debussy**

Nocturnes

**Nicolas Hodges** piano

**RCS Chamber Choir** (upper voices)

**Ilan Volkov** conductor

This concert ends at approximately 9.30pm

This concert is being broadcast live by BBC Radio 3 in *Radio 3 in Concert* and will be available to stream or download for 30 days via BBC Sounds, where you can also find podcasts and music mixes.

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

# Welcome



Vojtěch Brtnický

It's great to be back in Glasgow after a long break. We are delving into French repertoire in this concert, including classics by Ravel and Debussy. The diversity of 20th-century French music is still full of discoveries, and we are also presenting two works that are rarely heard in British halls – Elsa Barraine's Second Symphony and the Piano Concerto by Maurice Ohana. I am particularly excited, as this is the first time I have conducted either of these works.

The always imaginative Nicolas Hodges will play the piano part in the Ohana. I've known Nic for decades and every project together is full of intensity and laughter. Ohana is a spectacular orchestrator, like no other, and it is baffling that his music isn't played more often. Interest in Barraine's music is quite recent – she was a Jewish, French composer, much admired by Messiaen, but she didn't achieve the success she deserved in her lifetime.

Debussy and Ravel need no introduction, but I firmly believe their music can never fully be grasped on recordings alone. *Nocturnes* is one of the pieces that made me fall in love with Debussy as a child – especially that last movement, in which the upper voices of the RCS Chamber Choir will bring to life the seductive 'Sirènes'.

The dynamic range in this programme is endless, and the orchestral palette uniquely vivid: a single soft cymbal stroke, a huge, powerful chord, layers of rhythms – and much more.

It has been ages since I performed any of this repertoire with the BBC SSO, and I can't wait to hear them shape and dig into this music. And in the intimate space of City Halls, the experience will be truly visceral – that's for sure.

## **Ilan Volkov**

Creative Partner, BBC SSO

# Symphony No. 2 (1938) c.19 minutes

**Elsa Barraine**  
(1910–1999)

- 1 **Allegro vivace**
- 2 **Marche funèbre**  
[Funeral March]
- 3 **Finale**

September 1938 was a month characterised by looming dread and impending crisis. Austria had already been annexed by Hitler's forces, and the Czech Sudetenland would soon follow – sowing the seeds for the Second World War, which broke out a year later. Meanwhile in Paris, Elsa Barraine's Symphony No.2 received its first performance from the Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française. Subtitled 'Voïna' (or 'War' in Russian), the work gives voice to the tensions and turbulence of the late 1930s. As Barraine herself would say many years after the symphony's premiere: 'In '38, we knew there would be a war; you would have to be crazy not to notice.'

In comparison with the large symphonic works of the 20th century, the Symphony No.2 is compact – lasting a little under 20 minutes. Despite its short running time, it packs an emotional punch.

The first movement, Allegro vivace, is full of twisting, uneasy harmonies, punctuated by outbursts of militaristic rhythms on the snare drum.

The second movement, 'Funeral March', begins with a low, imposing brass figure, soon followed by spiralling melodies in the high strings and woodwinds. The symphony's Finale has something of an ironic edge. Its jaunty, dance-like rhythms serve as a stark contrast to the simmering unease of the previous two movements, culminating in some triumphant brass chords. Barraine's symphony demonstrates both her technical skills in composition and her ability to create musical atmosphere. The music moves rapidly through changes in style and mood, building tension that reflects the emotional weight of its subject matter.

The performance history of this work has been patchy. Though it received a few radio broadcasts in 1938 and 1939, Barraine's status as a *persona non grata* during the war, owing to her Jewish heritage, meant that the symphony was not performed at all during the Nazi occupation. After the Liberation (and Barraine's

reinstatement within the French cultural landscape) it found a new popularity, but it is only relatively recently that it has come to enjoy more regular outings. Though Barraine's music sought to capture a particular mood in time and place, its political themes continue to resonate in today's world.

**Programme note © Emma Kavanagh**

Emma Kavanagh is a musicologist and cultural historian at Aix-Marseille Université, France. A specialist in opera and musical culture in France between the Revolution and the First World War, she is working on a collaborative archival project in partnership with the Aix-en-Provence Festival.

