

# Surprise guest at St Mary's Music School Spring Concert

Alexander McCall Smith made a surprise appearance at the St Mary's Music School Spring Concert when he read aloud his poem *On Calton Hill*.

This was a prelude to the premiere performance of the latest composition for the national music school's Seven Hills Project.

Mr McCall Smith has written a collection of seven poems to reflect the character of the seven hills of Edinburgh and seven composers (all with links to the School) have been commissioned to each write a musical response to one of the hills and the corresponding poem.

Neil Tòmas Smith's composition *Enlightenment*, inspired by Calton Hill and Mr McCall Smith's poem, is the third in the series to be produced for the project, which was launched to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St Mary's Music School and culminates at a celebratory concert performed by pupils in 2023.

Neil Tòmas Smith said: "There are few hills so full of meaning as Calton Hill. It has a rather mighty legacy to try and reflect in a piece of music. Yet, there seemed to be a common

thread in much of what the hill was known for: curiosity, scientific exploration and enlightenment ideals (notwithstanding a rather more anarchic, nocturnal set of narratives). This was and is a place from which people look out to the world, and to space, to learn more about their surroundings and position. Enlightenment, then, became the theme of the work.”

A former pupil of St Mary’s Music School, Neil dedicated his composition to his teacher Tom David Wilson, who composed the second piece for the Seven Hills Project, *Imagined Conversation on Blackford Hill*.

Commenting on the Spring Concert, which took place at St Mary’s Cathedral in Edinburgh, Dr Kenneth Taylor, Headteacher, St Mary’s Music School, added: “Everyone at St Mary’s Music School looks forward to our Spring Concert. It is important for our young musicians to have the opportunity to perform in public and we were delighted to include the new composition by Neil Tòmas Smith. The Seven Hills Project is a major celebration of new composition and performance which has really captured the imagination of our pupils. The latest piece has a special resonance, not least because the Old Royal High School on Calton Hill will be the School’s new home.”



Alexander McCall Smith and composer Neil Tòmas Smith