

# Festivals 2018 – a good time was had by all

The 2018 Edinburgh festivals season came to an end with a very pretty bang. The Virgin Money Fireworks Concert attracted an audience of around 250,000 to see the skies lit up with a marvellous display from Edinburgh Castle.



© Martin McAdam

400,000 fireworks

The 400,000 fireworks were set by Keith Webb of Pyrovision synchronised to music played live by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra in Princes Street Gardens. The music ranged from Holst's *The Planets* to *West Side Story* in a nod to the centenary of American composer Leonard Bernstein.

Fergus Linehan, Director of the Edinburgh International Festival said: "This year's Virgin Money Fireworks Concert was absolutely amongst the best displays of its kind anywhere in

the world. I would like to thank Virgin Money for their continued support of this incredible community event, and for their additional support which this year made possible the second of our Edinburgh Schools Concerts. The Fireworks Concert is always an amazing way to end the Edinburgh International Festival and to bring the city's bumper summer festivals season to a close."



Andrew Nicholson, Brand Director at Virgin Money said: "Virgin Money is delighted to support the world-famous end of Festival Fireworks Concert and it is a fitting finale to what has been

another wonderful International Festival. The display was stunning and the performance by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra was breath-taking. Community is at the heart of Virgin Money and it's amazing to think that the fireworks are enjoyed by so many people across Edinburgh as a fitting farewell to another fabulous festival season."

Chief Executive of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Gavin Reid said: "Many congratulations to the International Festival on their hugely successful programme celebrating the Year of Young People. It was a great pleasure for us to be able to play to so many Primary School pupils from right across Edinburgh at the Virgin Money School Concert in Princes Street Gardens in the afternoon. Our thanks to our wonderful Lucy Crowe and Nicky Spence for joining the Scottish Chamber Orchestra on stage this evening. This event is an enormous team effort from the whole of the City and we thank all our technical and health & safety partners, the City of Edinburgh Council and Forth 1 for their valued ongoing support of the Virgin Money Fireworks Concert. We are very proud to work alongside the Edinburgh International Festival with our Major Partner and event sponsor Virgin Money and are delighted with their continued support of the arts in Scotland."



Wasabeats did their thing in West Princes Street Gardens for the press

## ON THE FRINGE

Audiences were encouraged to take a leap into the unknown at the Fringe this year and sample the unparalleled variety of shows on offer. The 3,548 shows in this year's Fringe programme addressed a wide range of issues including sex and consent, political uncertainty, gender equity, class, religion, and featured thousands of performers, from famous faces to those making their first appearance on a stage.

Shona McCarthy, Chief Executive of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society, said: "2018 has been another fantastic year for the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Artists from around the world have flocked to Scotland's capital, delighting audiences with work that is exciting, shocking, entertaining, world class and often, hilarious. From cabaret to children's shows, invigorating dance and physical theatre, to life enhancing

drama. Whatever the medium, so many Fringe artists help us to question the world around us and illuminate the most challenging areas of being human in new ways. It is an exceptional festival where audiences can curate their own experience and where all ages and tastes are catered for.

“The redevelopment of the Virgin Money Street Events has been embraced by audiences and performers, and we are proud to have improved the accessibility of our street events arena on the Royal Mile with dedicated viewing areas for those with access needs, fully accessible stages, BSL interpreted performances and sensory backpacks for children and adults on the autism spectrum.

“We are committed to breaking down barriers to attending the Fringe and through the Fringe Blueprint we will continue to work to address issues that affect participants and audiences at the festival, to ensure that no matter who you are or where you come from, you feel you can have a voice and be welcomed here in August.”

The four companies which make up EdFest – Underbelly, Assembly, Gilded Balloon and Pleasance – reported a bumper year with 1.6 million tickets sold at these venues – up 9% on last year.



William Burdett-Coutts of Assembly Photo ©TheEdinburghReporter

William Burdett-Coutts, Artistic Director, Assembly, said: “We have had another incredibly successful Festival this year with nearly half a million tickets sold across our 200 plus shows.

Many of our companies have enjoyed full houses, 5 star reviews, nominations and awards including, My Left Right Foot which won both a Fringe First and a Herald Angel and Casting Off which won the Total Theatre Award for Circus.”

Karen and Katy Koren, Artistic Directors, Gilded Balloon, said

“As we come to the end of another Fringe season, we’re reflecting on what has been an absolutely fantastic month across all Gilded Balloon venues. We were delighted to return once again to the National Museum of Scotland and Teviot Row House, and open the doors to the Rose Theatre for the second year running. Our 2018 programme put women at the forefront, with Luisa Omielan, Hot Brown Honey, Maisie Adam and The Miss Behave Gameshow just a few of the fantastic performers we hosted throughout August.”



