

SINGAPORE CHINESE ORCHESTRA

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

TEMASEK
FOUNDATION

Founded in 1996, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO) is Singapore’s only full-time professional Chinese orchestra. Led by Principal Conductor Quek Ling Kiong since 2023, it is known for its excellence in traditional Chinese music and unique Singapore flavour.

The SCO makes its home at the Singapore Conference Hall, and has toured major cities in Asia and Europe, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Gwangju and Berlin. The orchestra made history when *Butterfly Lovers*, recorded with award-winning violinist Joshua Bell, broke into the Top 20 in Britain’s classical music charts in 2023.

As part of its mission to spread the love of Chinese music to the wider community, the SCO also conducts regular outreach programmes at schools, hospitals and other venues.

Tonight’s concert features the following musicians from the Singapore Chinese Orchestra:



Left to right

Boo Chong Wei, Benjamin
percussion

Lee Jun Cheng
dizi (bamboo flute)

Ma Huan
*yangqin (hammered
dulcimer)*

Left to right

Tan Manman
erhu (two-string fiddle)

Wang Siyuan
pipa (Chinese lute)



FACTORY INTERNATIONAL

Factory International is the organisation behind Manchester International Festival (MIF) and the landmark new cultural space Aviva Studios. Helping to put Manchester on the map as a global destination for arts, music and culture, Factory International invites the world’s most exciting artists to invent tomorrow together.

HALLÉ

2025/26 MANCHESTER
CONCERT SEASON

KAHCHUN WONG: PRINCIPAL CONDUCTOR AND ARTISTIC ADVISOR
SIR MARK ELDER: CONDUCTOR EMERITUS
ANNA LAPWOOD: FEATURED ARTIST
UNSUK CHIN: FEATURED COMPOSER
JONNY GREENWOOD: HALLÉ PRESENTS FEATURED ARTIST

“... an ensemble of tremendous heart and soul with a questing spirit of adventure as well as admirable finesse.”
The Times

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SIEMENS

HALLÉ
SOUNDS
OF THE EAST

WITH SINGAPORE CHINESE ORCHESTRA



Sun 6 Jul 2025, 7.30pm
The Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, UK

Presented by the Hallé in partnership with Factory International for Manchester International Festival 2025



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CHINARY UNG (B. 1942)

GRAND SPIRAL (DESERT FLOWERS BLOOM) (1991)

EUROPEAN PREMIERE

For Chinary Ung, growing up in Cambodia meant a soundscape shaped by traditional folk music, vibrant Pinpeat ensembles used to accompany ceremonies and rituals and the melodic cries of street vendors. The first time he encountered Western classical music, it wasn't filtered through any expectation – it was pure structural revelation.

Grand Spiral (Desert Flowers Bloom) belongs to Ung's *Spiral* series, a group of works that echo the looping patterns of a spiral, not only in their form but also in their interwoven melodies and temporal flow. Conceived not long after the original, this orchestral version – an evolution of *Grand Spiral for Symphonic Band* (1990) – offers a broader sonic palette. Inspired by the image of a translucent sculpture, rotating slowly under the desert sun and casting prisms of shifting colour and warmth, it moves from its bold, propulsive opening through to its reflective final passage, the 'last dance'. Over four decades after the work's original conception, Ung's *Grand Spiral* captures a cycle of energy and renewal.

MEET THE COMPOSER: CHINARY UNG

Cambodian-American composer, Chinary Ung studied at the University of Fine Arts in Phnom Penh, where the only instrument available to him was an E-flat clarinet (an odd instrument to study by any standard). In 1964, he came to the United States to continue his clarinet studies at the Manhattan School of Music. An interest and talent in composition soon became apparent and he went on to study at Columbia, where he received his PhD in 1974. His teachers have included Chou Wen-Chung and George Crumb.

Ung's music is a remarkable blend of two cultures. Whilst he chooses to write for Western instruments, he bases his melodic material on Asian pentatonic scales, often calling for pitch bending and microtones that further resemble the music of the East. In works such as his *Spirals*, the textures are also reminiscent of the music of Southeast Asia.

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

LA MER (1903-5)



Claude Debussy's *La mer*, completed in 1905 in Eastbourne on the south coast of England, has captivated audiences for over a century. The piece draws deep inspiration from the composer's memories of the sea and from visual art – specifically Katsushika Hokusai's iconic woodblock print *Under the Wave off Kanagawa*, also known as *The Great Wave*. Debussy was so taken by the image's dynamic energy that he chose it for the cover of the score's first edition, even mirroring the placement of his name with that of the artist's signature.

