

Orchestral manoeuvres bring special concerts to Old St Paul's during August

The Russian String Orchestra has announced a programme including world and European premieres and rare Edinburgh appearances by internationally regarded artistes at Old Saint Paul's church in Jeffrey Street during August.

The orchestra, which won a Herald Angel award on its Fringe debut in 2017 and is currently giving daily afternoon and tea-time concerts at theSpace @ Surgeons Hall and theSpace @ Niddry Street, added seven evening recitals at Old Saint Paul's after its founder and conductor, Moscow-born Misha Rachlevsky fell in love with the church's interior and acoustics during the Fringe last year.

"For me music is as important as food," says Rachlevsky, who founded the New American Chamber Orchestra and the Chamber Orchestra of Granada, in Spain, before returning home to create The Russian String Orchestra under its previous name, the Chamber Orchestra Kremlin in 1991.

"And music comes in as many varieties as food, some light and refreshing, some more substantial and satisfying."

Adding the Old Saint Paul's concerts gives a contrast particularly to the Orchestra's light-hearted Strings on Fire series in Niddry

Street, where the musicians wear casual attire including pink sneakers and Rachlevsky dons his Lord of the Strings t-shirt.

“The ambience of Old Saint Paul’s made me feel that we could offer something different from our other Fringe shows,” says Rachlevsky. “For instance, we can use the magnificent organ there for the opening concert on Friday 9th when John Kitchen will join us for The Four Seasons. I also thought it would be wonderful to hear the superb baritone Vladimir Chernov in these surroundings and we’ve managed to secure him for Saturday 10th when we’ll be giving the world premiere performance of a piece, Ricordanza, written specially for him and the orchestra by the American composer Richard Danielpour, who I think is one of the most exciting composers working today.”

Danielpour is flying in for the premiere as his 2017 composition A Simple Prayer will also receive its first European performance in Saturday’s concert alongside pieces by Anton Arensky and Tchaikovsky.

Other highlights in the concert series include guest appearances by American pianist Suzanne Bradbury and Scottish clarinetist Calum Robertson, as well as spotlights on the orchestra’s own world class soloists, and four further European premieres of pieces that resulted from the orchestra’s residency at trumpeter Herb Alpert’s School of Music at the University of California in Los Angeles in 2018.

“We’ve commissioned and featured many new pieces over the years

as it’s important to keep adding to the orchestral repertoire,” said Rachlevsky.

“At the same time, however, we need to keep highlighting the strengths of the existing catalogue and people coming along to Old Saint Paul’s will hear great works by Liszt, Grieg, Stravinsky and not forgetting dear old Gustav Holst, who had the foresight to compose St Paul’s Suite for String Orchestra in 1922. We’ll be bringing that suite home on Friday 16th.”

