Kate Molleson: Hello and welcome to the Edinburgh International Festival 2025. I'm Kate Molleson, and this is The Warm Up, an insider's guide to the performance that you're about to experience.

This time, we are diving into the closing concert and what a treat it's gonna be this year. Mendelssohn's *Elijah.* Before we hear from the mezzo soprano, Karen Cargill and from the Edinburgh Festival Chorus Director James Grosssmith here is our Festival Director, Nicola Benedetti.

Nicola Benedetti: So every year our closing concert at the Usher Hall is always a big moment, and it has that level of grandeur and weight that the Edinburgh International Festival is capable of. So the stage at the Usher Hall will this year be bursting, full to the Brim with the Edinburgh Festival Chorus, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, all under the baton of my dear friend and incredible musician of such integrity, Thomas Søndergård. As well, of course, as a lineup of stellar soloists plus a Rising Stars of Voice programme participants who all will join forces to perform Mendelssohn's one and only *Elijah*.

So, in the tradition of what we call classical music, the Christian religion always features heavily and when choosing monumental works of scale and grandeur and size, often these works do have a deep tie to a belief system, and in this particular case, a tale of restoring faith against ultimate hardship and suffering. I would actually like to frame it in the context of our Opening Concert, *The Veil of the Temple* by John Tavener. Now, John himself said that this work, which presents many religions from around the world, stands for a common truth shared by all belief systems.

James Grossmith: I'm James Grossmith and I'm Director of the Festival Chorus. The end of the festival we close with Mendelssohn's *Elijah.* Now this is important work for the Chorus. They famously recorded it in the nineties, 1994 I think it was, a now legendary recording with Bryn Terfel and with Paul Daniel and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. It's a piece that the chorus have performed and come back to many times, and so it's wonderful that features in this festival again.

It's also a piece, funnily enough, that I think looks beyond the religions of the world that we know. People think of it as a very much as a biblical text and 19th century, or oratorio. But actually in the sort of transfiguration of Elijah and the way that he goes up to heaven in a blazing chariot and looking out over the mountains at the end of the work, you can tell that Mendelssohn was also looking for something beyond and looking for a deeper truth beyond the texts of the Catholic tradition, the Jewish tradition, the Lutheran tradition, all of which

he works with in, in that piece. So I think it's an interesting connection between the opening and the closing concerts in this festival.

Karen Cargill: My name is Karen Cargill. I'm a mezzo soprano, and I will sing the woman slash angel slash queen.

It's such a multifaceted role this for the mezzo because you have a very human element in the very direct human experience of someone speaking directly to God. You have the baddy if you like. You have the character who is vengeful. And then you have the angel character, too. And so it's the full gambit, I guess, of emotional range that you can play.

And the music is so beautifully written for those three different types of characters, too, and it's just so clever. It just speaks to his genius that he can have one voice type portray all these different characters. And the music so instinctively speaks to that. And his love of Bach, I think is very clear in this.

I often think of the Passions when I perform this piece because the first chorus and last chorus of the Passions are the things that bring me to tears every time in Bach. And again, we have that here. We have those big coral numbers that just speak directly to your soul and makes you think about what the higher power is, if there's a higher power, what is life beyond where we are right now?

And the gift of a composer like Mendelsohn is that the sound world that he creates makes us ask those questions.

Mendelssohn's *Elijah* is a roadmap that the composer gives us with the directions, the destination that he hopes that you get to. And our job, as musicians, is to take the direction and follow the road, but create it in our own way, with our own instruments, with our own internal vibration. That's my job, and when I talk about truth and honesty in my own art, it is being present in the moment. So, you know, I can sing one day and I've slept well and I've had a lovely breakfast and a leisurely day, and my day's gone exactly as I want, and I can sing and feel great.

The next day, I can have slept really badly, I can have been in terrible traffic, I can have had a ticket on my car and I show up to sing. I still have something to say even though I've had those experiences. It's living in the truth of that and not completely pushing that stuff away. *That* informs who we are as an artist that day. We've done all of the preparation. We've done all of the work and the rehearsal so that we know what the piece is, but truth is who we are that day and how we interpret the music in order to say something.

Kate Molleson: James Grosssmith, Karen Cargill and Nicola Benedetti. The Closing Concert is on Sunday the 24th of August, half past seven at the Usher Hall. It runs for two hours and 45 minutes with one interval.