Melrose Music Society

SCOTTISH CHARITY NO. SC005891

Sunday 8th November 2026, 7.30pm

Ian Watt, Guitar: *Pieces of Picasso*



Fernando Sor	*Minuet in C minor, Op 24/1* *Rondo in C major, Op. 22/4*
Giulio Regondi	*Introduction and Caprice, Op. 23*
Michael Tippett	*The Blue Guitar*
	Interval
Stephen Goss	*Cantigas de Santiago (selection)*
Miguel Llobet	*Scherzo-Vals*
	El Mestre (Catalan Folksong)
Emilio Pujol	*Canción de Cuna* *El Abejorro* *Trois Morceaux Espagnols*

Fernando Sor (1778-1839) ***Minuet in C minor, Op 24/1***
Rondo in C major, Op. 22/4

Fernando Sor was born in Barcelona and received his formal musical training at the monastery of Santa Maria de Montserrat, whose abbot recognised his talent and provided the funds for him to join the choir school at the age of 12 (his father having died shortly before). Descended from a long line of soldiers, Sor's mother eventually made him swap the choir school for the military, where he managed to further his musical development whilst rising to the rank of captain in the Spanish army during the Napoleonic wars. After Spain's defeat, Sor was labelled an 'afrancesado' for having accepted an administrative position in the new regime and, when the Spanish repelled the French in 1813, felt compelled to leave for Paris, never returning to his native country.

In Paris, Sor was able to fully pursue his vocation as a musical artist and his guitar works were greeted with enthusiasm, although, when the same French public rejected his operatic attempts, he moved to London, followed by Moscow, where his ballets, particularly *Cendrillon*, were met with approbation. His time in London (1815-1823) was particularly fruitful, reflected in the fact he was made an honorary member of the Royal Academy of Music in its foundational year of 1822.

Despite an oeuvre encompassing orchestral (concert and dramatic), songs and sacred music, many of Sor's more ambitious works are lost, and it is as a composer for the guitar that his reputation endures. The two pieces featured in tonight's programme are the slow and brooding *Minuet in C minor* (a form which Sor widely explored in an extremely creative way), which opens his set of *8 Short Pieces, Op. 24*, and the Haydnesque *Rondo in C major*, which concludes his *Grand Sonata, Op. 22.*

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Giulio Regondi (1822-1872) ***Introduction and Caprice, Op. 23***

Born in Geneva to a German father and Italian mother, Giulio Regondi spent his formative years in Lyon. A child prodigy of exceptional ability, he enjoyed a 'Mozartian' childhood, visiting all the major European courts, and Sor dedicated his '*Souvenir d'amitié',* Op. 46 to him in 1831 when he was just 9 years old. It was in that year that he first visited London, the city which would eventually become his home, and where he died in 1872, having established a reputation not only as an extraordinary guitarist but one of the chief exponents of the newly-patented English concertina.

Whereas Sor might be said to represent the guitar's transition from the classical to the romantic era, Regondi belongs wholly to the latter. Although he produced more published works for the concertina, his guitar compositions are notable for both their consistency of quality and technical demands, and the most famous of them is the '*Introduction and Caprice'*, Op. 23.

Michael Tippett (1905-1998) ***The Blue Guitar***

Transforming – Juggling - Dreaming

Sir Michael Tippett composed *The Blue Guitar* in 1983 for the great English guitarist Julian Bream. Inspired by Wallace Steven's poem, *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, which was in turn inspired by one of Picasso's '*man with a guitar*' paintings, Tippett's musical language entirely avoids any traces of the guitar's Spanish origins. The first stanza is as follows:

The man bent over his guitar
A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.
They said, "You have a blue guitar
You do not play things as they are."
The man replied, "Things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar."

The composer was at pains to emphasise that the composition should be treated as absolute music, with only three ‘moods’, or ‘gestures’, left over from the poem, and this should be kept in mind when listening. Nevertheless, he suggested three titles with a loose connection to particular verses.

i. Transforming

Being the lion in the lute

Before the lion locked in stone.

ii. Juggling

…the old fantoche

Hanging his shawl upon the wind.

iii. Dreaming

…Morning is not sun,

It is the posture of the nerves,

As if a blunted player clutched

The nuances of the blue guitar.