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## **Piano Concerto (1980–81)** c.26 minutes

**Maurice Ohana**  
(1913–92)

**Nicolas Hodges** piano

One of the experimental avant-gardists of French music during the second half of the 20th century, Maurice Ohana distanced himself from the serialism of the post-war years through developing a musical language based on his cultural origins and an aesthetic alignment that owed much to the innovations of Debussy. Although French by training and adoption (he settled in Paris in 1932), Ohana was born in French-colonial Morocco to Spanish and Gibraltar-Andalusian parents. From his childhood he was immersed in the Andalusian *cante jondo*, the oldest and purest form of flamenco, but also became increasingly fascinated by the rhythmic principles of the indigenous African musics he experienced in his youth. These traditions provided fertile sources of inspiration in his early works and, as his mature style crystallised during the 1960s, led him to investigate ways of recreating the spontaneity of improvisation within a composed score through juxtaposing layering techniques with different types of sound-densities and textures. Yet, fundamental to all his music is the importance of an essentially vocal quality, a feature stemming from his profound love of ancient plainchant, as well as the vocal repertoires of the

Renaissance, discovered through his studies at the Schola Cantorum in Paris. Ohana also remarked: 'All my music is monodic [made up of a single melodic line] and that which is added is just a trail or shadow – the soul of it is monodic.'

Premiered in 1981, the single-movement Piano Concerto is divided into four main sections. The first presents what might be called 'thickened' monodies, the soloist and orchestra alternating in responsorial fashion while alluding to the intense emotions associated with the Andalusian *cante jondo*, in particular the *saeta*. Although the mood is initially resigned and contemplative, it becomes increasingly agitated as the piano counterpoints the orchestral monody with frenzied percussive rhythms. The harmonic dream and bewitching beauty of the opening returns in a central slow section that seeks what flamenco musicians call *sonido negro* (black sound), a special magic enclosed in sound closely associated with the idea of *duende* (demon) that has been much evoked by the poet Federico García Lorca who was also an important influence on Ohana. The concerto builds to a concluding climax in a violent, percussive toccata of apocalyptic power.

A pianist himself, Ohana made a significant contribution to the piano repertoire, his works for the instrument spanning the breadth of his compositional career. Technically a British citizen due to his father's Gibraltarian nationality, Ohana fought with the British Army throughout the Second World War and completed commando training in Scotland while seconded to the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. He retained a lifelong affection for all things Scottish, including the wearing of the Black Watch tartan.

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c.20 minutes

### Interval

(as tonight's concert is being broadcast live on BBC Radio 3, please be sure to return to your seat in good time)

### Programme note © Caroline Rae

Caroline Rae is a pianist and Professor of Music at Cardiff University. The author of *The Music of Maurice Ohana* (Routledge, 2018), she has published widely on 20th-century French music and was made a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2018 for her services to French culture.

# Valses nobles et sentimentales

(1911, orch. 1912) c.16 minutes

## Maurice Ravel

(1875–1937)

- 1 **Modéré** [Moderately] –
- 2 **Assez lent** [Quite slow] –
- 3 **Modéré** [Moderately] –
- 4 **Assez animé** [Quite animated] –
- 5 **Presque lent** [Almost slow] –
- 6 **Assez vif** [Quite lively] –
- 7 **Moins vif** [Less lively] –
- 8 **Epilogue: Lent** [Slow]

Many of Ravel's orchestral works were originally written for the piano and later orchestrated. This is true of *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, composed in 1911 and orchestrated the following year. The work is dedicated to Louis Aubert, a composer who had studied alongside Ravel at the Paris Conservatoire, and who premiered the original version.

One distinct difference between Ravel and Debussy is that Ravel typically used a compositional model as a starting point for a piece. For this series of waltzes, the model was Schubert, who composed several piano pieces titled either 'Valse noble' or 'Valse sentimentale'. Other than the title, however, there are few points of similarity between Ravel and Schubert. The musical language, while rooted in tonality, frequently uses extended chords characteristic of Ravel's style. These acerbic dissonances are heard from the very start of the work. Ravel's attraction to the world of the Viennese waltz also appears in his large orchestral work simply titled *La valse* (1919–20), a celebration of the whirling dance that ends in a frenzy, surely a metaphor for the end of the Austro-Hungarian empire.

Ravel's orchestra for *Valses nobles et sentimentales* is not huge, featuring two of each woodwind instrument, though it requires two harps and an extensive percussion section including celesta and glockenspiel. The untuned percussion tend to underline the energy of the faster movements, and Ravel is also fond of the distinctively French orchestral colours of solo woodwinds plus harp or celesta. The string section is frequently subdivided and features a wide variety of playing techniques that vary the sonority.

