

New arts venue proposed for the city centre



Proposals have been unveiled for a new arts centre in St Andrew Square to become the home of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra (SCO). It would also serve the city as a new conference and education venue, and the SCO say it would be one of the best mid-sized music venues in Europe.

The venue will be purpose built immediately behind the Royal Bank of Scotland former HQ in St Andrew Square and would comprise a 1,000 seat auditorium with rehearsal and recording spaces.



We understand that the new space is designed not to compete with The Usher Hall which is owned by the council but to complement what is offered there. With excellent acoustics this new performance venue would offer space for popular music, jazz, folk, chamber and other small classical music groups to perform. The space would also be available during the Festival as one of the key all-day venues.

The SCO who currently use The Queen's Hall for their rehearsals and concerts hope that this new venue will:

- provide an excellent opportunity to build new audiences across the age groups by programming a wide range of music as well as other forms of entertainment;
- provide community arts companies from across Scotland and further afield with improved performance space;
- provide facilities for organisations to host events and

conferences, as well as larger scale company general meetings;

- create new restaurant, cafe and bar facilities to complement the development.

The SCO have partnered with IMPACT Scotland which is a charitable trust and who will oversee the construction and management of the new complex. The Dunard Fund has committed what is described as a 'substantial gift' and other individual gifts have been promised, but more fundraising will be needed to turn the proposal into reality.

The office building at 35 St Andrew Square will be purchased by the Dunard Fund and will become an HQ for the staff of IMPACT Scotland, the SCO and some other arts bodies

Sir Ewan Brown, who has been chairing the IMPACT Scotland ProjectBoard said, "I see this is a global opportunity for a global city, combining the best of the old and the new to establish a venue that will attract performers, audiences and visitors from around the world."

Malcolm Buchanan, RBS Scotland Board Chairman, said, "We have been a part of the fabric of Scottish life for nearly 300 years and this latest venture is a fantastic opportunity for the Royal Bank of Scotland to play a major role in supporting the arts and education in Scotland. While we will be retaining our historic branch at 36 St Andrew Square we will be assisting in the build by making available the land around the building and 35 St Andrew Square to help make this project a reality."

Colin Buchan, Chairman of the SCO said, "With this wonderful support from the SCO's long-term supporter, Dunard Fund, this project provides a fantastic opportunity for the SCO to provide an open, welcoming and unforgettable audience experience in a much-needed mid-sized performance venue with stunning acoustics in the heart of Edinburgh. Not only will it

provide our internationally renowned orchestra with a splendid new home, it will also enable the SCO to reach out in ways that have not been possible in the past.”

Richard Holloway, Chair of Sistema Scotland said, “Our Big Noise orchestras, working with health, education and social services, are already transforming the lives of some of Scotland’s most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and helping them to achieve their full potential. This new facility will give young people in our most deprived communities the opportunity to play alongside and be inspired by professional musicians in world-class orchestras. It will prove that, as well as delighting us, the performing arts can be a powerful instrument of social transformation. It’s a thrilling prospect.”

✘ In welcoming the news, Fergus Linehan, the Director of EIF, said “It is very important to the future development of the Edinburgh International Festival that all our venues are of the best international quality. We would adopt the new complex not just for our much loved morning concerts but as one of our principal, all-day performance venues. It would also deliver creative learning and participatory opportunities, releasing individual potential and enabling local residents, as well as visitors, to share in the city’s remarkable artistic achievements”.

A spokesperson for Dunard Fund said, “Edinburgh has long awaited an iconic, acoustically superb mid-sized performance hall and we are proud to participate in this exciting project. The new venue would not only benefit the city’s Festivals and the SCO, but would also be a magnet for international touring groups representing all aspects of the performing arts.”