

365 : Stories + Music – collaborative creation for Celtic Connections and beyond

Combining the creative work of author James Robertson and folk musician Aidan O'Rourke this performance at Celtic Connections in January 2020 is only one aspect of their work as you will read below.

The stories were written by James Robertson when he set himself the challenge of writing a short story every day for 365 days. Each story had to be 365 words long. Penguin published the stories in 2014.

The music has been written by Aidan O'Rourke who heard about the stories and decided to write a tune every day in response. So now there are 365 tunes.



Aidan O'Rourke and James Robertson with Kit Downes behind PHOTO Genevieve Stevenson

The concert featuring both music and stories will take place on 2 February 2020 at the Mackintosh Church in Glasgow. O'Rourke will be joined by Kit Downes on harmonium and piano, Sorren Maclean on guitar and James Robertson will read his own words on stage alongside Tam Dean Burn, Gerda Stevenson and Iona Zajac.

There is an art installation designed by Yann Seznec to house the collection of stories and music which will be on display in the foyer of the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall during the festival. This is a work of art in itself made of wood and brass. There are no digital screens visible.

The installation was commissioned by Edinburgh International Book Festival and it will tour to Linlithgow Palace and the Scottish International Storytelling Festival next year.

Aidan O'Rourke said: "This project was never meant to be quite so... public! Nobody was necessarily going to hear any of it.

That wasn't the point. My 365 tune cycle started as an entirely personal writing exercise – to see what might happen if I imposed a daily writing ritual upon myself. I read James's stories; I felt a tangible connection. I loved how succinct and emotive he could be with his words. I appreciated the power of his understatement, of saying less in a world when everyone seems to be shouting more. I wondered whether there might be a musical parallel.

“The older I get, the more quietly I seem to want to play, James warned me off setting myself such an absurdly epic task. He already knew the pitfalls. But I'm driven by a creative challenge– or maybe I'm just a glutton for punishment – and so for a year, these tunes became the punctuation and grammar of my everyday. I had to force myself out of my comfort zone because default settings sound pretty hackneyed after a week or two. And now the cycle has grown and spiralled. It's been mind-expanding working with Kit and James, both of whom take me in directions I would never go without them”.

James Robertson said: “I love the way the 365 project has built new layers of creativity and performance on my original collection of stories. It's been a total joy and privilege to work with these talented musicians, and I am still astonished that my words have provoked such a rich range of responses in Aidan's compositions. Then there is the installation, a thing of beauty in itself, and all the readers who have lifted the stories off the page, adding such a range of voices and moods. It's been a huge collaborative effort but also great fun, and I am just grateful to be part of it”.

365: Music + Stories created in partnership with Edinburgh International Book Festival, with support from Creative Scotland, PRS for Music Foundation's The Open Fund, the University of Glasgow's Scottish Literature department, BBC Scotland, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Scottish Poetry Library, An Tobar, Reveal Records and Penguin Books.

Meantime in case you can't wait until next year you can subscribe to have a daily story and tune delivered to your inbox. This is free of charge and is regarded as a daily miniature piece of public art.

Tickets for *365 featuring Aidan O'Rourke & James Robertson* at Celtic Connections are available now via www.celticconnections.com

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