

All Edinburgh Festivals cancelled in 2020

Now we know that these are very strange times indeed.

Our Edinburgh Festivals which bring such life and brightness to Edinburgh each summer in August, will not take place this year.

An announcement from all of the festivals was released this morning, and all directors express the same sadness and hope for future years.

This is the first time in over 70 years that there will not be any shows taking place during the five festivals. We don't really need to tell you that this is due to concerns around the Covid-19 pandemic.

Usually there are 5,000 events in Scotland's capital each summer, with audiences of 4.4 million and over 25,000 artists, writers and performers from 70 countries. This is the second biggest cultural event in the world, second only to The Olympics.

Edinburgh Art Festival, The Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Edinburgh International Book Festival, Edinburgh International Festival and The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo will not take place in 2020.



Fiona Hyslop photographed at the opening night of Edinburgh International Festival at Tynecastle in 2019 Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com

Culture Secretary Fiona Hyslop said: "I completely understand and support the very difficult decision the festivals have had

to take by cancelling this year's events.

"Edinburgh's Festivals in the spring and summer are a huge asset to Scotland's international reputation. They reach audiences around the world and make a major contribution to our economy and society.

"The cancellation of the festivals will no doubt be a major loss and they will be missed greatly in 2020. But in taking this difficult decision now, everyone involved in the festivals, from staff to spectators, will be able to fully focus on their health and wellbeing which is critical during this time of great uncertainty.

"I am committed to looking into support for seasonal staff who will suffer some of the greatest impact. The Scottish Government will work with the festivals and all partners to ensure they can build on their previous success and return to the stage in 2021."

The festivals' history stretches back to 1947, where in the aftermath of the Second World War the Edinburgh International Festival was founded to reconcile and reunite people and nations through art, in an event that transcended political and cultural boundaries. Many years later the International Festival continues to present the world's leading theatre, dance and music artists in Edinburgh's magnificent venues.

The Fringe story began when eight theatre groups turned up uninvited to perform on the fringes of the very first International Festival. Since the dawn of this spontaneous artistic movement, millions have flocked to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe to produce, and to enjoy art of every genre.

The Edinburgh International Book Festival began in 1983 and has grown rapidly in scope and size, welcoming writers from all over the world to exchange ideas on some of the world's most pressing issues.



In happier times Nick Barley Director of Edinburgh International Book Festival 2019 PHOTO John Preece
The Edinburgh International Book Festival is now one of those which has been cancelled. In earlier days we might have made a quip about this allowing the grass in Charlotte Square to grow back, but all of these lighthearted comments are probably just too much for most to bear at the present time.

Nick Barley, Director, Edinburgh International Book Festival said: "It is with great sadness that I can confirm that the Edinburgh International Book Festival will not take place as a physical entity in August of this year due to the risks surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. This is not a decision we have taken lightly, however the safety of not only our authors, our audiences, our staff and our suppliers, but also that of the people who live and work in our wonderful city, is of paramount importance and we believe that planning to bring large numbers of people from all over the world together in Edinburgh in August is not appropriate this year. We hope to be able to programme a series of online events to take place in the summer.

"We will be back! The Edinburgh International Book Festival is an integral part of the Scottish cultural offering, and we will return next year. We are already looking forward to authors and audiences coming together to celebrate the written word in 2021. In the meantime, please keep reading and please keep supporting your local independent bookshops, many of whom are offering a mail order or door drop delivery service."

The youngest of the August festivals, Edinburgh Art Festival was founded in 2004 to provide a platform for the visual arts, each year bringing together the capital's leading galleries, museums and artist-run spaces to present work by international and UK artists.



Director of Edinburgh Art Festival Sorcha Carey

Sorcha Carey, Director, Edinburgh Art Festival said: "It is with deep sadness that today we announce the cancellation of Edinburgh Art Festival 2020. Our decision is taken in response to the ongoing risks posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the need to prioritise the safety of our audiences, artists, participants, staff and indeed all those working to combat coronavirus.

"While it has become impossible to deliver a festival this year, we remain fully committed to doing all we can to continue to support our visual arts community during what is going to be a hugely challenging time in the weeks and months to come.

"We hope that it will be possible for galleries, museums and production spaces across the city to reopen their doors in the coming months. In the meantime, we will work creatively to find alternative ways to share the work of artists with audiences.

"We will be back next year – as always working closely with our partner galleries, and alongside our extended network of sister festivals, to celebrate the work of artists with audiences and communities across the city."

Since their visionary beginnings the August festivals have presented the very best established and emerging artists from all corners of the globe and across all aspects of the performing, literary and visual arts in what has become the most significant and important celebration of culture anywhere in the world.

Shona McCarthy, Chief Executive, Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society said: "It's heart-breaking that the Fringe and our sister August festivals will not take place as planned this summer. However, having taken advice and considered all the options, we collectively believe this is the only appropriate

response.

“The safety of participants, audiences, local residents and indeed everyone connected to our festivals will always come first. Our thoughts today are with the doctors, nurses, health and social care professionals on the front line, as well as all those affected by this dreadful pandemic. Our sympathies too are with the thousands of artists and participants directly affected by today’s decision – we will do everything we can to support you over the coming months.

