

# A drunk man looks at the thistle

Scotland's most inimitable contemporary musical virtuosos Red Note Ensemble are once again going on a lyrical tour of Scotland.

Dedicated to developing and performing interesting and significant contemporary music, co-directors John Harris and Robert Irvine have collaborated with multi award winning Glasgow composer Bill Sweeney to create a vibrant adaptation of Hugh MacDiarmid's epic poem 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle'.



In the picture are John Harris and Robert Irvine, the directors of the Red Note Ensemble, and actor Crawford Logan, the narrator for the Ensemble's production

Originally written in Scots and published in 1926, it's infamously thrown narrator explores the state of Scotland from an emotionally and intellectually charged perspective. Its prose ranges from the comic to the serious and examines a wide range of cultural, sexual, political, scientific, existential, metaphysical and cosmic themes. Bill, with his background in the European avant-garde, and a love of traditional Scottish folk music and jazz, is perfectly placed to capture the many sides of MacDiarmid: modernist and traditionalist, nationalist and internationalist. Bill Sweeney was originally commissioned to write his version of A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle by Glasgow's MayFest in 1992.

Bill said: "When I was finishing this piece in 1992, there was a General Election on and given that outcome, I'm a bit nervous about this year's! Going back to the piece to prepare this edition, I was struck again just how MacDiarmid's

portrayal of the Scottish psyche – should be plural and mutually contradictory, of course – is still so relevant: we achieve a parliament and revile the members we elect to it, erect a parliament building and ridicule it, complaining about the cost, and the whole tartan hoots-mon-ery self-inflicted caricature still stirs what passes for our souls! 1926 – 1992 – 2010...is there hope? MacDiarmid himself, from ‘Lourd on My Hert’:

Nae wonder if I think I see A lichter shadow than the neist I’m fain to cry: ‘The dawn, the dawn! I see it brakin’ in the East.’ But ah – It’s juist mair snaw!”

As the Contemporary Ensemble-in-Residence at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music Drama in Glasgow, and an Associate Company of the Traverse Theatre, Red Note develop the work of new and established composers internationally and in Scotland, particularly at Glasgow University and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama. The Ensemble’s name was dreamt up when John Harris and Robert Irvine saw how compositional software would turn unplayable or out of range notes red, rising to Bill’s challenge, they told one newspaper, “Red Note will be the group that will play the unplayable”.

John Harris said: “It’s true as professional virtuosos we love to play the difficult music that other music groups might think twice about attempting, but we also know that our first job is to entertain and give the audience a good night out! Bill’s version of A Drunk Man is perfect for us: it’s a fun, thought-provoking, musical romp for the audience – and it’s also fearsomely difficult to play. Perfect!”

They will be conducted on this tour by rising star Jessica Cottis. At only 29, she is already established as a highly sensitive and experienced professional conductor, working with superstar maestro Donald Runnicles at the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, who describes her as his “extra ears”. As a recipient of numerous prizes, Jessica has given recitals

across North America, Europe and Australasia, recorded for the SSLSO label and has been broadcast on ABC and BBC Radio 3.

The ensemble for this tour is made of 9 players, including a jazz clarinetist and trombonist, 4 singers, and much-loved Scottish actor Crawford Logan in the title role of the famously thrown narrator. You can expect an evening of humour, inebriation, beauty, politically-charged comment and virtuoso musical and literary invention!

Wednesday 9th June: Traverse Theatre, Cambridge Street,  
Edinburgh, EH1 2ED

Tickets & Information: 0131 228 1404 / [www.traverse.co.uk](http://www.traverse.co.uk)