



Edinburgh Symphony Orchestra

The Edinburgh Symphony Orchestra was the brainchild of its first conductor, Donald James - then Head of Music at Edinburgh Academy – and gave its first concert in aid of Oxfam at the Reid Concert Hall in June 1963.

At its first formal meeting on 24th September 1963, Neville Garden was elected Chairman, Graham Melville-Mason Orchestral Manager, and David Hume appointed Leader. Rehearsals for the first concert of the newly established orchestra started the following March and, at first, were concentrated into a short period before the concert, rather than the regular weekly Wednesday rehearsals, which began in 1968.

From the start, the aim of the Orchestra was to give concerts of a high standard of performance, attempting more difficult works than amateur musicians in the city had played hitherto and providing a wider repertoire. Membership was by invitation to players of known ability or by open audition rather than a period of trial rehearsals as used today, although an annual subscription is still payable.

The young Orchestra nearly foundered after James's departure from Edinburgh, only one concert being given in 1966 and one in 1967. A pattern of two, and later three, concerts per year was established under the conductorship of Henry McGlone (1967-72) and then Neil Butterworth. At this time, the Orchestra also played each year in St Mary's Cathedral, Palmerston Place, in choral concerts conducted by Michael Lester-Cribb.

The Orchestra has benefited considerably from stable leadership: after three years with David Dalgleish, the Orchestra was led from 1970 until 1982 by Lorna Dunbar and from 1982 – 87 by Colin Saddington, since when the post has been held by Philip Taylor.

Following on from Graham Melville-Mason, Cameron Binnie was Orchestral Manager from 1966 to 1986 and the post was subsequently held by Aline Watson from 1986 until 1995. Since then the duties of this post have been distributed amongst Committee members with a more executive role being played by the Chairperson.

No history of the Orchestra can pass without mention of its loyal non-playing officers. For the first nine years Mrs Joyce Robertson was the Honorary Secretary, and in her the Orchestra had a very enthusiastic supporter and devoted worker behind the scenes, ably followed by Mrs Margaret Burns. Dr Ruth Wynne-Davies was a tower of strength in organising the Orchestra and creating the Friends of the Orchestra during her seven years as Secretary and from 1979 Mrs Maeve Power worked with devotion and efficiency in this office for many years. Most recently Mr Ernest Beattie has very effectively introduced the Orchestra to the benefits of modern technology in streamlining the work of the Committee.

No orchestra would be complete without the Directorship of the conductor. The Orchestra has been extremely fortunate in securing the Musical Directorship of Leon Coates (1973 – 1985) and Alasdair Mitchell (1985 – 2003) who have supervised a general rise in the standard of playing and given members the opportunity to explore some less familiar areas of the orchestral repertoire over the last 30 of the Orchestra's 40 years. It is fitting that both participated in our Anniversary Concert

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as Orchestral Pianist and Conductor respectively. From time to time the Orchestra has also invited a number of Guest Conductors including Stephen Doughty (Organist in our Anniversary Concert), Robert Dick, Tim

Paxton and Will Conway to present additional concerts or to see the Orchestra through periods between regular appointments.

To date, the Orchestra has presented well over 100 concerts in the Reid Concert Hall, the Queen's Hall and most recently in Greyfriars Kirk. From time to time it has also played outside Edinburgh in Galashiels, West Linton, Dundee, Dunblane, Kirkcaldy, Glasgow and Haddington. Highlights have included concert performances of the complete opera *Fidelio* and Act I of Wagner's *Valkyrie*, Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, and the premieres of Kenneth Leighton's *Scottish Dances*, J.A.Ireland's *Piano Concerto* and Keith Murphy's *Guitar Concerto*. Less well known works from the classic repertoire have included Nielsen's *Violin Concerto* and Hovhaness's "Mysterious Mountain" *Symphony*. In concerti we have enjoyed making music with established soloists such as Tasmin Little, Moray Welsh, Stephen Osborne and Rafal Zambrzycki-Payne as well as performing with outstanding local artists.

The Orchestra places strong emphasis on social events. For many years from 1977 the Friends of the ESO contributed to this, and also helped in securing the orchestra's financial status through a variety of fund raising events and activities. Although no longer in active existence as a group, we welcome their continued support through attendance at performances. New and existing Orchestra members have the opportunity to get to know each other during rehearsal coffee breaks and at regular post-rehearsal and after-concert gatherings.

Following the retirement of Alasdair Mitchell at the end of the 2003-04 season, Gerard Doherty was appointed Musical Director. Gerard is an experienced conductor and was a member of the RSNO violin section.

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