

A Splash of Tartan for the 68th Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo

Brigadier David Allfrey, The Chief Executive and Producer of The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, welcomed the press to the Royal Gallery this morning. There was a threat of rain at any moment, but enough sunshine appeared for the photographers to make it look like a real summer's day.

The Tattoo has a well-worn format, with dancers, music by a wide variety of military bands, projections on to the Castle and of course the fireworks at the end.



Brigadier Allfrey is just back from the Gulf States as his job is to sell the Tattoo around the world, and attract to it the world class talent it is renowned for.



Sergeant Ayami Nakama from Japan's Ground Self Defence Force Central Band with Sergeant Nathan Crossley and Jason Morris from the Massed Bands of Her Majesty's Royal Marines.

We spoke to the Brigadier (who tweets as @TopTattoo) afterwards on the castle esplanade where the crowds flocking to the castle got a little preview of some of the acts taking part in the spectacle from Friday night onwards.

He said in typically descriptive fashion : "This is now the recreational time of year as all the ingredients are in place and our wonderful team at Cockburn Street, only 23 on the staff have done extraordinary things bringing everybody together. It is like television cooking now, all the

ingredients are in a bowl and we are just about to make the dish!"

On the matter of the clans' involvement this year Brigadier Allfrey is very enthusiastic. He said : "This year we are celebrating Scotland's heritage and history so it was absolutely critical to involve the clans and the families. So we have been in conversation now for nearly two years with the Standing Council of Scottish Chiefs.

"57 clans will be represented and with an early offer on tickets many clans people are coming in from all over the world. Those who are joining us for the retinue as we are calling it will be parading with their chiefs from the Great Hall of Edinburgh Castle where they will be welcomed by the Governor of this great castle.

"They are going to patrol down through the castle precincts guarded by our own house clan and then at the right moment after a great shout the doors will open and they are going to come out onto the esplanade.

"They will then take up position either side of the red carpet; the Salute Taker will arrive and be introduced to the chiefs of the evening. There will be two or three clans each evening. He will be given a presentation and becomes a chieftain for the evening and then takes the salute from the Royal Navy guard of honour and then he and the chiefs then make their way up to the Royal Gallery to enjoy the show. We are so thrilled to be hosting them these 3,000 clansmen and women."

[Brigadier David Allfrey speaking about the 2017 Tattoo](#) from [Phyllis Stephen](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Some of the highlights :

Paying tribute to HMS Queen Elizabeth the new aircraft carrier out on sea trials

The Massed Bands of Her Majesty's Royal Marines

The Queen's Colour Squadron and the Band of the Royal Air Force Regiment

The Band of the Royal Regiment of Scotland

Brigadier Allfrey had explained at the press conference some of what we can expect this year, and began by telling us that military contributions to the festivals began in 1947 and of course the Edinburgh Festivals are celebrating their 70th year. But the Tattoo isn't!

The man responsible for the whole event told us why : "The Tattoo decided to go its own way in 1950 and so this is only the 68th season of the Tattoo, but I hope we will be in our 19th consecutive sell-out year. Ticket sales are remarkably at 98% this morning."

This is big business. An audience of 220,000 will see the

event across the next month which means around 8,800 people every night. Some 3,500 VIPs will get up to the Royal Gallery where the press event was held (with great bacon rolls from Contini!). That number includes the Salute Takers and in addition there are royal visits planned this year.




Allfrey continued : “We entertain senior guest from defence, from Foreign Affairs from the world of business trade and investment. Tourism is important as the Tattoo draws tourists into Scotland but also encourages people from our great islands to travel to those countries that have contributed.

“Our viewer numbers usually get to around 592 million when we reach the news channels in China. We are really proud of being a flag carrier for Scotland and Great Britain.

“We make an important contribution to the economy, and while numbers vary we believe that the impact is between £77 million and £100 million into the Scottish economy each year. We think we are an important reason for people to come to Scotland and enjoy our country.

“We are about bringing people together. We live in a global village and we don’t get on all of the time, but it is our experience that if you know your neighbours better then you can resolve differences more easily. Our strapline is ‘Arrive as Strangers and leave as friends’.”

 Anyone who has been on the Castle Esplanade at the Tattoo will tell you that you meet people from all corners of the globe, some it has to be said more prepared for the likely weather up there than others.



Brigadier David Allfrey

ROYAL NAVY

The Brigadier said that this year it is the Royal Navy which is being brought to the fore. He carried on : "With the Royal Navy in the lead this year we have three Royal Marine bands, and of course the aircraft carrier Queen Elizabeth out in the North Sea on sea trials and HMS Prince of Wales across in Rosyth still in the course of being built.

Admiral Sir Philip Jones, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff, said: "The Royal Navy is thrilled to be taking centre stage at this year's Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo. Last month, the new aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth began her sea trials in the Firth of Forth, and this month steel was cut on the River Clyde for HMS Glasgow, the first of a new generation of fighting ships. This is a new chapter for Scottish industry and for the Royal Navy, and we are delighted to share our excitement with friends from around the world.

"Every day, Scottish-based sailors, submariners and Royal Marines are working at home and around the world to protect and promote the United Kingdom's place in the world. They are some of the finest ambassadors our country could wish for and a wonderful programme of maritime pageantry and spectacle is in store."

"And one of our aircraft is here! The £1 million model F35 which is an exact replica, is hoisted up under the stand at the entrance. It weighs 10 tonnes and is a lovely way of making a statement about our partnership with the Royal Navy this year as everyone passes through the entrance."