This impressionistic musical seascape expands on the artwork that inspired it, exploring the vast and unpredictable character of the ocean across its three movements – *From Dawn to Midday on the Sea*, *Games of the Waves* and *Dialogue of the Wind and the Sea*. Debussy blurs the boundaries between tone painting and abstract form, with shimmering orchestration, elusive harmonies and constantly shifting textures. The music evokes the sea's many moods: tranquil and tempestuous, radiant and mysterious.

Debussy's *La mer* stands beside the work of other composers who found creative resonance in cross-cultural exchange, revealing, through sound, the enduring dialogue between nature, memory and imagination.

MODEST MUSSORGSKY (1839-1881) ORCH. KAHCHUN WONG

PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION (1874)

UK PREMIERE

Bringing the evening to a triumphant close, the musicians of the Hallé are joined by soloists from the Singapore Chinese Orchestra for the UK premiere of Kahchun Wong's imaginative orchestration of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Here once again, music and art come together, as the inspiration for Mussorgsky's 1874 solo piano suite came from ten vivid artworks painted by his friend Viktor Hartmann.



Hartmann - Plan for a city gate

The music unfolds as a journey through a gallery, with each movement a response to a specific painting – from whimsical sketches and fabled scenes to grand architectural visions. Passing through Paris, Poland and into Slavic folklore before arriving at Kiev, the work translates the exhibition into musical form, with a recurring 'Promenade' theme guiding us from frame to frame, echoing the listener's experience of walking between artworks.

Originally composed for solo piano as a memorial to Hartmann, who had passed away the previous year, Mussorgsky's work became more widely known in orchestral form. Many composers have taken up the challenge: from the popular versions by Ravel and Rimsky-Korsakov to lesser known editions by Sir Henry Wood (founder of the London Proms), the flamboyant conductor Leopold Stokowski and the British band, Emerson, Lake and Palmer.

Wong's new orchestration offers a unique culturally diverse standpoint, infusing the familiar masterpiece with the timbres of traditional Chinese instruments, such as the erhu and pipa. This fresh perspective breathes new colour and texture into Mussorgsky's tribute, highlighting the unity between sound and image, East and West, and closes this concert filled with its rich fusion of cultures.

KAHCHUN WONG CONDUCTOR



© Drew Forsyth

Internationally acclaimed for his electrifying stage presence and thoughtful exploration of Eastern and Western artistic legacies, Singaporean-born Kahchun Wong is currently Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Hallé, Chief Conductor of the Japan Philharmonic Orchestra and Principal Guest Conductor of the Dresden Philharmonic.

In his final appearance as Chief Conductor of the Nuremberg Symphony Orchestra, he presented the world premiere of his own orchestration of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* – featuring folk instrumental soloists from the Singapore Chinese Orchestra – before a 75,000-strong audience at the Klassik Open Air festival (also broadcast on 3SAT and BR-Klassik).

Kahchun has forged close relationships with many contemporary composers: he has led premieres of works by Tan Dun, Toshio Hosokawa and Reena Esmail, commissioned Narong Prangcharoen and included music by James MacMillan and Unsuk Chin in his first Hallé season.

In December 2019, Kahchun became the first artist from Singapore to be conferred the Order of Merit by the Federal President of Germany for his dedicated service and outstanding achievements in Singaporean-German cultural relations and the advancement of German musical culture abroad.

THE HALLÉ



© Alex Burns

Innovation has been central to the Hallé since its foundation in 1858 by Sir Charles Hallé, a true pioneer. His fundamental belief that music should be for everyone remains central to the orchestra's vision today, yet the Hallé is much more than just a world-leading symphony orchestra. Its collective spirit can be felt in the variety of communities it embraces, the diversity of the ensembles it nurtures and the array of different concerts it offers.

Since Hallé's death in 1895, his ground-breaking work has been continued by other musical legends: Hans Richter, Hamilton Harty, John Barbirolli and Sir Mark Elder, who stepped down as Music Director at the end of the 2023/24 season after almost a quarter of a century at the helm and now assumes the mantle of Conductor Emeritus. Kahchun Wong has opened a new chapter in the Hallé's history as Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor.