



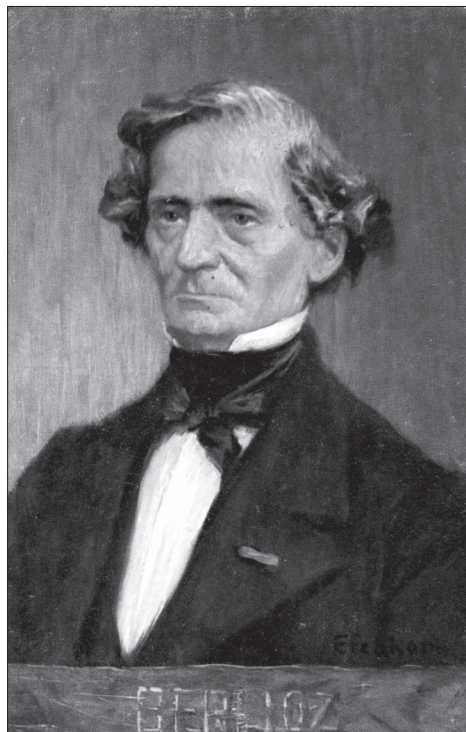
Classics

Spirit of **SCOTLAND**

Berlioz • Mendelssohn • Arnold • Verdi • MacCunn



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Hector Berlioz

Spirit of Scotland

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

- | | | |
|---|---|-------|
| 1 | The Hebrides, Op. 26
Overture | 10:16 |
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Hector Berlioz (1803–1869)

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| 2 | Waverley, Op. 2
Grande ouverture | 10:21 |
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Malcolm Arnold (1921–2006)

- | | | |
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| 3 | Tam o'Shanter, Op. 51
Overture | 7:53 |
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Hector Berlioz

- | | | |
|---|---|-------|
| 4 | Rob Roy – Intrata di Rob-Roy Macgregor
Overture | 13:03 |
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Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901)

Macbeth: Ballet Music from Act III

5	No. 1	2:10
6	No. 2 –	5:12
7	No. 3	2:43

Malcolm Arnold

Four Scottish Dances, Op. 59*

8	I Pesante	1:58
9	II Vivace	2:07
10	III Allegretto	2:43
11	IV Con brio	1:31

Hamish MacCunn (1868–1916)

12	Land of the Mountain and the Flood	9:56
	Overture	TT 71:15

Scottish National Orchestra

Sir Alexander Gibson

Philharmonia Orchestra*

Bryden Thomson*

Spirit of Scotland

O Caledonia! stern and wild,
Meet nurse for a poetic child!
Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
Land of the mountain and the flood,
Land of my sires! what mortal hand
Can e'er untie the filial band
That knits me to thy rugged strand!

From *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*
(Canto VI, ii) by Sir Walter Scott

Each composer on this disc, as the titles show, fell at one time or another beneath the spell of Scotland's 'rugged strand', its poetic children or those writers to whom the country offered inspiration. It was through Scott – notably the 'Waverley' novels – that Berlioz came to Scottish literature, and Malcolm Arnold is represented by a cautionary tale of Robert Burns. Verdi's Scottish connection lies with a great playwright's response to conflict in a Highland setting, while Mendelssohn was one of a number of young Romantics who included Scotland in their fashionable, if not obligatory, grand tours. Hamish MacCunn, Greenock-born, had but to look about him.

At about the same time that Macpherson's Ossian translations of Fingal's Celtic triumphs were enjoying currency on the continent, a

French edition of Sir Walter Scott's first novel, *Waverley*, was also being widely read on the other side of the English Channel. Berlioz, not yet out of his teens, picked up a copy in the early 1820s and at once became fascinated by Scott's tale of the 1745 rebellion at Prestonpans and its effect on Edward Waverley, a soldier initially more interested in honour than in the fortunes of either side:

...While dreams of love and lady's charms
Give place to honour and to arms!

The student Berlioz wrote his *Waverley* (one of the first concert overtures) towards the end of 1827, and although it was performed in Paris at his lavish debut concert the following year, the work was not published until 1839. The above couplet, scribbled at the head of the manuscript, neatly sums up the work's essence, with its ardent cello theme in the opening *Larghetto* (a section strikingly developed from fragments) and the following *Allegro vivace* in which the Weber-like style and energy of the violin writing offers a telling contrast with much that is pure Berlioz: parallel woodwind chords in diminished sevenths, short full-orchestra *crescendo* from a whisper to a *fortissimo* – and, as ever, fine, prominent



scoring for brass, less weighted in favour of trombones than in subsequent years. The score bears the heading 'À Moris. Le Colonel F. Marmion', an uncle of the composer whose namesake provided the title for one of Scott's poems. To the twenty-three-year-old Berlioz it must have been an irresistible choice of dedication.

