

STAR BURST

NØRTHERN
CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Northern Chamber Orchestra

STARBURST

Violin Zoë Beyers

Cello Jonathan Aasgaard

Director Sarah Brandwood

-Spencer

27 September 2025

The King's School

Macclesfield



With an extensive discography, Norwegian Jonathan **Aasgaard** is one of Europe's most versatile cellists. He is principal cello of the Sinfonia of London, a regular guest principal of leading British and continental European orchestras and, as a dedicated teacher, Professor of Cello at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

A champion of new music, he has given the world première of Carl Davis's Ballade for cello and orchestra, the European première of Giovanni Sollima's Double Cello Concerto, the UK première of Weinberg's Cello Concerto, the US première of concertos by Franz Neruda and Emil Hartmann, and world premières of dozens of solo pieces, many written specially for him.

Zoë Beyers was appointed as Music Director of the Northern Chamber Orchestra in 2024. She is the leader of the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra and has recently been appointed as the leader of Britten Sinfonia. Zoë has established a reputation as one of the finest violinists based in the UK and performs as soloist, chamber musician, director and orchestral leader across the world. She was first violinist of the Dante Quartet from 2019-2025 and appears as soloist and guest leader with the BBC Symphony, BBC Scottish Symphony, Philharmonia, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony and Scottish Chamber Orchestras.

Zoë is dedicated to performing the music of contemporary composers and is involved in the commissioning and premiering of several new works. She also has a passionate interest in education, teaching at the Birmingham Conservatoire and coaching violinists and ensembles at the start of their careers. She is proud to be involved in ARCO, a distance learning collaboration between Birmingham Conservatoire and students in deprived areas of South Africa.

Sarah Brandwood-Spencer was appointed as Associate Director of the Northern Chamber Orchestra in 2024. Since her debut in Paris she has enjoyed a busy career as a soloist, chamber musician and orchestral player. A graduate of the Royal Northern College of Music and the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, she has toured the world as principal and soloist with the European Union Chamber Orchestra, been guest associate concertmaster with the Canadian Opera Company, worked as a principal player with the prestigious Goldberg Ensemble and was a founder member, principal and soloist with the Lancashire Sinfonietta.

Sarah was a principal violinist of the Halle Orchestra for seven years and is now enjoying a varied career as guest leader and principal player with many of the country's leading orchestras and as a recording artist for various television, film and pop sessions. Sarah is a passionate chamber musician and performs regularly with her colleagues in the Chagall Ensemble.

Established in 1967, the **Northern Chamber Orchestra** (NCO) has evolved into a prominent ensemble. The upcoming Macclesfield concert season features esteemed guest soloists including Raphael Wallfisch and Jeneba Kanneh-Mason. The orchestra's twenty-one members are not only accomplished chamber musicians but also perform regularly as soloists. Our orchestra is led by the talented Zoë Beyers as Music Director and Sarah Brandwood-Spencer as Associate Director. Their creative experience and dynamic approach allow our orchestra to reach new audiences and expand our horizons.

The NCO actively engages with schools, colleges, and music groups in its concert locations, providing tailor-made, inspiring programmes for both young and adult learners. This commitment to education extends to collaborations with institutions like Chetham's School of Music and Essential Music Hub. The NCO works with and is supported by several area music education hubs, such as 'Accent' Warrington and Halton Education Hub, the Love Music Trust, NYMAZ North Yorkshire Music Education Hub, Derbyshire, and Greater Manchester Music Education Hubs. These collaborations strengthen the NCO's mission of spreading the power of music education and nurturing young talents in the field.

NORTHERN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

SATURDAY 27 SEPTEMBER 7.30PM | THE KING'S SCHOOL IN MACCLESFIELD

Starburst, Jessie Montgomery (1981 –)

Double Concerto, Op. 102, Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897)

- I. Allegro
- II. Andante
- III. Vivace non troppo

Symphony No. 3, Op. 56, 'Scottish', Felix Mendelssohn (1809 – 1847)

- I. Andante con moto – Allegro un poco agitato
- II. Vivace non troppo
- III. Adagio
- IV. Allegro vivacissimo – Allegro maestoso assai

We begin this season's exploration of the musical galaxy with GRAMMY Award-winning composer, violinist and educator **Jessie Montgomery**. Her dazzling *Starburst* is a vivacious piece for strings, sparkling with rapidly changing musical colours. Exploding gestures are juxtaposed with gentle, fleeting melodies to create a multidimensional soundscape.

