

Edinburgh International Book Festival 2022 – a review

It was my first opportunity to fully absorb the book festival in its temporary site at the Edinburgh Art College.

Yes, it has a lot to live up to with Charlotte Square but the 2022 experience was more than satisfying. The Art College has fought its corner well in light of some criticism. Perhaps the highlight for me was the author and poet Jenni Fagan who summoned that old Book Festival magic. In conversation with Sally Magnusson for the event 'Geillis Duncan Has a Broomstick' the discussion turned to the North Berwick witch trials and the recently published paperback edition *Hex*. It's very much a book about male power with an axe to grind. Women who had money, inheritance, agency and of course power would draw attention from men that could dispose of them through any means necessary but mainly by drawing on superstition and hearsay. Fagan encourages us to think about what the truth is, can we trust historical accounts? Through art, she endeavours to make a kind of communion with her subject Geillis Duncan and the audience. Fagan questioned the harmful power of information and the constant feed of negativity and bad news through mainstream television and radio. She also spoke of her struggle with Covid and a sense of facing mortality as many did during the pandemic.



Jenni Fagan PHOTO Richard Purden

Another highlight was PJ Harvey who brought life to her folkloric horror tale Orlam. Read by Harvey the intensity of her Dorset accent brought the poetry to life creating a potent sense of atmosphere when summoning the mythological UNDERWHELEM and the language and superstitions of the West Country. The humour and language are bawdy, strange and at times intoxicating. Harvey was an engaging presence, although it was sometimes hard to hear the questions asked by her fellow poet and mentor Don Paterson who seemed completely absorbed by Harvey and the sense of the moment.



Jarvis Cocker PHOTO Richard Purden

Jarvis Cocker also put in an appearance to promote *Good Pop Bad Pop: An Inventory* about the contents of his loft. Cocker has made a brilliant career post Pulp as a radio presenter on shows such as Radio 4's *Wireless Nights*, he's won much acclaim for his collaborations with the likes of Chilly Gonzales on the album *Room 29*, the song cycle about a room at the Chateau Marmont. He brought the live version of the show to Edinburgh for an EIF performance in 2017 returning in 2019 to the Leith Theatre when presenting the live experience for *JARV IS* at the Leith Theatre. So something of a festival veteran his book festival appearance attracts long-term Pulp fans and enthusiasts of his later output. *Good Pop Bad Pop* makes for an entertaining discussion concerning a random collection of items such as photos, tickets, clothes and other artefacts that have linked the singer's life and career. An audience question centred on the possible closure of The Leadmill, the longest-running live music venue in the singer's hometown of

Sheffield. Yet again another live music venue is under threat suggesting how much our cultural lives destroyed for profit.



Kevin Bridges PHOTO Richard Purden

As Kevin Bridges prepares to go on the road again he arrived in Edinburgh to chat about his new novel *The Black Dog*. Influenced by the likes of Irvine Welsh, Bridges spoke about the importance of the *Trainspotting* author in getting young working-class men to read citing it as the first book he ever read. He also pointed to the language and dialect of James Kelman in making an impact on the lockdown project. More personally he admitted considering leaving the stand-up scene when spending some time in Madrid to get some time and space away from the spotlight.



Irvine Welsh – Edinburgh International Book Festival – Day 17,
Edinburgh School of Art, 29th Aug 2022

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Edinburgh International Book Festival – Day 1, Edinburgh
School of Art, 13th Aug 2022
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