



Just Festival 2016: From the Edge




'We want to unsettle, challenge and inspire our audiences...by offering a platform to people and ideas which sit outside the mainstream.'


The **Just Festival** is unlike any other. Yes, it aims to entertain us – but it also wants to make us think, to open our eyes to issues that might not get an airing anywhere else, to engage us in dialogues about social justice, equality and identity in an increasingly polarised world. This year the  festival's theme is ***From the Edge***, a concept open to interpretation in many ways. People may be marginalised politically or socially – or they may be boundary pushers, exploring the very limits of science, society, faith or the arts. The Just Festival gives all of them a voice, a space to deliver their message, and it does so with a great programme of performances, talks, exhibitions and conversations, all based at **St John's Church**, Princes Street and the **Quaker Meeting House**, Victoria Terrace.

 *'Compelling, imbued with a rare empathy and compassion,*****'* is what one reviewer had to say about **Ava Hunt's drama, *Acting Alone***. Inspired by the people she met in **Palestinian refugee camps**, Ava weaves together stories of immense complexity and fragile humanity with tales of her 'often funny and occasionally bizarre' experiences of working as an actor and performing alone. *Acting Alone* asks an important question: can one person make a difference? Palestine is also the subject of **Beautiful Resistance/Alrowawad's dabka** dance and song performance at St John's. Beautiful Resistance promotes human rights through creative and non-violent responses; its founder **Dr Abdelfattah**

Abusrour will tell its story.

Renowned musician **Michael Cretu** is the founder of **MIRO**  (**Manchester International Roots Orchestra**). MIRO gave a wonderful performance of *Time for Change* at the festival two years ago and it's back in 2016 with a unique repertoire of music from the Middle East, South Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe, embracing rap, hip-hop, classical music and jazz along the way. You can read The Edinburgh Reporter's five star review of the 2014 show [here](#). In a separate event Michael, whose uncle **Johnny Raducanu** is considered the father of modern Romanian jazz, will give a talk on the **Roma's culture and heritage** and perform a double bass recital inspired by Roma traditions.

 Closer to home, **Fathers Network Scotland's** drama *Being a Dad* (developed with Edinburgh's acclaimed **Strange Town Theatre** as part of the **Year of the Dad**) reflects on the experiences, hopes, fears and challenges faced by many fathers, especially disadvantaged young fathers, in Scotland today. Meanwhile **Drake Music Scotland** presents *Equilibrium*, a group formed in response to demand from disabled musicians looking for more opportunities to write and perform traditional Scots music. Equilibrium's members use acoustic instruments (harp, fiddle) and digital instruments that can be played by those with limited mobility. It has already performed at the **Fringe, the Scots Fiddle Festival** and **Celtic Connections** – now it's coming to St John's.

St John's Festival Pulpit (every Sunday evening in August)  brings some impressive speakers – **Baroness Julia Neuberger, Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, Lord Hope** and **The Very Revd Dr John Hall** – to examine the intersection of public life and religion in the UK. In other talks Human Rights and LGBT campaigner **Peter Tatchell** will address the contentious topic of *What should schools teach pupils about sex?* and in *Razor's Edge: Female Genital Mutilation* Gambian gender and political activist **Neneh Bojang** will talk openly about her own harrowing

experiences. **Dr Dina Sidhva** will explain the research underpinning *Images from Limbo*, which tells the story of HIV-positive asylum seekers from Africa and offers powerful insights, captured by the very people living on this edge of despair and uncertainty. **Edinburgh-based Mercy Corps** works in more than 40 countries around the world to alleviate suffering, poverty and oppression. This is Mercy Corps' third year as Just's international charity partner; its exhibition, *The Displacement Dilemma*, looks at the global refugee crisis and what we can do to help. *Gaza – Photography in Dark Times* is the work of five young photographers, who reveal how the blockade impacts on the style and content of their art. 'Darkness is never far away, and yet the humour and resilience of the human spirit shines through'.

Just Festival **Conversations** never shy away from controversy. A particularly interesting topic this year is *Isolation in Modern Society: a Blessing or a Curse?* Reports of social isolation appear to be rising, but while many see this as a problem, some people actively seek isolation in the pursuit of happiness. Panellists **Brian Sloan**, CEO of Age Scotland, feminist author **Sara Maitland**, who has chosen to live alone for many years, **John Mason MP** and chair **Jonny Kinross** of Edinburgh's Grassmarket Project look at the issues. In *Is a Nomadic Lifestyle Incompatible with the 21st Century?* **Fiona Watson** (Survival International), **members of the travelling community** and chair **Professor Colin Clark** consider whether communities should be allowed to continue a mobile lifestyle – should they all just settle down, be educated, pay taxes and contribute to society like everyone else? Other Conversations look at prisons, climate change, language/identity and the global migration crisis.

After all that engagement, you'll be hungry – but fear not, the lovely **Knights Kitchen** is once again providing great refreshments in its **festival café** at St John's; soups, breakfast and lunch boxes, sandwiches, salads, curries,

barbecues, hot veggie options, bakery and sweets – all with an African twist – will be available throughout the festival. Now's your chance to try **Boerewors sausage, plantain, sweet potato rosti** and **Jamaican ginger chilli brownies!**

Tickets for Just Festival events can be purchased online now from the [festival website](#), which also has details of venues. The **Just Festival Box Office** will be open outside St John's 5-9.30pm 5-27th August (*not* Sundays, Mondays or Thursdays) and tickets may also be bought on the door, subject to availability.

'Free speech does not mean giving bigots a free pass. it includes the right and moral imperative to challenge, oppose and protest bigoted views. Bad ideas are most effectively defeated by good ideas – backed up by ethics, reason and evidence – rather than bans and censorship' (**Peter Tatchell**).