Johannes Brahms' *Double Concerto* was his last orchestral work, written in 1887 to reconcile his broken friendship with the violin virtuoso Joseph Joachim. Joachim premiered the work with the cellist from his quartet, Robert Hausmann. In this *Double Concerto*, Brahms harkens back to the Baroque concerto grosso practice of having multiple soloists. This tradition became something of a rarity after the Baroque era, but Haydn and Mozart had re-interpreted it in their *sinfonie concertanti*, as had Beethoven in his *Triple Concerto*. The two soloists, violin and cello, dialogue with each other and with the orchestra in a work full of passion, in a dramatic yet lyrical minor mode, enhanced with rich harmonies and rhythmic subtleties.

After a brief orchestral gesture the concerto begins with a cadenza, first for the cello alone, and then for the violin joined by the cello. There are many moments where the two soloists seem to become a single instrument. In the second movement, a concise ternary form, the soloists often play together in octaves, combining strength and tenderness. The finale's main rondo theme is in a *style hongrois*, evoking the music of the Hungarian Roma. This was always fertile soil for Brahms' imagination: think of his *Hungarian Dances*, his first *Piano Quartet*, his *Clarinet Quintet* and the finale of the *Violin Concerto* which he also wrote for Joachim. The major-key closing flourish is one of Brahms's most joyous.

Dedicated to Queen Victoria, **Felix Mendelssohn's *Symphony No. 3 in A minor*** conjures up the atmospheric ruins of Holyrood Chapel, Highland battles and the Scottish countryside. Premiered in 1842, the symphony had a long gestation, beginning with the first of Mendelssohn's many journeys to Britain. This visit, made in 1829, included a tour of Scotland, in part prompted by the Mendelssohn family's fondness for the works of Sir Walter Scott with their vivid portrayal of Scotland's landscapes. Mary Queen of Scots' ruined chapel at Edinburgh's Holyrood Palace made a deep impression on the composer. Roofless, overgrown with grass and ivy, its image haunted him and the beginnings of his Scottish Symphony took hold; he sketched a melody which became the opening of the brooding introduction and the seed of many of the themes of the symphony.

The score tells the performers that 'the individual movements of this symphony must follow one another immediately', an unusual approach in Mendelssohn's time. Substantial outer movements bookend characterful middle movements, each one following sonata-form principles. The first movement's Allegro urges forward with a theme derived from the slow introduction. An unsettled second theme in E minor, rather than the expected C major, follows, its growing turbulence then dissipating into a wistful codetta. These themes are developed and reprised, the music's mood swinging between hushed expectation and storms, before dissolving into a return to the opening material and an ambiguous pizzicato close. A joyously fleet-footed scherzo Vivace, featuring a 'scotch snap' figuration, is followed by an Adagio. Tragic in tone at first, it soon blossoms into a flowing major-mode theme, alternating with passages of martial-sounding dotted rhythms which foreshadow the conflicts to come in the last movement. Quick, snapping rhythms energise the stirring finale, which Mendelssohn originally marked *Allegro Guerriero* (fast and warlike). Each instrumental group jumps into the action, including a fugal section, before the textures thin out and the music is left suspended over a long pedal note. The symphonic journey is completed with a majestic, redemptive hymn in A major.

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Saturday 8 November 7.30pm

Christmas Concert 2025

Tenants' Hall, Tatton Park, Knutsford
Friday 12 December, 3.30pm and 7.00pm

Serenade

The King's school, Macclesfield
Saturday 13 December, 7:30pm

Chevalier de Saint-Georges

St. Michaels Church, Macclesfield
Saturday 17 January, 5.00pm

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THE ORCHESTRA

Violin I

Sarah Brandwood-Spencer
Midori Tramaseur
Qian Wu
Georgina Bloomfield
Marino Capulli

Violin II

Simon Gilks
Rebecca Thompson
Louise Latham
James Pattinson

Viola

Alex Mitchell
Alistair Vennart
Harriet Mitchell

Cello

Jennifer Langridge
Lucy Arch
Graham Morris

Double Bass

James Manson
Diane Clark

Flute

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Nichola Hunter

Oboe

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Jane Evans

Clarinet

Elizabeth Jordan
Helen Blamey

Bassoon

Helen Peller
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Horn

Naomi Atherton
Jack Sewter
Jenny Cox
Peter Richards

Trumpet

Tracey Redfern
Peter Mainwaring

Timpani

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