*Valses nobles et sentimentales* is a chain of eight waltzes that differ sharply in character and tempo, though neither nobility nor sentiment is the primary mood. It is generally easy to imagine dancers whirling

around the dance floor as the 3/4 rhythm is usually perceptible. Some of the waltzes, however, feature offbeat episodes that blur the underlying rhythm to breaking point. The grand seventh and penultimate waltz, the longest of the set, opens with a magical horn, woodwind and harp prelude and gradually builds up towards the emotional and dynamic climax of the work. However, Ravel eschews a triumphant conclusion, instead ending the sequence of waltzes with a slow, quiet, ghostly echo of what has gone before.

**Programme note © Caroline Potter**

Caroline Potter is Visiting Reader in French Music at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. She has published widely on French music since Debussy, and her most recent book, *Erik Satie: A Parisian Composer and His World* (Boydell Press, 2016), was named *Sunday Times* Classical Music Book of the Year.

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## Nocturnes (1892–9) c.26 minutes

### Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

- 1 Nuages [Clouds]
- 2 Fêtes [Festivals]
- 3 Sirènes [Sirens]

**RCS Chamber Choir**  
(upper voices)

The *Nocturnes* had an unusually long period of compositional gestation as Debussy struggled to find new ways of exploring colour and timbre to convey fleeting images and moods. First conceiving the work in 1892 as *Trois scènes au crépuscule* ('Three Scenes at Twilight'), he was originally inspired by the dream-like imagery of the Symbolist poems of the same title by his friend Henri de Régnier, but then discovered the darkly atmospheric series of night-time landscapes by the Paris-based American artist James McNeill Whistler – a sort of Baudelaire of the visual arts – from whom Debussy borrowed the title *Nocturnes*. Encouraged by his discoveries in the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1894) which opened new compositional paths in terms of harmony, instrumental colour and form, Debussy finally completed his *Nocturnes* in 1899. In his

## Nocturnes Claude Debussy

programme note for the first complete performance by the Orchestre Lamoureux under Camille Chevillard in 1901, Debussy wrote: 'The title *Nocturnes* ... is not meant to designate the usual form of the nocturne, but rather all the various impressions and special effects of light that the word suggests.'

Mysterious and subdued in steadily oscillating textures, the tonally ambiguous opening movement 'Nuages' evokes what Debussy called 'the immutable aspect of the sky and the slow, solemn motion of the clouds, fading away in grey tones tinged with white'. He got the idea late one night standing on the Pont de Solférino in Paris watching a moonless sky with the Seine below 'without a ripple, like a tarnished mirror'. 'Fêtes' is more exuberant, its dance-like triplets and jaunty themes evoking Debussy's 'dazzling and fantastic vision' of a festival procession in the Bois de Boulogne, but as seen disjointedly from afar through the trees; crowds run and resplendent horsemen of the Garde Républicaine sound their bugles before disappearing into gloom. 'Sirènes' looks forward to *La mer* in depicting the sea and what for Debussy were 'its countless rhythms'. Among the waves, silvered by the moonlight, a wordless chorus of upper voices evokes the mysterious song and wistful sighs of mystical Sirens, supernatural beings who lured sailors to their doom. Among Debussy's first works in which visual images are intrinsic to the essence of his musical ideas, *Nocturnes* is often considered an example of musical Impressionism. Although Debussy notoriously disliked this term owing to what he considered its derogatory connotations, such negativity has now long since waned.

Programme note © Caroline Rae

### Ilan Volkov conductor

Ilan Volkov enjoys a long-standing relationship with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, as Principal Conductor (2003–9), Principal Guest Conductor (2009–24) and now as Creative Partner. He is also Principal Guest Conductor of the Brussels Philharmonic.



Hannah Blake-Fathers

He works with ensembles around the world and appears at the Berlin, Edinburgh, Lucerne, Musikprotokoll, Salzburg and Unsound Kraków festivals. A regular visitor to the BBC Proms, his performances there range from Giovanni Gabrieli and Mozart to James Dillon and Anthony Braxton. In 2012 he launched the Tectonics Festival, a diverse celebration of new music with iterations in Adelaide, Athens, Glasgow, Kraków, New York, Oslo, Reykjavík and Tel Aviv.

In opera he has conducted *Eugene Onegin* for San Francisco Opera, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Glyndebourne and *Peter Grimes* for Washington National Opera.

