

**Manchester Collective: The Unfurrowed Field  
Programme Notes**

**Setlist**

Fergus McCreadie	Stony Gate
Donald Grant	Thoir thusa nuas an rionnag sin (Bring you down that star)*
Donald Grant	Prelude Valse
Fergus McCreadie	Nearness of You
György Kurtág	selections from Officium breve in memoriam Andreae Szervánszky
Christian Mason	'Muttos' from Sardinian Songbook
Donald Grant	NZ 2004

*Interval*

Trad.	Slow Air
Christian Mason	'Eki Attar' from Tuvan Songbook
Joseph Haydn	Op. 54 No. 2, II. Adagio
Anna Meredith	Honeyed Words
Fergus McCreadie	Seasons Change/Snowcap/The Unfurrowed Field*

\*world premiere

Approximate runtime: 95”

**Line-up**

Fergus McCreadie – Piano  
David Bowden – Bass  
Stephen Henderson – Drums

Rakhi Singh – Violin  
Donald Grant – Violin  
Simone van der Giessen – Viola  
Christian Elliott – Cello

## Programme notes

Scottish pianist **Fergus McCreadie** approaches the sound of Scottish folk from the perspective of jazz, using shapes and lines from the classical tradition. His long-standing trio—featuring drummer Stephen Henderson and bassist David Bowden—formed when they were students at Glasgow’s Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and have found a permanence that’s less like jazz’s piano trio—a form in which personnel chops and changes rapidly—and maybe more like a chamber ensemble. But unlike classical group, all McCreadie’s music was originally taught by ear, giving a special lift to performances as deeply internalised music is realised with springy elasticity.

**The Unfurrowed Field** takes its name from a track on McCreadie’s Mercury Prize-nominated 2022 album *Forest Floor*. The record revolves around the natural Scotland McCreadie is fond of; in his spare time, McCreadie is a keen hiker, who enjoys the shift in perspective that the great outdoors brings: you realise just how small you are in the world. Nature flows through the set, too. Among the tunes featured here is a changed up version of ‘The Unfurrowed Field’: it’s time-shifted, more spacious, and brings a string quartet into the mix. Complementing this are the shiny surfaces of ‘Snow Caps’, an ultra-bright tune from his forthcoming album *Stream*, that captures the feeling of being blinded twice—first by the sun, and then by the reflection of the snow—when you arrive at the top of a snowy peak. McCreadie says the first part of the programme is shaped like a circular walk. “It’s not super common musically, but it’s so often the case in other areas of life—especially if you’re going out on an adventure, realistically, you’ll probably end up back in the same place,” McCreadie says. But though the spot might be the same, the arrival comes with the weight of knowing what came before.

This idea feeds into the rest of Collective music director **Rakhi Singh**’s repertoire choices. Two thoughts shape what follows: “what can I do to hold the space for the folk-jazz element,” she says, while also realising that “what I choose makes us listen to everything in a different way.” The clearest way of holding the space comes by enlisting another Scottish musician improvising in the gaps between folk, classical and jazz: string player **Donald Grant**. ‘Thoir thusa nuas an rionnag sin’ (a line from a Gaelic proverb meaning Bring you down that star) is a dreamy slow jig inspired by an impeccably clear night sky on an early morning walk home after a recent Hogmanay; another, ‘NZ 2004’—in which Grant commemorates an extreme sports-heavy trip to New Zealand—is a rollicking trip through uneven time signatures, in a gnarly fusion of Scottish folk timbres and groove-heavy improvisation.

## Featured works

### **Christian Mason 'Eki Attar' from Tuvan Songbook, 'Muttos' from Sardinian Songbook**

*(Singing) string quartet, 2016 and 2018*

How violinists across England hold and play their instruments today probably has something to do with Nicola Matteis Jr. A Baroque violin virtuoso described as “stupendious” by a contemporary observer, Matteis was a key figure in the development of violin playing in England, helping make a switch to an Italianate style that involves a different hold of the bow (holding it only by the wood) and placing the instrument slightly higher up towards the chin. Matteis’ status as a technician of the violin is demonstrated perfectly in this short prelude to the concert; by stretching the performer’s technical abilities, he astutely weaves multiple interdependent lines into one voice that’s coherent and occasionally crunchy.

### **Joseph Haydn 'Op. 54 No. 2, II. Adagio'**

*String quartet, 1788*

Joseph Haydn fits unexpectedly well into the magical folkly Venn diagram. Heard among the rest of the programme, the Adagio from his quartet Op. 54 No. 2, sounds like a fusion of the florid, improvised language of McCreadie, and the earthy chorale sound of Sardinian song.

### **György Kurtág 'Officium breve in memoriam Andreae Szervánszky, Op.28'**

II.

VIII.

IX.

XI.

XV. Arioso interroto (di Endre Szervánsky)

*String quartet, 1988–1989*

It’s the same for György Kurtág’s ‘Officium breve in memoriam Andreae Szervánszky’. Taken from the more melodious, even folk-adjacent end of Kurtág’s music, these masterful musical aphorisms nevertheless maintain the classic Kurtág principle: a minimum of notes equalling the maximum, essential expression. Singh feels that these Kurtág pieces sit right at the centre of the programme’s Venn diagram.

## **Anna Meredith 'Honeyed Words'**

*Arranged by Richard Jones  
String quartet, 2016*

If there's a work that brings all the ideas together—a rustic folkiness, a work in translation, a feeling of wanting to burst out of instruments that can't speak—it's Anna Meredith's 'Honeyed Words'. It began life a moment of calm between two chattering tracks on her debut album *Varmints*; Richard Jones's arrangement for the Ligeti Quartet translates the smooth synthesiser lines into string movements full of bulges. There's an upright quality to this fluid work, like a very slow, languorous dance with lunges—a folk dance at night's end, if you will.

*Programme notes © Hugh Morris for Manchester Collective, 2024*