The febrile Berlioz was to convalesce in Nice on more than one occasion during his life, and while resting there, free of worry, he often sketched, revised or completed several works at a time.

And so I drink deep draughts of the sunny, balmy air of Nice, and life and joy return to me, and I dream of music and the future... I live entirely alone. I write the overture to *King Lear*. I sing. I believe in God. Convalescence!

From *Mémoire* by Hector Berlioz

The overtures *Rob Roy*, *King Lear* and *Le Corsaire* were conceived during that stay in 1831 when he drank 'deep draughts of the sunny, balmy air'; though only the latter two were composed in Nice itself. Rome, several months later, was the scene for *Rob Roy*. The city and its musical academics depressed Berlioz,

...the anti-musical atmosphere... reduced me to a state in which I found it almost impossible to compose...

While at the Academy there, he wrote, or recast, no more than a handful of works. Among these, apart from the overture, was the 'Scène aux champs' from *Symphonie fantastique*, and there is something of the pastoral atmosphere of this movement, with its plaintive cor anglais and oboe calls, in the central cor anglais melody of *Rob Roy*. The melody itself, however, played over a harp accompaniment, looks directly forward two years to the more rugged Byronic landscape of *Harold in Italy*, in which Harold's theme quotes it in full. In *Rob Roy*, as in the Byron-inspired work, the harp is much in evidence.

Blended with trumpet and bassoon, it lends the opening bars, with their soft horn motive, a unique sonority, and it is silent for any length of time only during the vigorous second group (the overture is in sonata form) on bassoons and lower strings. Those quick on the uptake will spot a minute later a more fleeting pre-echo of *Harold*, again from the cor anglais, though here the melody is without the harmonic sting in the tail which it possesses in the symphony. The connection between the two works is principally thematic, however: if the overture is a tribute to the Scottish warrior, then its rollicking 6/8 metre reflects neither menace nor darkness in his nature, merely the liveliness of a roving character. The hostile reaction of the work's first, Parisian, audience must have

hurt Berlioz, for he was driven to destroy the score immediately after the concert (although, characteristically astute, he kept a duplicate).

On 7 August 1829, after arriving at Tobermory on the Isle of Mull, Mendelssohn wrote to his parents:

In order to make you understand how extraordinarily the Hebrides have affected me, I have written down the following which came into my mind.

'The following' turned out to be the first twenty bars of *The Hebrides* overture, inspired, claimed the young composer, while standing in Fingal's Cave on the uninhabited island of Staffa. If, as the error-free handwriting and recent research suggest, the theme had lain in Mendelssohn's subconscious for some while beforehand, its return to the composer's mind amid such magnificent scenery is not hard to understand. Keats, similarly awestruck by the view some ten years earlier, offered an eloquent description of the cave, named after Ossian's Celtic hero whose life was devoted to driving the Norsemen out of the Hebridean islands:

Suppose, now, the giants who came down to the daughters of men had a whole mass of these columns and bound them together like bunches of matches, and then with immense axes had made

a cavern in the body of these columns. Such is Fingal's Cave... For solemnity and grandeur it far surpasses the finest cathedral.

After jotting down those opening twenty bars (later halved to ten, quavers to semiquavers, the better to convey the flowing movement of the sea), Mendelssohn took nearly three years to complete the overture to his satisfaction. The first draft, headed *Die einsame Insel* (The Lonely Island), was finished in Rome shortly before Christmas 1830, yet over a year later we still find reservation in Mendelssohn's correspondence to his sister. After much reworking, and a London performance in May 1832, the score was finally completed.

