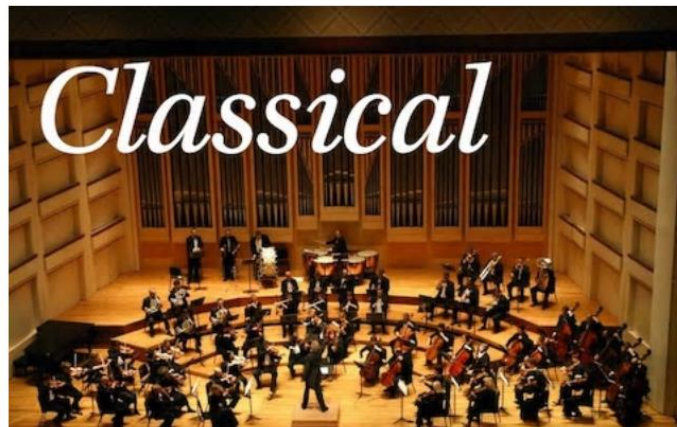


[Home](#) > [Culture](#) > [Music](#) > [What to Listen to](#)

## Edinburgh Festival celebrates its glittering musical legacy... August's best classical concerts



0 Comments



All of August's best classical concerts

By [Ivan Hewett](#), CLASSICAL MUSIC CRITIC and [John Allison](#)

28 AUGUST 2017 • 11:01AM

### Edinburgh International Festival 70th Anniversary concert

★★★★☆

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Edinburgh International Festival, an occasion that went unremarked in the festival itself – until last night. The final concert was a look back at the festival's glittering musical legacy, with performances of key works interspersed with filmed commentary compiled from archive footage.

Both the music and the films focused on the early days, which were glorious indeed. It was fascinating to be reminded that after the war, the great conductor Bruno Walter was reunited with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra at the Festival, in the very hall we were sitting in. Kathleen Ferrier, Shostakovich, Rostropovich, Lord Harewood, all passed before us, in grainy black-and-white images.

It could have been a mushy nostalgia-fest, but fortunately the performances from the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra under Martyn Brabbins were too vividly coloured and dramatic for that. Things got off to an unfortunate start with Arthur Bliss's Edinburgh Overture of 1956, which sounded like the score to an Ealing comedy set in Scotland. But with Shostakovich's blazing Three Interludes from *Lady Macbeth of Mtensk District*, which received their premiere outside the Soviet Union at the Festival in 1962, the emotional temperature shot up.



The Telegraph | 28 August 2017

To achieve the focus needed for really first-rate performance was hard amidst the constant film interruptions, but the orchestra and Brabbins managed it, turning in a truly rapturous rendition of Vaughan Williams's Rhapsody on a Theme by Thomas Tallis. Even better were three Mahler songs, sung with finely-spun intensity by Karen Cargill. If she felt nervous about following a filmed interlude on the immortal Kathleen Ferrier, who performed the same songs at the Festival in 1951, it certainly didn't show.

All this and the graceful performances of Ravel's Daphnis and Chloe Suite no 2 and Strauss's Emperor Waltz, left a warm glow in their wake, but the absence from this survey of the past half-century was disquieting. The newly commissioned piece – a charming but slight music-and-video evocation of the same Scottish island that inspired Mendelssohn in 1829, created by Ned Bigham and Gerald Fox – only served to point up the stellar quality of those early years. Celebrating a great Festival's past is a fine thing, but not if the celebration suggests its glory days are well behind it. **IH**

Hear this concert for 30 days on the BBC iPlayer via the Radio 3 website.