One further note is that Julian Bream switched the order of movements 2 and 3 for the work’s first performance, which allowed for a more virtuosic finale. This has since been rectified, with the approval of the composer, and the piece now ends in the state of atmospheric inquisitiveness, quite unique in character, which the composer intended.

Stephen Goss (1964-) ***Cantigas de Santiago (selection)***

Like Sor, Stephen Goss (b. 1964) is a guitarist and composer whose music reaches far beyond the confines of his own instrument. In addition to some of the world's leading guitarists, he has composed music for violinist Nicola Benedetti, tenor Ian Bostridge, percussionist Evelyn Glennie, and many other leading soloists. His *Cantigas de Santiago* were commissioned by the virtuoso guitarist David Russell, who, with his wife Maria, lives near the famous pilgrimage route. Relying on several medieval (12th-13th centuries) sources of monophonic vernacular songs, mainly addressed to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and early polyphony, he has successfully created a 'Spanish' work in which the Moorish sound world which now defines Spain to the modern ear is entirely absent. Although the piece has a total of seven movements, the three presented in this programme are:

iv. Kyrie Trope (Cunctipotens Genitor)

Here the melody is taken from the *Codex Calixtinus* and is an early example of notated polyphony. The plainsong melody acts as a 'cantus firmus' in the bass, whilst the upper line acts as a decorative counterpoint. The 'tropped' *Kyrie* was a liturgical custom discontinued at the Council of Trent, by which the traditional petition *Kyrie eleison* ('Lord, have mercy') was elaborated upon by a longer, more poetic, prayer, in this case: 'All-powerful Father, God creator of us all, have mercy. May your holiness save us, good leader, have mercy.'

vi. Ay ondas que eu vin veer (Ah, waves that I came to see)

The *Cantigas de Amigo* by the 13th century Galician troubadour, Martin Codax, are sung by a young woman looking over the bay at Vigo wondering if her lover will ever return. Goss sets both the first, 'O waves of Vigo's bay', in which the woman asks the waves if they have seen him, and the last, played here tonight, 'Ah, waves that I came to see', where she resigns herself to the likelihood that he is lost.

vii. Non é gran cousa se sabe (Pilgrim of St. James)

From the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, the pilgrim, en route to Santiago, spends the night with an unmarried woman and, without confessing his sin, resumes the pilgrimage. He is visited by the devil, disguised as St. James, who commands him to slit his own throat. Having given into despair, he carries out the order and is found dead by his companions. St James then accuses the devil of winning the soul deceitfully and petitions the Blessed Virgin Mary to settle the dispute, which she does by ordering the pilgrim's soul returned to his body, bringing him back to life.



Miguel Llobet (1878-1938) ***Scherzo-Vals***
El Mestre (Catalan Folksong)

Following the death of Sor, the guitar's popularity in Europe went into steep decline, and it was in this context that it experienced a rebirth in the heart of Spain through the performances, compositions (such as *Recuerdos de la Alhambra* and *Capriccio Arabe*) and, perhaps most importantly, astonishing transcriptions of piano, chamber, orchestra and even operatic music, of Francisco Tárrega (1852-1909). Of Tárrega's many disciples, the greatest were undoubtedly the Catalan performers and composers, Miguel Llobet (1878-1938) and Emilio Pujol (1886-1980).

The light, playful character of Llobet's *Scherzo-Vals* belies the technical demands it places on the performer, a testament to his greatness as a virtuoso (he was most probably the greatest of his day). *El Mestre* has an entirely different mood; one of his many Catalan folksong arrangements, it mournfully tells the story of a schoolgirl whose teacher has fallen in love with her. Both works are extraordinarily harmonically progressive compared with most guitar music of the time, proving that Llobet was as inventive in his compositions as he was virtuosic in his performances.

