

Scotland's second ever poetry festival launches hybrid program

Scotland's newest and most boundary-bending poetry festival, Push The Boat Out (PTBO), launched its online and hybrid offer today, October 1st in Edinburgh.

Taking place from the 15 – 17 October 2021 within the creative hub of Summerhall, Push The Boat Out will be the second poetry festival ever to be held in Scotland and has already been making waves for its mission to change perceptions of poetry.

Named after the poem "At Eighty" by the first Scottish makar Edwin Morgan, PTBO is inspired by the vibrancy and range of contemporary poetry, hip hop and spoken word and creates an environment where all variations of this vital artform are encouraged to grow, evolve and even collide. The festival is directed by Jenny Niven (Former head of literature Creative Scotland and Acting Director Edinburgh International Book Festival), and was co founded by Jenny Niven and Kevin Williamson (Rebel Inc, Neu Reekie!).



Push the boat Out's Jenny Niven and Kevin Williamson © 2021
Louise Montgomery (*this and top image*)

The flagship project of the hybrid offer from PTBO is 'A Poetry Mile' an unique project which saw 23 leading poets commissioned to produce more than 70 brand new poems relating to locations within a square mile of Summerhall. The poems

have been built into an app which custom generates walking tours of some of Edinburgh's most iconic locations, from the Scottish Parliament (where users hear spoken word poet Leyla Josephine's devastating response to the Alex Salmond allegations) to the Sheep Heid Inn (where Michael Pederson recounts his time there as a skittle boy).

Users determine the type of experience they'd like to have, from 'melancholy' to 'historical' to 'queer poetry' and are served a bespoke audio map to follow. Each poem is read by the poet themselves, creating hundreds of possible individual audio tours.

The project, supported by James and Morag Anderson, and the Futures Institute at Edinburgh University, offers an original, contemporary take on a modern, complex city and features poets such as Edwin Morgan prize winner Alycia Pirmohamed, spoken word icon Hollie McNish and three Edinburgh city makers, Christine de Luca, Alan Spence and recently anointed Hannah Lavery.

Totally covid safe, the app can be enjoyed on foot, promoting the mental health benefits of walking, or from anywhere, online (an idea which appealed to the Futures Institute for students planning to come to Edinburgh). The project is Push the Boat Out's innovative imagining of what a truly hybrid festival, born in covid times, might look like and proudly supported poets to create new work during difficult times.





Push the Boat Out – Ellen Renton and Leyla Josephine

Poetry rabble rouser Michael Pederson will host a bespoke Poetry Mile walk, lunch and game of skittles at Scotland's oldest surviving public house, The Sheep Heid Inn, as part of the festival. Michael Pederson says:

'Edinburgh is a city buoyed by poetry – poetic sentiment is the cement that clasps together its ancient rock; is what

marbles the sea hair, and propels the gelid the wind that pummels our bodies, spilling down a deep fissure for a quick getaway; it's the butt of the joke brewing in its underbelly. Of course, the only real way to map this City is by poetry, by voices, by visitants, by denizens. Ordnance Survey is over, The Poetry Mile is here – tread careful & trust no-one (but us).'

Julia Sorensen, PTBO comms manager and poet laureate of St Albert, Edmonton, Canada said: 'A Poetry Mile feels like a collection of secrets. It's not that poems are things we should've kept to ourselves – it's the opposite – it's just that there's been no space to tell them yet. A Poetry Miles gives poets a place to share personal and specifically-located stories through their work, and the poems help users discover – or re-discover – the city afresh.

Dr Patricia Erskine, Culture & Community Director, Edinburgh Futures Institute said: "Nothing conjures up a sense of place quite like a poem. The wonderful new poems in A Poetry Mile will evoke warm feelings, engage your senses, draw out hidden memories and create some new ones.



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At the Edinburgh Futures Institute, we challenge, create and make change happen. So it has been incredibly exciting to support Push The Boat Out as they created this extraordinary digital project. The poems and walks may chime with us or they may change how we think about the city, its buildings and its green spaces. Whether it's your first time or you've walked the routes many times before, the poems are sure to inspire anyone who wants to walk A Poetry Mile in Edinburgh, in person or online."

Today PTBO also announce our wider online offer, with a range of events streamed live, offered on catch up, or developed into podcasts which will be released immediately following the festival. These include partner events with leading Scottish literary organisations Scottish BAME Writers Network, Gutter Magazine, Shoreline of Infinity and Stewed Rhubarb press. A one of kind bespoke sign language poetry workshop is offered by Chinese filmmaker and poet Yi Ru.

All online events are free.

Completing the festival's accessibility offer is a series of free events, including Artists' talks with Alec Findlay, Sean Wai Keung and Pip Thornton, and sessions showcasing the work developed in partnership with leading reading charity, Open Book Reading.



'Push the Boat Out' Festival launch, The Watershed, Union Canal, Edinburgh, 8th Sept. 2021

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Jenny Niven, director of Push The Boat Out, said: "With the festival born during, and in some ways in response to, covid times, we've been thinking since the beginning about how to keep innovating and creating, and make vibrant contemporary poetry as accessible as we can in these unusual circumstances.

"We're really pleased to be able to offer such a wide selection of our events available to anyone who can't physically come to Summerhall – as well as our lovely Poetry Mile app which you can use from absolutely anywhere. Nonetheless we can't wait to be "

Access [a poetry mile here](#)

For the full programme visit: <https://shows.pushtheboatout.org/>