Even by Mendelssohn's standards, the orchestration (two each of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and trumpets, and strings and timpani) is of exceptional beauty and transparency, the art of transition seamlessly achieved. Although at first no more than a repeated one-bar figure, the opening theme soon proves as changeable and pliant as the surface of the sea itself. Twice it broadens out, inverted, over a swelling timpani roll and a surging string bass line before ushering in the *cantabile* second subject on cellos and bassoons. A little further on it re-appears, *ff* and thrown into jagged relief, over agitated semiquavers



on cellos and basses (in such writing as this, it is as if the sea is boiling over). This first theme has the lion's share of the development too, calmly appearing in distant keys or, during some part exchanges between strings and woodwind, almost as a distant cousin to the *Midsummer Night's Dream* Scherzo: here perhaps, suggests Roger Fiske, can be heard the chugging of the little paddle steamer which took Mendelssohn and his companion from Oban to Tobermory. In terms of bars the recapitulation is ingeniously concise, yet now there seems all the time in the world to unfold the second subject, intoned by clarinets before the magnificent coda, a concluding return to *pianissimo* and a fragment, on flute, of the second subject.

Unlike his hero Berlioz – 'the greatest musical influence in my life' – Malcolm Arnold developed his remarkable orchestral instinct from the inside; at twenty-one he was appointed principal trumpet of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, a tenure temporarily (and unhappily; Arnold was a conscientious objector) interrupted by the war. At much the same time, Arnold completed the work which brought him to the notice of the general public, the overture *Beckus the Dandipratt*, which, like *Tam o'Shanter* written a little over ten years later, represents the lighter side of a musical personality which as it is tends towards the burlesque (though by no means

exclusively, for there are many serious, even bitter pages among the symphonies). Like Beckus, Robert Burns' Tam is also something of a dandipratt (roughly translatable from the old English as 'urchin' or 'rogue'). The beginning of the tale finds this 'blithering, blustering, drunken bellum' at the end of a market day, cosily ensconced with his cronies in a local hostelry. Some decidedly uncouth brass comment, quiet chromatic string *tremolandi* (Sibelius, says Arnold, was another formative influence) and bassoons, Scotch-snapping, all help to portray Tam's fuddled state as he weaves his way outside for the homeward journey through a rainswept night on which 'a child might understand/The Deil had business on his han'. For Tam, halfway through his journey, the 'business' in question takes the form of a ghoulisb knees-up at the ruined Kirk-Alloway – 'Warlocks and witches in a dance... hornpipes, jigs, strathspey, and reels/Put life and mettle in their heels'. Arnold's macabre crew are rather more grotesque than this: their strathspey is heavily weighed down by braying 'bagpipe' horns, *Dies irae* rumblings from lower brass, and Scotch fiddle music. Burn's hornpipe is here, though, perky if a shade coarse on piccolos, trombones and tuba. Unseen by those within, Tam's eye is drawn to a 'cutty-sark' (short skirt) worn by one of the revellers. Forgetting himself, he

roars encouragement: 'Weel done, Cutty-sark!' His words, uncannily mimicked by a solo trombone, ring out in silence: they have seen him. The chase is on, Tam driving his mare forward with terrified ferocity (imaginative use of low percussion here to suggest the thunder of hooves and myriad feet). A stream looms ahead and, with inches to spare, horse and rider leap to the opposite bank, safe now, for spirits cannot cross water. Only the horse's tail remains on the other side, a grisly trophy plucked at the last moment by Nannie, owner of the cutty-sark and 'far before the rest' in pursuit.

The *Four Scottish Dances* employ of course traits and timbres derived from Scottish folk music, but differ in other ways also from their English forbears. The first, a strathspey, alternates slow and fast tempi with some exciting effects of fast-tonguing in trumpets and trombones in the fast section. The second, a reel, alternates quick and slow tempi (this movement originated in some music written in 1949 for the film *The Beautiful Country of Ayr*). The third is part love-song, part nature-poem, and features a long-breathed romantic melody in the manner of Hebridean folksong, while the finale is a brief whirlwind impression of a Highland Fling.

The assorted sprites, devils and witches who dance around the cauldron at the opening of Act III of Verdi's *Macbeth* did so

in 1865 for little reason other than to provide Parisian opera audiences with the traditional ballet sequence. This, and a fair number of other revisions some eighteen years after the opera's first production (*Macbeth* marked Verdi's first approach to Shakespeare) caused the composer more than a few headaches. At the beginning of Act III, he reminded his librettist, 'the only characters on stage are the witches, and to have these delightful creatures cavorting about for fifteen or twenty minutes will make a rather frenzied divertissement'. In the event, the ballet music took a rather more concise form than Verdi had envisaged; it was, he insisted, to be a mixture of dancing and mime in order to achieve variety of tempo and mood. The music begins at a rapid pace with trumpets adding a grotesque, lolloping presence to the melodic line. Suddenly the phantoms pause to invoke Hecate, goddess of the night and witchcraft. She appears, followed by string writing of an unexpected, soft radiance (the bars might almost be a discarded idea from the *Requiem*) while the company stand, entranced and silent, in an attitude of fervent devotion. During a gentle melody on cellos and bassoon, she tells them that she knows of their work and is aware of the reason for their having invoked her presence. She announces, to a majestic theme for trombones, that King Macbeth is coming



to interrogate them about his destiny and that they must satisfy his curiosity; then, to gentler music decorated by flute, she advises them to summon the spirits of the air to revive him should the fearsome sight of so many apparitions prove overwhelming. But, she concludes, the ruin that awaits Macbeth cannot be delayed. She disappears amid thunder and lightning, and the gruesome company link hands and dance a macabre waltz around the cauldron.

By contrast, glowing colours surround Hamish MacCunn's concert overture **Land of the Mountain and the Flood**, music which prompted a contemporary to the happy comment that 'it is all done in daylight'. Of Highland descent, MacCunn was the son of a shipowner and grew up in a highly cultured atmosphere. The latter part of his short life was devoted largely to conducting for the Beecham and Carl Rosa Opera Companies (for whom his performances included *Siegfried* and the first performance in English of *Tristan*) and at the Savoy. Something of a star pupil among Parry's first intake at the newly-opened Royal College of Music, he emerged at the age of nineteen with a handful of compositions which included a cantata *The Moss Rose* and a pair of overtures, of which *The Land of the Mountain and the Flood* is the second. It was an immediate success at one of the

Crystal Palace concerts, and seems likely to have been its composer's freshest and most accomplished work, notwithstanding many subsequent operas and other vocal compositions (an enterprising revival of a choral setting of Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* in Edinburgh in the 1970s enjoyed only moderate response, although the opera *Jean Deans* has been produced several times in the UK). Little analysis is necessary to the appreciation of this clear-eyed music. Its sonata form embodies two memorable subjects: an opening cello melody of appealing simplicity (and the inevitable Scotch snap) and a lyrical theme in the relative major, heard first on violins. Scoring is unfailingly accomplished and often more than that, especially where the horn is concerned; it would be a hard heart indeed which failed to respond to that instrument's tender conclusion to the exposition, or to its quiet call-to-arms a bar or two later at the beginning of the fiery, minor-key development.

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Considered one of Europe's leading symphony orchestras, the **Royal Scottish National Orchestra** (formerly the Scottish National Orchestra) was formed in 1891 as the Scottish Orchestra, and was awarded the

Royal Patronage in 1991. Many conductors have contributed to its success, including Karl Rankl, Hans Swarowsky, Walter Susskind, Sir Alexander Gibson, Bryden Thomson and Neeme Järvi. Currently, Walter Weller is Conductor Emeritus, Alexander Lazarev is Principal Conductor, Marin Alsop is Principal Guest Conductor and Garry Walker is Associate Conductor. The Orchestra gives more than 130 performances each year in Scotland, appears regularly at the Edinburgh International Festival and the BBC Proms, and has toured abroad through Austria, Croatia, Slovakia and Spain. It has recorded a varied range of works, including film soundtracks such as *Titanic*, *Superman*, *Star Wars*, *Jaws* and *Vertigo*.

The Orchestra's education programme continues to develop musical talent and appreciation by working with people of all ages and abilities throughout Scotland, and has earned the Orchestra the Royal Philharmonic Society's prestigious Education Award. The Royal Scottish National Orchestra was recently awarded a Classic FM 'Red F' award for outstanding contribution to classical music in 2002, through its recording, performance, education and outreach work.

One of the world's great orchestras, the **Philharmonia Orchestra** is now in its ninth

season with renowned German maestro Christoph von Dohnányi as Principal Conductor. That post was first held by Otto Klemperer, and the Orchestra has since had important collaborations with Lorin Maazel (Associate Principal Conductor), Riccardo Muti (Principal Conductor and Music Director), Giuseppe Sinopoli (Music Director) and, currently, Kurt Sanderling (Conductor Emeritus) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (Conductor Laureate), besides such eminent figures as Furtwängler, Richard Strauss, Toscanini and Karajan. Resident Orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall, it also has regional residencies, providing an ideal opportunity to expand its dynamic educational and community-based programme. Winner of several major awards, it has garnered unanimous critical acclaim for its innovative programming policy of commissioning and performing new music by the world's leading composers. The Philharmonia Orchestra undertakes frequent international tours in addition to its prestigious residencies at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, the Megaron in Athens and the Lincoln Center in New York.

