

Standard Life Opening Event : Bloom Talking to Leo Warner

We met Leo Warner of 59 Productions ahead of the practice run for Bloom which took place last night.

Tonight is the opening event of the 2017 Edinburgh International Festival and this event sponsored by Standard Life will light up St Andrew Square tonight and then will be repeated tomorrow night.



The idea behind it is to reflect the comment made by the Lord Provost in 1947 when the Edinburgh Festivals began. Sir John Falconer said that the festival should 'provide a platform for the flowering of the human spirit' in the post-war era.

We met the man behind the 59 Productions team who, it must be said, looked remarkably relaxed on Thursday afternoon!

Leo Warner is Director of 59 Productions and Director of the Standard Life Opening Event : Bloom. He is responsible for all the wonderful images you can expect to see this evening and tomorrow at the opening event.

Led by [@59productions](#) with input from [@garethfrysound](#) [@StandardLifeplc](#) Opening Event : Bloom is in the hands of Leo Warner We spoke to him pic.twitter.com/v1D8SMdCSk

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [August 4, 2017](#)

The organisers have told us that although the advance tickets have sold out there is room for people who just turn up at 10.30pm and then get the opportunity to walk around the square and enjoy the experience and the event.

TER : You are looking very relaxed. How can that be with a dress rehearsal in a few hours?

LW : I have an amazing team of people working with me. There is an incredible technical team at 59 Productions and also from the Edinburgh International Festival. There is a wonderful team of animators and designers working here in a cabin in St Andrew Square. Really the whole city of Edinburgh from the council and the stakeholders to the transport authorities have come together to make this piece work so I am very well supported.

TER : What should people expect when they come along?

LW : Well as you enter St Andrew Square from George Street you come into a kind of transformed environment, a part of the city which you might know quite well but we've I suppose augmented using a combination of music – there's an original score by composer Nick Powell, sound design by Gareth Fry. There will be projection on three sides of St Andrew Square with entirely new animations set to music and then there is a sort of spatial lighting installation which is within the gardens and outside of the perimeter.

So it is really a piece which is designed to be more than a sum of its parts. There is no one leading element to this.

TER : How do you do this? How does it all work?

LW : 59 Productions have done two previous opening events at the International Festival. I directed the Deep Time event last year which was a projection onto Edinburgh Castle and the rock which it sits on. At that point we swore that we would never get any bigger because it was about as far as we could push it in terms of complexity. This year we were very to do something for the 70th anniversary which really celebrated the whole city and the idea of Edinburgh as a festival city. We wanted to touch on all the art forms and cultural activities that happen here. So we wanted to make an immersive

environment and we looked all over Edinburgh. We looked at many sites and we were repeatedly drawn back to St Andrew Square because it is such a central hub. It's a real thoroughfare. Many many people pass through here both visitors and residents alike.

So we settled on the square as an ideal canvas to create something which people could inhabit and be part of, and only really in retrospect realised that we had made something which was even bigger and more complicated than anything we had ever attempted to do before.

What we are doing is celebrating that moment 70 years ago when the launch of the international festival and the other festivals which sprung up following that ignited this wave of art and culture. It was an ignition point for light and colour and energy, spread not just about Edinburgh and throughout the UK but really all over the world.

Once we had selected the space the first creative thing we did was write the music. This is a bespoke composition. It is entirely new music although it feels a bit like a jubilant mix tape of styles and periods. Then we started the animation process. That was reliant on doing first of all a laser scan of the whole square from which we generated a 3-D model which allows us to accurately remap the architecture, both in software and then when we arrive on site to allow us to align the projectors, using a semi-automated system.

This means they are very, very accurately matched to the architecture. Then our team of artists and animators who made the animated content are given a template which has all of the surfaces of all of the buildings that we are projected on in it and they start to work with that map to build content which is designed specifically for the buildings and the architecture.

They work with a combination of different software tools.

There is a lot of 3D animation in it. We use cinema 4D, Maya, 3ds Max® and After Effects for a lot of the 2D and 2¹/₂ D animation and a lot of art working and Photoshop.

But also there is some hand drawn stuff in there as well. We use all of the tools available to us. One of the nice things about this particular project is that we have been able to give our regular artists and our key designers a very free rein to do a showcase of their style and their work. We are really celebrating the diversity of our styles that the very idea of the Festival City is set up to encompass.

TER : So you just press autoplay and off it all goes?

LW : As the sun begins to set we will be checking the extremely complex projection alignment and running some hopefully very discreet sound checks! The synchronisation between the music sound effects, light and projection is absolutely fundamental.

Essentially what I will be doing is stand trying not to look too nervous make while this amazing team of artists and technicians make the piece work!





This is an enormous undertaking for 59 Productions who have been retained after the spectacles produced last year and the previous year at The Usher Hall and on Castle Rock.

The Edinburgh International Festival's Twitter feed showed off some of the images from the practice run last night (or perhaps a sneaky preview on Wednesday night!)

A few photos taken in the wee small hours of [#EdinBloom](#). Come along and see it in person for free on 4 & 5 Aug! <https://t.co/0LChbJIPzY> ^N pic.twitter.com/iY5z11aPD5

– edintfest (@edintfest) [August 3, 2017](#)

Now to mark the 70th anniversary of the festivals it is recognised that Edinburgh has led the way on festivals which have sprung up across the globe in its wake.

Bloom will be a public art epic outdoor event celebrating the changes to Edinburgh in the last 70 years, becoming a cosmopolitan colourful place.

All the buildings around the square will be used as a canvas and the images projected onto them will be point perfect using

projection mapping. The images will be accompanied by music specially composed by Nick Powell.

You are invited to visit the square from 9pm if you have a ticket or from 10.30 unticketed. The 20 minute loop will play from 10pm till midnight allowing many people to be immersed in the experience. The event takes place tonight 4 August and tomorrow night too.

The Standard Life Opening Event : Bloom is created by 59 Productions in association with the University of Edinburgh

The technology Partner Blue-i Theatre Technology has worked in partnership with mclcreate

Music composed by Nick Powell

The organisers have issued instructions and guidance on security at the Festival

“Your safety and security at International Festival events is of the utmost importance to us. Please note that bags may be subject to security searches and you should not bring bags larger than 30cm x 30cm x 15cm to our venues. Rucksacks may not be allowed into venues. If you spot anything suspicious during your visit to the International Festival, please do let a member of the team know.”