© Martin McAdam

Anthony Alderson, Director, Pleasance said: “It’s been a fantastic Fringe where we have broken box office records throughout the month. Our biggest and boldest programme ever has seen us fill a trophy cabinet of awards that include Fringe Firsts, both Edinburgh Comedy Awards, The Holden Street Theatres Award and the Filipa Bragança Award. Companies have thrived off how busy and buzzing the city is.”



Dick and Dom at the Underbelly Press Launch got Ed Bartlam and Charlie Wood with their custard pies Photo John Preece

Charlie Wood and Ed Bartlam, Directors, Underbelly, said: "We are delighted that so many of our companies and artists have been recognised with awards, strong audiences and superb reviews. This year it has been about much more than numbers. It has been about the opportunity to support artists to perform here, to develop and invest in shows, to present a strong line up of new writing, innovative comedians and the best of international contemporary circus, and give space to those who want to create work which not only entertains but also addresses issues which affect us all."

## EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

2,800 artists from 60 nations performed in 85 productions across 180 performances at the Edinburgh International Festival, filling auditoriums across Edinburgh, this year stretching to Leith where the new season of Light on the Shore with Edinburgh Gin Seaside celebrated Scotland's most influential contemporary musicians, drawing attendances of

16,000 to the newly re-opened Leith Theatre.



La Cenerentola was one of the big events at this year's festival Photo John Preece

Overall attendance was very strong and met expectations with performances reaching an average of 85% of total capacity across the programme. Following the International Festival's largescale 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in 2017, the 2018 Festival focussed on inclusivity and the development of future audiences.

## OPENING EVENT

The International Festival spearheaded its celebrations of Scotland's Year of Young People with the Aberdeen Standard Investments Opening Event: Five Telegrams. 2,500 tickets were given to young people, approximately 1,000 of whom were from areas of multiple deprivation. In addition, 40 young people were employed at the event as Wardrobe Assistants, Film Coordinator & Editor, Camera Operators, Event Assistants and Digital Marketing Assistants. At the Palace of Holyrood House, Akram Khan Company's Kadamati marked the centenary of the end of the First World War, with 300 young dancers from across Scotland performing to an audience of 1,500.

## EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL BOOK FESTIVAL

The Edinburgh International Book Festival's public programme closed after 17 days of debate, discussion and public engagement with authors and audiences from around the world and across the political and cultural spectrum. Writers including Rose McGowan, Chelsea Clinton, Yanis Varoufakis, Maria Alyokhina, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ambassador Zindzi Mandela addressed the overarching theme of Freedom in events for adults and children with discussions ranging from identity to economics, migration to censorship.





Director of Edinburgh International Book Festival Nick Barley with the festival programme. Photo John Preece

Nick Barley, Director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival, said “It’s wonderful to know that the Festival has been so popular and has broken records again in all the ways these things are usually measured. But I wish there was an index of enlightenment, or an exuberance-ometer to show how the Book Festival also contributes to Scotland’s knowledge, happiness and well-being.”

Councillor Donald Wilson, Culture & Communities Convener for the City of Edinburgh Council said: “Edinburgh in August is for everyone and I am delighted that this year’s International Festival has built on its 70 years of success to become more

inclusive and international than ever. This year's events have enabled tens of thousands of people from all over the Capital, from all walks of life – young and old – to take part in and enjoy incredible art, theatre, dance and music.

“The International Festival's return to the heart of the Leith community for the first time in 30 years has been a huge success locally, both at the Leith Theatre and with pupils from Leith Academy. With artists from 60 different nations and audiences from 80, it is clear Edinburgh remains home to one of the most multicultural, far-reaching and adored Festivals on earth. The Council is proud to continue its support.”

Meantime the Tory MSP Miles Briggs seems to want even more than having a good time. Mr Briggs said while those living in Edinburgh are largely in favour of the festival and the benefits it brings, many were complaining of increased inconvenience.

He added it was important to keep local people on board, and by offering cheaper tickets this could be a way of continuing the good relationship in future.

Scottish Conservative Lothians MSP Miles Briggs said: “It's great news that the fringe and festival continue to go from strength to strength and put Edinburgh and Scotland on the map as home to one of the world's best spectacles.

“It's getting bigger and better, and people who live in the city are pleased to see that continue.

“However, there's no question that – as more people flock to the city – the level of inconvenience and hassle increases for those who live and work here.

“It's important we retain the goodwill of residents, and one way of doing that would be to offer discounted tickets across the board to those who can prove they live here – almost like a festival dividend.

“I have written to both festivals to see if they will consider putting this in place for next year.

“The success of these events is commendable. And while they continue to grow, it’s important we examine the opportunities and challenges they pose to people and businesses.

“We need an honest dialogue on how to get the balance right.”