Born in Scotland in 1926, **Sir Alexander Gibson** studied at Glasgow University and at the Royal College of Music where in 1951 he was awarded the Queen's Prize. He went on to attend the Salzburg Mozarteum before

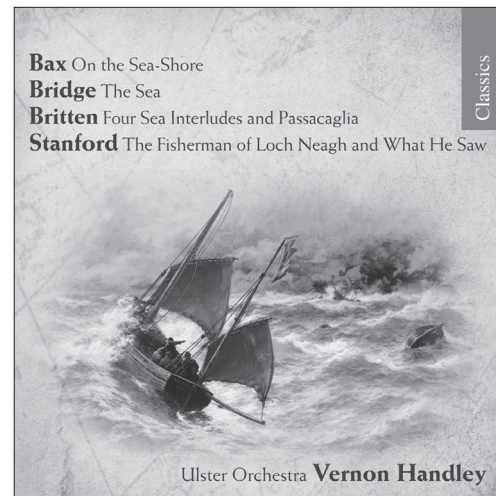


going to Siena to work at the Accademia Chigiano, and at the 1952 Besançon Festival was awarded the Enesco Prize for young conductors. Between 1951 and 1957 he held posts as répétiteur and later Staff Conductor at Sadler's Wells Theatre; from 1951 to 1954 he was Assistant Conductor of the BBC Scottish Orchestra, and in 1957 became Music Director of the Sadler's Wells Opera Company. Two years later he was appointed Principal Conductor and Artistic Director of the Scottish National Orchestra, and tours through Europe and North America and many recordings contributed greatly to raising that Orchestra's international prestige. Having founded Scottish Opera in 1962, he began to appear more widely as a symphonic conductor with British and international orchestras. He made his debut with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in 1970 and became Principal Guest Conductor of the Houston Symphony Orchestra in 1981. He was made a CBE in 1967, knighted in

1977, and became president of the Royal Scottish Academy of Music in 1991. Sir Alexander Gibson died in 1995.

Born in Scotland, **Bryden Thomson** studied at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama and in Europe with Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt and Igor Markevitch. He worked with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra as assistant to Ian Whyte after whose death he undertook some 250 engagements in two years. He was Principal Conductor of the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra from 1968 to 1973, Principal Conductor and Music Director of the Ulster Orchestra from 1977 to 1985, and undertook guest conducting engagements with orchestras such as the Philharmonia Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Scottish National and Scottish Chamber orchestras. His work in the operatic field included posts with Norwegian Opera and Scottish Opera. Bryden Thomson died in 1991.

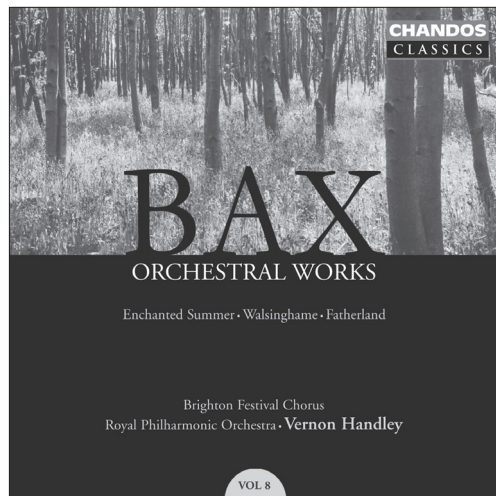
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Recording producers Tim Oldham (Scottish Dances), Brian Couzens (other works)

Sound engineer Ralph Couzens

Assistant engineer Peter Newble (Scottish Dances)

Mastering Jon Cooper

Recording venue St Jude's Church, Central Square, London NW11; 7 & 8 February 1990 (Scottish Dances), Henry Wood Hall (SNO Centre), Glasgow; 29 & 30 June 1981 (other works)

Front cover *Ring of Brodgar at sunrise* © Alfio Ferlito/istockphoto

Design and typesetting Cassidy Rayne Creative

Booklet editor Elizabeth Long

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Chandos Records Ltd, Colchester, Essex CO2 8HX, England

Printed in the EU

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