✘ A big part of the show has to do with Scottish clans. Brigadier Allfrey explained their involvement : "We have 57 clans who will join us over the course of the run, that is 3,000 clansmen and women who are going to meet each evening in the Great Hall of Edinburgh Castle and then patrol down through the Castle precincts to greet our Salute Taker each night. They will then pronounce the Salute Taker a chieftain for the evening. That is going to be very special, as not only

are they coming to the Tattoo itself but there is a whole range of family events planned around Scotland too.

“The clans will start the show each evening, although we rather coldly describe the start of the show as the preliminaries since it takes place before the show actually starts.

“They are going to to be hosted every night in the Great Hall by the Governor and their own clan chiefs will join us. They will patrol down through the castle precincts with our own house clan guarding and caring for them as they do so.

“The audience will get a great shout as they assemble the other side of the drawbridge and they will play out onto the Esplanade behind their own pipers and standards to take the places either side of the red carpet to welcome the evening’s Salute Taker.

“It is tremendous to go through the histories of all these clans and this has been a journey for all of us. You just have to look at the colour on the clan pages and their tartans to get a sense of their part in everything.

✘ “I would like to focus on the international contribution. It feels an incredibly international year. We have Monaco for one night only on our opening night. The Orchestre des Carabiniers du Prince au Monaco will accompany guests from the Principality to give the audience a touch of Mediterranean sunshine and glamour against a backdrop of yachts and casinos on the Castle façade.

We are very thrilled that the principality is going to be involved. Japan who have never been to the Tattoo before are coming. For those who may not be aware of it military music in Japan was brought into being in the 1890s by a British director of music and we are thrilled that Japan will be represented this year with a singer who has the voice of an

angel.

Other countries being represented include the USA, Malta, four pipes and drums from Australia, pipes and drums from Germany and dancers from Canada.

This year the proceedings will start with a fanfare as normal but this year it is a fanfare for the Oceans and it is a drummers' fanfare. The Brigadier described it : "You will sense from the percussion the deep waves building in the ocean and then crashing on our shores as it runs up the gravel of the shoreline."

And he warned against thinking that anything was random in the Tattoo : "When dancers dance through a military band it is not just a mere theatrical device, it is about showing and demonstrating what our military is representative of. And let me tell you that the members of the fFanfare Band of the 9th French Marine Infantry Brigade are not just musicians, they are some of the fittest individuals who run up and down Arthur's Seat." The band is travelling from Poitiers to be part of the Tattoo.

Shetland Fiddlers 'Hjaltibonhoga' have brought a longship 'The Mirrie Dancer' from Shetland with them, along with a Viking Jarl Squad for protection, to celebrate the invasions and settlement of their islands.

Brigadier Allfrey is all in favour of the violins : "The lovely thing about the fiddle of course is that it gives the music another layer. Music from military bands, from the brass bands is all fine and dandy, but you need the lovely softening that the string instruments give and I think it gives us something more creative to play with in the middle."

As for the dancing there will be 50 Highland Dancers from the Tattoo Dance Company, drawn from talent across the world, who

will perform to a colourful score written especially for Splash of Tartan by Scottish composer Finlay MacDonald.

The Band of The Royal Regiment of Scotland will bring their own wonderful style and music to a re-enactment of an 'Ambush in the Glen' – a light take on a dramatic moment during the Jacobite Risings.

Brigadier Allfrey said : "It would not be a Tattoo without some gentle warfare with the lightest touch in the performance. The band of the Royal Regiment of Scotland will help to tell the story of the government troops being ambushed by Highlanders during the show.

The Castle Esplanade will be transformed into a Highland glen with illustrations from Scottish artist 'Stref' – best known for his cartoons in The Dandy, The Beano, The Broons and Oor Wullie – while The Band of The Royal Regiment of Scotland tell a tale of the Jacobites.



Activity aboard the new aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth will be depicted on the esplanade. First the band of the Royal Air Force regiment and the Queen's Colour Squadron will demonstrate that the RAF will be playing a part in flying the F35 from the deck of the carrier.

Allfrey continued : "There are about 800 musicians involved, along with the choir from Erskine Stewart Melville school and a big stage band who will be situated on the new Moat Stage which is tucked away during the day but which emerges as the lights go down.

"And at the end barely visible up on the battlements the lone piper will bring the programme to a close with the lament.

"I am even more excited than normal this year and in particular about the music will I think surprise everybody."

“What we are finding is that an increasing number of countries want to be represented here and they are often asking if they can be in the show, rather than us having to ask. We are booked already for several years to come!”

With a nod to the future we are told that there is a five to ten year innovation programme which is ongoing. The Moat Stage is now in place.

FREE WIFI

But this year there will be free wifi on the esplanade this year provided by the same company who provide EDI Free Wifi. And an app will be launched too recognising that many people enjoy the spectacle by texting their friends while they are watching the show.

Brigadier Allfrey concluded : “We are on the threshold of August now and look forward to the month ahead and what is being presented.”

TICKETS

Some tickets for the 2017 Tattoo (4 – 26 August), priced £25 to £300, can still be purchased online at www.edintattoo.co.uk/tickets, or by telephone on +44 (0)131 225 1188, or in person from the Tattoo Ticket Sales Office at 1 Cockburn Street in Edinburgh.