Emilio Pujol (1886-1980) ***Canción de Cuna***
El Abejorro
Trois Morceaux Espagnols:
Tonadilla – Tango - Guajira

Pujol, whose temperament was less extroverted, was also a noted virtuoso, and probably the first guitarist to give a full recital at the Wigmore (then known as the Bechstein) Hall in London. A learned man and scholar of note, his research anticipated the modern early music movement through his rediscovery and revival of the vihuela and its repertoire. Despite his early career as a touring virtuoso, a debilitating hand tremor which began in the 1940s resulted in his being known chiefly for his teaching, compositions and biography of Tárrega. Perhaps even more harmonically adventurous than Llobet, the *Trois Morceaux Espagnols* masterfully interweaves the adventurous chromatic Impressionism of 1920s Paris (where Pujol lived) with Hispanic motifs which entirely avoid cliché. It will be preceded by *Cancion de Cuna* and *El Abejorro* ('The Bees'), short, simple, and direct character pieces, the first a delicate barcarolle and the second a rapid and fiery concert etude.

Programme notes by Ian Watt.

Ian Watt

Described by *Classical Guitar Magazine* as 'a guitarist of outstanding skill and originality', Ian Watt (b. 1991, Aberdeen) has appeared throughout Europe, the Americas and East Asia. Having first come to international attention by winning 2nd prize at the highly prestigious 'Parkening International Guitar Competition' (USA) in 2009, where he was hailed by Soundboard magazine as an '18-year-old phenom', he subsequently took 1st (along with the audience and junior jury prizes) at the 2011 Heinsberg International Guitar Competition, where he attracted the attention and respect of many of Europe's leading guitar soloists. Noted for his 'exceptional range of timbre' (*BBC Music Magazine)*, Watt's playing has been further described as 'dazzlingly virtuosic' and 'astoundingly atmospheric' (*The Herald*). He has released three solo albums for Nimbus Alliance, including a 2013 recording of Britten's '*Nocturnal*' which was described by *BBC Music Magazine* as 'sublime'.

Never content to limit himself to the guitar's solo repertoire, Watt enjoys an extremely varied musical life and collaborates regularly with a variety of musicians and groups, including Scottish Opera, Welsh National Opera, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the Hebrides Ensemble. He has worked closely with several prominent contemporary composers, giving world premieres of works by Hafliði Hallgrímsson, Rory Boyle and the complete guitar music of John McLeod (†2022).

Highly regarded as a teacher, Watt was appointed at the age of 21 to the guitar faculty of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, where he lectured from 2012-23. He has given masterclasses internationally for over a decade, including at the Korean International Guitar Festival, Mikulov International Guitar Festival, Kutna Hora International Guitar Festival, Balatonfüred International Guitar Festival, Royal College of Music, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, and was appointed to the Royal Academy of Music as a tutor in 2026.

Our Next Concert and our Next Season

Sunday, March 7th at 3pm
Martin Roscoe, piano

Our next season will open with the welcome return of arguably one of the UK's best loved pianists. Renowned for his versatility at the keyboard, Martin is equally at home in concerto, recital and chamber performances. He will play three Beethoven sonatas: No. 7 in D Major, No. 23 in F Minor 'Appassionata', and No. 32 in C Minor.

This concert begins our shorter **New Season** of five concerts, running from March to August 2027, and featuring several familiar returning artists. This is the first stage of a transition back to a regular season running from Autumn to Spring, with a break over the summer. As it is shorter, subscribing for the upcoming season is at a proportionally lower price, offering the usual level of discount on attending all concerts. Please do pick up a brochure for further details of the concerts.

Please volunteer - although we have been putting on concerts of the highest musical calibre since the early 1960s, we remain a very small operation relying entirely on a few volunteers to organise and manage our activities. If you think you might be able to help in any way by, for example, transporting musicians to and/or from local stations, serving refreshments during the interval, creating publicity materials, putting up posters around the Borders, please, do contact us.

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