

Growing Stories: the 2018 Scottish International Storytelling Festival

'At the end of the day, everything is stories, and they all start and grow from somewhere.' (Fiona Hyslop MSP)

A Jacobite plot, an Icelandic troll, gardens, Gaelic, guisers and ghosts – what else could this mean but the return of the spectacular – and occasionally spooky – Scottish International Storytelling Festival?

✘ The 30th Scottish International Storytelling Festival (SISF) was launched on Tuesday at Dr Neil's Garden on the shores of Duddingston Loch, a setting especially appropriate for a celebration whose 2018 theme is *Growing Stories*.

Drs Nancy and Andrew Neil created their garden from wasteland, nurturing and caring not only for their plants, but also for their patients, whom they encouraged to come and work in the garden with them. This year's SISF will focus on nurturing our cultural roots, reseeding our talents and relationships – both individual and international – and empowering local communities in all parts of Scotland.



Storyteller Daniel Allison, Fiona Hyslop MSP and Shona Cowie (c) Colin Hattersley

Opening the morning's events, Director of the Scottish Storytelling Centre **Donald Smith** said that the 2017 festival had reminded his team of the importance of 'digging where we stand'. But while this year's festival emphasises Scotland's stories, from the legends of Ossian and of Sgiath (Amazon Queen of Skye) to the tales of Scottish Traveller Stanley

Robertson, storytellers from across the world continue to play a major part, with contributors coming from as far afield as India, Belgium, Brittany, Turkey, Sierra Leone, Iceland and Canada.

Fiona Hyslop MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, said;

‘It is very important that we are seen as a country that reaches out to other nations and shares its welcome, its warmth and its stories. It’s all about discovery and rediscovery, and that is what nature allows us to do.’



A particular thread in this year’s festival is the deep cultural legacy shared by Ireland and Scotland; the Scottish Government has now established an Innovation & Investment Hub in Dublin, and hopes to develop the relationship between the two countries well beyond the festival. In the meantime come and hear about Celtic legends, Fenian Lays, mighty warriors, foolish men and strong women – and, on a more serious note, consider the significance and future of the Irish border in *Borderlands*, a free symposium. There’s even an *Ossian Supper* at which you can enjoy poetry, story and song along with your tea.

Scotland’s **GARDENS** Scheme OPEN FOR CHARITY

The festival’s partnership with communities across Scotland continues to grow too, and this year SISF has teamed up with **Scotland’s Gardens Scheme**, a charity that masterminds the public opening of gardens large and small, huge and humble, for the benefit of numerous good causes (it’s raised over one

million pounds in the past 5 years) – and for our benefit too. Chairman David Mitchell;

‘Gardens are great levellers; in times of strife they unite us as one common community. This pilot scheme will see festival events taking place in six gardens, offering a new voice to our gardeners and an opportunity for young storytellers to highlight what people have been doing for 1500 years, since the first gardeners arrived on Iona, summoned by St Columba.’



From the Botanics to Lochend Secret Garden and Leith Community Croft, visitors young and old can learn to grow and share stories and folktales of plants, trees and food, enjoy healthy refreshments, celebrate

World Apple Day and even make their own besom (broom). And there are many other child-friendly events during the festival; how about *Gory Stories*, a jaunt through the Old Town with stories of witches and ghosts (suitable for ages 5+), *The Breathing Space*, a morning of tree tales, seed planting and clay pendant making (ages 11+) or *Once Upon a Book*, in which storytellers will guide you through the world of children’s literature, with sessions for different age ranges from 3 upwards?



Daniel Allison, Programme Manager Annalisa Salis and Storytelling Coordinator Miriam Morris (c) Colin Hattersley

And of course, SISF doesn’t limit itself to Edinburgh; ***Festival on Tour*** is a programme of regional storytelling. Guest storytellers meet with local performers and audiences throughout Scotland, from Argyll and Bute to Dumfries & Galloway, Perthshire, Orkney, Fife and all stops in between!

Thurso even has its own **Portskerra Storytelling Festival** – and where better to have a *Stroll with Trolls* than Dunoon? Miriam Morris, National Storytelling Co-Ordinator;

‘We want people to embrace local stories, to encourage communities and schools to engage with storytelling whatever that means to them, to research, record, recite and give recognition to stories collected in their areas. It’s been a real joy to come in every morning and hear all the ideas and initiatives – some from people who have never interacted with storytelling before.’



The outreach programme runs from September to November, with its first event held at Craigmillar Castle (left) last month.

So this October why not turn away from the tablet and the TV and engage in some traditional entertainment? You can pick up a programme for the festival at outlets throughout the city, or see the full programme [here](#).

Tickets may be booked either through the Scottish Storytelling Centre’s Box Office (0131 556 9579, sisf.org.uk) or, where appropriate, at partner and regional venues’ own booking outlets – full details in the brochure.

