

Gloucester Young Musician of the Year with Gloucester Symphony Orchestra

Pittville Pump Room
Mon 6 July

Herbie Urquhart-Dixon *violin*

Gloucestershire Symphony Orchestra

Glyn Oxley *conductor*

Max Bruch	Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26	25'
Interval		
Ludwig van Beethoven	Symphony No. 3 in Eb, Op. 55 'Eroica'	53'

About the Programme

Max Bruch (1838–1920) – Violin Concerto No. 1 in G minor, Op. 26

Max Bruch might have had mixed feelings about tonight's programme. In 1903, while staying in Naples, he complained that local violinists seemed ready to launch into his First Violin Concerto wherever he went. Though he wrote more than 200 works, including two further violin concertos, it was this concerto alone that secured his reputation. "Did I perhaps write just this one?" he once asked in exasperation.

Its first performance in 1866 left Bruch dissatisfied and he withdrew it almost immediately. Unsure about the concerto's unconventional opening movement, he sent the score to Joseph Joachim, the celebrated violinist who would later premiere Brahms's Violin Concerto. Joachim responded with detailed suggestions, and Bruch spent the next two years revising the work before Joachim gave the premiere of the final version in Bremen in 1868.

The revisions left their mark on the concerto's structure. The first movement, marked Vorspiel ("Prelude"), avoids the extended orchestral introduction audiences might have expected, with the solo violin entering almost at once and leading directly into the Adagio. The Adagio quickly became the concerto's most admired movements; Joachim later described the work simply as "the richest, the most seductive". After only the briefest pause, the finale follows with energetic dance rhythms and technically demanding double-stopped writing for the soloist.

Bruch sold the score outright for a relatively modest sum. He spent much of his later life frustrated that this concerto overshadowed his other works, insisting that his later concertos were "just as good, if not better". Audiences, however, never quite agreed.

Joachim's role in the concerto's history extended well beyond its premiere. Their collaboration was so extensive that Bruch later worried his letters to the violinist might make him seem "schoolboy-like". On the manuscript's dedication

page, Bruch originally inscribed the work "to Joseph Joachim, with respect". Joachim crossed out the final word and replaced it with a different one: "friendship".

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) – Symphony No. 3 in E flat major, Op. 55, "Eroica"

Beethoven knew his Third Symphony was unlike anything his audience had ever heard before. When it was published in 1806, he advised that it should be placed near the beginning of a concert, lest listeners grow too tired to appreciate its full effect. Even then, one early listener reportedly commented, "I'll give another kreutzer if the thing will only stop."

Beethoven's first title for the symphony was simply Bonaparte. Like many European intellectuals of the period, he admired Napoleon as a defender of the revolutionary ideals of liberty and equality. But by 1804, as the work neared completion, Napoleon had crowned himself Emperor. Beethoven's pupil Ferdinand Ries later recalled bringing him the news; on hearing it, the composer flew into a rage, declaring that Napoleon would now "trample on all the rights of man" before furiously scratching his name from the title page. When the symphony was published two years later, it appeared instead as the Sinfonia Eroica, "Heroic Symphony, composed to celebrate the memory of a great man". Beethoven never clarified whether he still had Napoleon in mind.

The symphony opens with two abrupt chords before the cellos introduce its first theme. From this simple opening, Beethoven builds a movement on a scale unlike anything audiences had heard before. The second movement was equally unexpected: a funeral march placed at the centre of the work, where listeners might have expected a more conventional slow movement. The scherzo that follows provides a contrast, with its trio scored for three horns rather than the usual two. For the finale, Beethoven returned to a theme he had already used in his ballet, *The Creatures of Prometheus*. Rather than presenting it immediately, he begins only with its bass line, gradually building towards the full theme through a sequence of variations.

The *Eroica* marked a turning point not only for Beethoven, but for the symphony itself. Early listeners may have found its length exhausting but today, few would ask for their kreuzer back.

Artist Biographies

Herbie Urquhart-Dixon

Urquhart-Dixon began playing the violin at age six, having been inspired by a performance during a school assembly. Soon after, he was enrolled in the local string starters group, sparking his love for ensemble playing. His playing continued to progress under the tutelage of Cathy Hill, ultimately achieving distinction at grade 8 at the age of 14, whilst studying at Cirencester Deer Park School. After completing his studies at Deer Park, Urquhart-Dixon chose to attend Pate's Grammar School for 6th form, where he had the incredible opportunity of performing the first movement of Bruch's 1st violin concerto, under the guidance of teacher Dr Lara James.

Urquhart-Dixon's involvement with the local music service has allowed him to perform in many fantastic venues, including Birmingham Symphony Hall and the Royal Albert Hall. He was among the first members of the Gloucestershire Intermediate String Ensemble (now Gloucestershire Youth String Orchestra) back in 2018 and has recently been given the privilege of performing Bach's Brandenburg Concerto no. 4 as a soloist accompanied by the ensemble. Alongside this, he is playing in the Gloucestershire Youth Orchestra, leading the group as principal violin.

Having decided to pursue music further, he currently holds several unconditional offers to study at conservatoire, heavily attributed to the teachings of violinist Michael Bochmann, under whom he currently studies.

Gloucester Symphony Orchestra

Gloucestershire Symphony Orchestra is one of the county's leading amateur/semi-professional orchestras, providing a platform for local composers and soloists. They strive to encourage both young musicians and audiences, for example by hosting the Gloucestershire Young Musician competition and by maintaining close links with Gloucestershire Academy of Music. They play classical music from all eras, including modern works and first performances, and regularly join forces with musicians and performers from other Gloucestershire-based music groups. They have around fifty regular player members, giving four concerts a year, and have performed in many venues throughout the county, including Gloucester Cathedral, Gloucester Guildhall, Cheltenham Town Hall, Pittville Pump Room, Cheltenham College and Tewkesbury Abbey.