“Culture brings out the best in us. It gives the marginalised a voice, it shapes and reshapes how we think of ourselves and, crucially, it unites us. Since their inception in 1947 the Edinburgh festivals have existed to champion the flowering of the human spirit and, in the face of this truly unprecedented global emergency, we believe that this spirit is needed now more than ever.”



Vikki Allan of Aberdeen Standard Investments, Fergus Linehan Director of Edinburgh International Festival, Anna Meredith Composer and Richard Slaney of 59 Productions ahead of the Five Telegrams opening at the Usher Hall in 2018

Fergus Linehan, Festival Director, Edinburgh International Festival said: “We are hugely disappointed to announce this cancellation but given the current outlook we believe it is the correct decision. We recognise that Edinburgh’s festivals play a very important role in the cultural, social and economic lives of our city and country, and this decision has not been taken lightly. Our thoughts are with all the country’s key workers and we hope that we can celebrate your heroic efforts when this awful pandemic has passed.

“The Edinburgh International Festival was born out of adversity – an urgent need to reconnect and rebuild. The current crisis presents all at the Festival with a similar sense of urgency. Work begins straight away on a 2021 Festival

season that will boost both our spirits and our economy.

“As we observe our essential social distancing we can, I hope, look forward to being back together soon: sharing brilliant music, theatre, dance, literature and art from the greatest creative minds of our time. Until then, thank you for all your good wishes and keep safe in the coming months.”



Brigadier David Allfrey Chief Executive The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo PHOTO The Edinburgh Reporter

Conceived in 1950 the iconic major event, now known as The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, brings together a huge cast of international military and folkloric performers to perform live to 220,000 visitors each August, with many millions watching the show on BBC TV around the world.

Brigadier David Allfrey MBE, Chief Executive, The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo said:“Like most people, businesses and institutions, The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo has been working hard to adapt to the unprecedented conditions occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“In the first instance, we have sought to comply carefully with Government advice and guidance in looking after our customers, staff, suppliers, stakeholders and all those who rely on our annual success and charity. In addition, we have been looking at how best to make a wider and constructive contribution to the national, regional, municipal and individual effort.

“The pandemic is impacting across the world, the Tattoo – along with other major events and festivals – will need to carefully understand and adapt to whatever is our new normal.

“We are keen to do this as a great many people have come to rely on our annual routines for their livelihood and their entertainment, with an associated benefit that stretches internationally and across Scottish and UK tourism. Now

though, we judge it is impractical and undesirable to stage a Tattoo in anything like its normal form in August.

“Accordingly, we have decided – for the first time in our 70-year history – to cancel our 25 shows set previously for the period 7–29 August 2020.”

The Assembly Festival is also putting its plans on ice. A spokesperson said: “This means that as of today we will be taking shows off sale and automatically refunding any ticket purchases made for the 2020 Assembly Festival minus booking fees.

“Whilst the immediate future is uncertain, we are optimistic that the pioneering spirit of the Fringe will continue.



Anthony Alderson Director of Pleasance PHOTO John Preece
Anthony Alderson, Director of the Pleasance, said: “Our primary concern is for public safety. In light of the current risk to public health, and with so much uncertainty about future risk, we firmly believe there is no alternative but to suspend any plans. We also want to avoid the significant financial liabilities that performers and visiting companies could have by going forward.

“I sincerely thank and congratulate all of those artists that have spent so long creating such incredible work. We truly hope that it has not been in vain. Our programme is curated with works that excite and challenge us – this remains the case. These artists continue to be part of the Pleasance family and, whether it is in London or Edinburgh, we would be delighted to continue discussing future opportunities.

“In time, when restrictions are lifted and life returns to a new kind of normality, we will reopen and once again capture that undefinable Fringe spirit that embodies all those who perform with us, work with us and visit us. Our London theatre’s doors will open as soon as we’re able and we will

return to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe galvanised within a renewed purpose. We will establish new ways to support artists and even better routes to help audiences discover them. We will thrill, amaze, provoke and entertain. We will persevere. We hope we can do this together.”

Council Leader Adam McVey and Depute Cammy Day said:“This was a profoundly difficult decision– leaving a massive gap in our Capital – but clearly it was the right one. Our thoughts are very much with all those fantastic artists, writers, performers and organisations who were working so hard to prepare for another busy festival season.

“The most important consideration is the health of our residents and the safety of everyone in the City. We’re all working closely together as a city and internationally with the common purpose of protecting each other, whilst taking up our shared responsibility for planning towards our recovery.

“With that in mind, we’re looking at every feasible option to help to sustain our key sectors, including the festivals, and have committed to honouring all grant payments due to our cultural partners for the current year, and to the repurposing of these, as required. We’ll do everything we can to assist our world-renowned cultural sector to remain at the centre of the city’s identity going forward.

“We’re incredibly proud to be known as the world’s Festival City and must never forget the positive contribution our festivals make to our lives, bringing art to Edinburgh in a way no other city enjoys. We’ll continue to work with all of our citizens, colleagues and stakeholders to do everything we can to make sure we come through 2020 and look forward to again bringing the world to Edinburgh and Edinburgh to the world for our summer festivals in 2021!”



Virgin Money Fireworks 2019 – Edinburgh International Festival. Photo: Martin P. McAdam www.martinmcadam.com