### Nicolas Hodges piano

London-born, Germany-based Nicolas Hodges performs music from Classical period to the present day and is especially renowned for his work in contemporary music. Many leading composers have written works for especially him, including Thomas Adès, Gerald Barry, Elliott Carter, Francisco Coll, Pascal Dusapin, Isabel Mundry and Wolfgang Rihm. He has appeared with the Bavarian Radio, Chicago and London Symphony orchestras, Berlin and Los Angeles Philharmonic orchestras, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, London Sinfonietta and the Askol|Schönberg ensemble. Among the conductors with whom he has worked are Daniel Barenboim, George Benjamin, James Levine, Susanna Mälkki, Jonathan Nott and Jukka-Pekka Saraste.



Eric Richmond

Also an active chamber musician he collaborates regularly with the Arditti Quartet, Adrian Brendel, Colin Currie, Ilya Gringolts, Anssi Karttunen and Carolin Widmann.

**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. Scotland's leading champion of new music 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 earlier this 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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Emily Nebel *guest leader*

Iona McDonald †

Peter Liang

Jane Mackenzie

Elita Poulter

Alastair Savage

Gent Koço

Emily Ward

Mireia Ferrer Yabar

Katrina Lee

Amy Cardigan

Michelle Dierx

Julia Lungu

Rachel Culpan

## **Second Violins**

Lise Aferiat\*

Greg Lawson

Brigid Leman

Julia Norton

Julia Carpenter

Barbara Downie

Alice Rickards

Ana do Vale

Ben Norris

Jane Lemoine

Wen Wang

Tessa Henderson

## **Violas**

Andrew Berridge †

Morag Robertson ‡

Lukas Bowen

Martin Wiggins

Matthew Johnstone

Rik Evans

Rhoslyn Lawton

Emma Connell-Smith

Liam Brolly

Yvette Berridge

## **Cellos**

Siân Bell †

Nick Byrne ‡

Sarah Oliver

Gill De Groot

Anne Brincourt

Feargus Egan

Sonia Cromarty

Andrew Huggan

## **Double Basses**

Gyunam Kim\*

Iain Crawford †

Genna Spinks ‡

Tom Berry

Lynette Eaton

Mhairi Sinclair

## **Flutes**

Matthew Higham\*

Siobhan Greal

Luke Russell †

## **Oboes**

Christopher Vettrano ‡

Fraser Kelman

James Horan †

## **Clarinets**

Yann Ghiso\*

Robert Digney

Aaron Hartnell Booth

Jenny Stephenson

## **Bassoons**

Paul Boyes ‡

Graeme Brown †

Rhiannon Carmichael

## **Horns**

Jake Parker ‡

Hector Salgueiro

Lauren Reeve-Rawlings †

Stephanie Jones

Diana Sheach

## **Trumpets**

Katie Bannister ‡

Mark Calder

Hedley Benson †

## **Trombones**

Ian Sankey ‡

Emma Close

## **Bass Trombone**

Alexander Kelly †

## **Tuba**

Andrew Duncan\*

## **Timpani**

Gordon Rigby\*

## **Percussion**

Joe Richards\*

David Lyons

Paddy Nolan

Alasdair Kelly

Kate Openshaw

David Kerr

## **Harp**

Helen Thomson

Sharron Griffiths

## **Celesta**

Judith Keaney

*\* section principal*

*† principal*

*‡ string sub-principal*

*¥ guest principal*

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# RCS Chamber Choir (upper voices)

The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland Chamber Choir is a group of singers selected from the undergraduate Vocal Performance degree of the RCS. The choir performs regularly both at the conservatoire and at external events, most recently recording for BBC One Scotland television broadcasts in December 2023 and April 2024, and collaborating with the BBC SSO in a performance of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* in February 2025.

The undergraduate choral programme at the RCS is led by conductor Andrew Nunn, widely regarded as one of the foremost choral directors of his generation. The RCS Vocal Performance department, led by Jane Irwin is an internationally renowned programme providing students with the artistic and academic skills to forge a singing career at the highest level.

## **First Sopranos**

Rei Camilleri  
Freya Gibson  
Maria McMaster  
Hannah Weakley

## **Second Sopranos**

Sian Davies  
Amelie Masters  
Amy Spearing  
Minnie Wood

## **First Altos**

Persephone Bell  
Lettice Lamb  
Ivana Peat  
Lily Visser

## **Second Altos**

Ffion Bernard  
Leah Doraisamy  
Anna Jackson  
Polina Weekes

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