

# **Fergus Linehan and his “substantial legacy” honoured at civic reception**

**Robert Aldridge, the Rt Hon Lord Provost, welcomed the tenth Director of the Edinburgh International Festival, along with his family, to a civic reception at the City Chambers on Sunday.**

The Lord Provost mentioned that “throughout his term Fergus has steered the mighty ship that is the International Festival and represented our cultural capital with passion, dedication and always with a great deal of humility”.



Fergus Linehan, Hannah Lavery, Edinburgh Makar and Robert Aldridge, Rt. Hon. Lord Provost. Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)

The Lord Provost referred to his own predecessor, John Falconer who, as Lord Provost in 1947, wished that the festival should be a “platform for the flowering of the human spirit with underpinning principles to promote international understanding and tolerance through an annual celebration of artistic excellence from around the world”. His statement marked the beginning of the Edinburgh Festival as we now know it in all its forms.

Mr Linehan addressed the invited audience at The City Chambers saying: “The role of John Falconer as Lord Provost should never be underestimated. The continued centrality within our governance system of the Lord Provost and the city is absolutely key to the success and endurance of the festival.”

He thanked many of the people in the room, council officers who he had worked with and also gave special mention to Steve Cardownie a former council leader and Culture Convener and Amy

McNeese-Mechan, who was Vice Convener of Culture in the last administration, saying they were “great champions of the festival”.

He referred to his own predecessor Jonathan Mills and the generous way Mills had welcomed him to the role eight years ago, but said that it took him a few years to shake off the term “new” when people talked about him. He admitted there was a little window between being the new, and now the outgoing, director. Linehan finishes his term at the end of this Festival.

Linehan continued: “The truth is that this job has a habit of defining us. It becomes the high point of our career and leaves an indelible mark on us for the rest of our professional lives.”

Linehan and his young family are moving to Australia in a few weeks, and he admitted leaving would be tough. He said: “Like all cities Edinburgh has its problems, but we have felt a sense of community and support which will stay with us for the rest of our lives. It has certainly defined our children, Billy and Bella, and leaving Edinburgh is very hard.”

He mused that the festival is “incredibly ephemeral” and when it is taken away we realise we can’t do without it. He said: “There is a moment on the day after the festival when it just all seems to dissolve miraculously, to change into smoke. The city just returns to a different kind of beat for another year.”

Quoting Shakespeare from *The Tempest* was an appropriate end to his short speech:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits and  
Are melted into air, into thin air:  
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,

The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.



Fergus Linehan, Director of Edinburgh International Festival.  
Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)  
The Lord Provost said: “Fergus’ tenure comes to an end at the

height of his powers, as the milestone of the 75th festival is reached. He has clearly used that opportunity to return the event to its absolute best. This is testament to Fergus and his highly professional team in securing high calibre performers to our city and to the high quality composers and musicians who have provided world-leading performances.”

The Lord Provost said it is normal to look back when someone is leaving a post and ask what their achievements are and what their legacy is. He said there are many in the case of Linehan whose handprints, for example, are immortalised in stone outside the City Chambers.

He described Linehan’s contributions to the local and international festivals as profound: “He introduced a large scale free event to celebrate the opening of the Edinburgh International Festival and the city’s summer festival season. The event attracts huge audiences and provides a new way for the festival to engage with underrepresented audiences and to establish partnerships. He has introduced contemporary music as a new strand in the International Festival programme and has been a driving force in reenergising Leith Theatre and presenting a full programme of international festival performances in the venue every year.

“He insisted that the International Festival should be relevant to the citizens of Edinburgh, translating to growth in the festivals’ learning and engagement programme with community and schools projects and commitment to two long term residencies with Castlebrae Community High School and Leith Academy.

“The list goes on, but of course as Co-chair of Impact Scotland he has had a hugely influential role in leading the negotiations and fundraising to create the new purpose built concert hall for Edinburgh, the Dunard Centre which is well on its way following planning approval last year.”



Edinburgh also honoured Mr Linehan with The Edinburgh Award 2021 which recognises an innovative contribution to Edinburgh's arts and culture heritage, and former Lord Provost, Frank Ross, presented Fergus with an engraved Loving Cup at a civic event in the same room.



Fergus Linehan winner of The Edinburgh Award 2021

The Lord Provost concluded: "Most of us will consider your greatest achievements and therefore your legacy for the time spent leading the International Festival as fourfold:

- securing the very best international artists
- extending the city's strong hand of friendship to a global audience
- maximising access for all across our city and
- strengthening community engagement.

"This is a really substantial legacy, and one I am sure which will inspire those who follow. In bringing the curtain down on your tenure, on behalf of civic and civil Edinburgh and all at The City of Edinburgh Council I congratulate you for your

tremendous contribution and legacy to our global cultural capital. I wish you all the very best as you move to pursue other interests. And, I look forward to continuing the city's collaboration with the 11th Director of the Edinburgh International Festival as it moves into the highly capable hands of Nicola Benedetti, CBE, as she becomes the first female and first Scot in the post."

Edinburgh Makar, Hannah Lavery recited a poem written in Linehan's honour of which this is a small extract:

"A city of imagination burned in the haar, a stage for the world and you invited a wond'rous caravan, a tent burstin' at the seams, a circus and you its ringleader, its champion, champion of aw the stuff of living, of aw the stuff of dreams, and you did us proud..."



Hannah Lavery, Edinburgh Makar. Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)





Billy, Fergus, Bella and Sophie Linehan and Robert Aldridge, Rt. Hon. Lord Provost. Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)



Fergus Linehan, Hannah Lavery and Robert Aldridge, Rt. Hon. Lord Provost. Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)



Hannah Lavery, Edinburgh Maker. Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)





Fergus Linehan Director of the Edinburgh International Festival Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)



Robert Aldridge, Rt. Hon. Lord Provost. Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)



Robert Aldridge the Rt Hon Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh with Fergus Linehan Director of the Edinburgh International Festival Photo: © 2022, Martin P. McAdam [www.martinmcadam.com](http://www.martinmcadam.com)





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