

Chevalier de Saint-Georges

17 January 2026. Saint Michaels Church, Macclesfield.

Northern Chamber Orchestra

Oboe Kenny Sturgeon

Violin Sarah Brandwood-Spencer

Director and violin Zoë Beyers

This concert is generously sponsored by Geoff Holman.



Biographies

Kenny Sturgeon

Kenny Sturgeon is Principal Oboe of the Northern Chamber Orchestra, a position he has held since 2015. He studied at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and the Royal College of Music, graduating with distinction, and was invited to perform with the European Union Youth Orchestra during his studies.

Kenny has enjoyed a wide-ranging career as a freelance oboist, performing with many of the UK and Ireland's leading orchestras, as well as in London's West End and on commercial recording sessions. From 2012 to 2013, he was Principal Cor Anglais of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra under Jaap van Zweden.

He is also Sub-Principal Oboe of the BBC Philharmonic, with whom he has toured and recorded extensively, appeared at the BBC Proms and broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio 3.

Zoë Beyers

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, Philharmonic, 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

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 is a passionate chamber musician and performs regularly with her colleagues in the Chagall Ensemble.

Programme

Concerto for Oboe and Violin, BWV 1060R, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750)

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegro

Hymn (after Byrd), Edmund Finnis (1984 –)

Symphonie Concertante in E flat major, Op. 13. No. 1, Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745 – 1799)

- I. Allegro
- II. Rondeau

Song for Athene, John Tavener (1944 – 2013)

Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G major, BWV 1048, Johann Sebastian Bach

- I. (Allegro)
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegro

Programme notes

Multi-instrument concertos were the norm in the late Baroque, and those of **Johann Sebastian Bach** are exemplars of this form. Bach often reworked the same concerto for different occasions, and it is fortunate that he did, for although the manuscript of the Concerto for Violin and Oboe was lost, musicologists were able to reconstruct it from Bach's later version for two harpsichords. The concerto follows the standard Italianate three-movement structure, fast-slow-fast, into which Bach injects his compelling musical ideas. The first Allegro uses a ritornello form, where a main theme, or ritornello, alternates with contrasting episodes. The soloists are bound in close dialogue. While there are some distinct solo sections, the boundaries between solo and tutti are somewhat blurred, as their lines often intertwine in a richly-woven fabric. The second movement features an elegant cantilena. The soloists' filigree melodic arches answer each other or combine in contrapuntal textures, gently supported by the tutti. The finale with its crisply energetic main theme again uses ritornello form, with the violin launching into some showy elaboration in the central episodes.

Edmund Finnis' numinous Hymn is the penultimate movement of his first string quartet, arranged for string orchestra by the composer in 2023. He says:

‘It is a reflection on William Byrd’s setting of the fifth century hymn ‘Christe, qui lux es et dies’. That ancient melody is a prayer for Light within the darkness of the night. The

falling and rising contours within it became integral to my work on the quartet as a whole, as did the mental image of the setting and rising of the sun.'

The story of **Joseph Bologne**, also known as the Chevalier de Saint-George, throws a light on the political turbulence in 18th century France, and on the legacy of colonialism and slavery. Born in the French colony of Guadeloupe to a plantation owner and an enslaved African woman, Bologne moved to France in 1753, where he excelled as a musician, soldier and sportsman, mixing with the nobility and gaining the admiration of Queen Marie Antoinette. His works attained widespread acclaim in his lifetime, including his charming Symphonie Concertante in E flat major, published in 1778. There are two movements, an opening Allegro followed by a Rondeau with a recurring refrain, alternating with contrasting episodes. The two violin soloists take delight in singing melodies and virtuosic embellishments, sometimes duetting, sometimes taking their moment in the spotlight.

John Tavener's haunting Song for Athene was written in memory of a family friend – Athene Hariades – in 1993. Its performance at the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales brought it international acclaim. Infused with influences from the Orthodox church, low held bass drones, chant-like melodies with parallel harmonisations, two-part inversions and modal shifts from major to minor, the music moves slowly, a bridge to the ineffable.

Amongst **Bach**'s prodigious output are six concerti grossi which he sent to the Margrave of Brandenburg in 1721. We have no record of a contemporary performance, but they survived and were rediscovered in 1849 in the Royal Library in Berlin. Dubbed the 'Brandenburg Concertos', they are today regarded as seminal works. All but the first adopt the Italianate three-movement form. These concertos contain some of Bach's most varied scoring, with each one calling for different instrumentation. The Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 features three each of violins, violas, and cellos, all of which play both solo and tutti, supported by the continuo. Both fast movements are propelled forward by a strong rhythmic drive. The number three features in the opening motive from which the first movement is built, a three-note neighbour pattern (e.g. G F-sharp G). The last movement is an exuberant gigue, its semiquavers streaming back and forth between the players.

The orchestra

Violin I

Zoë Beyers
Sarah Brandwood-Spencer
Catherine Landen
Georgina Bloomfield

Violin II

Catherine Yates
Louise Latham
Anthony Banks

Viola

Alex Mitchell
Becky Gould
Harriet Mitchell

Cello

Jennifer Langridge
Barbara Grunthal
Svetlana Mochalova

Double Bass

James Manson

Oboe

Kenny Sturgeon

Harpsichord

Darius Battiwalla

Upcoming concerts

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Saturday 21 February, 7.30pm

Clarinet Quintets with Julian Bliss

The King's School, Macclesfield
Saturday 21 February, 7.30pm

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