

Guitarist brings Letters for Peace to Leith and Linlithgow

St James Scottish Episcopal Church in Leith and the recently refurbished St Peter's Church on Linlithgow High Street will offer suitably calm and reflective settings for guitarist and composer Graeme Stephen's Letters for Peace as he reprises this acclaimed Fringe 2018 performance this month.

Aberdeen-born, Edinburgh-based Stephen wrote Letters for Peace, which he plays in Leith on Friday 12th April and in Linlithgow on Friday 26th April, after coming across a book about First World War conscientious objectors while on tour in Wales.

"I found the stories of these people really moving," he says. "They were vilified at the time but the statistics of that war, which was supposed to end all wars, made their stance all the braver and more principled to me."

Almost twenty thousand British troops were killed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme in 1916 and some 700,000 died in a conflict that, between 1914 and 1918 claimed over sixteen million military deaths and thirty-seven million lives in total around the world.

Letters for Peace uses these figures in a multi-media hymn to the futility of war that's written for guitar and string trio. It also features the voice of Stephen's wife, the Romanian

singer-songwriter Lizabett Russo while photos and words are projected on an overhead screen.

The piece was first performed as part of the Made in Scotland strand of the Fringe last August, when it received glowing reviews, and it has gone on to further acclaim at the annual Sound festival in Stephen's native Aberdeen.

Its performance in two churches is coincidental but appropriate, says Stephen.

"Letters for Peace isn't overtly religious," says Stephen. "But it seems apt to be playing it in these churches which have opened their doors to non-religious music and offer two great settings for reflection."

The guitarist, who has become known across the UK and further afield for his composing skills and has made a specialty of creating new soundtracks to classic silent films, has appeared in both churches recently.

"I was fortunate enough to play at St James in February with the Playtime Quartet and to open the St Peter's music series, which presents folk and world music as well as jazz, with the poet and guitarist Don Paterson," he says. "They're both great listening spaces with really attentive and appreciative audiences and St Peter's in Linlithgow has been beautifully restored. It's very Greek in style inside and a real treat to play music in."

