

Storytelling Festival first will feature new work inspired by Craiglockhart Hill

St Mary's Music School commissioned a new work by multi-award winning Scottish composer, Ailie Robertson, and it is this work which will be played for the first time at this year's Scottish International Storytelling Festival (SISF) celebrating female composers and their relationship with place.

The piece, *Dottyville*, for violin and cello will be performed by GAIA Duo musicians Katrina Lee and Alice Allen and was inspired by Edinburgh's Craiglockhart Hill.



It is the fifth of seven new music commissions by St Mary's Music School's Seven Hills Project which has brought together seven composers with links to the School to write a work inspired by the topography of one of Edinburgh's seven hills and the corresponding 'hill' poem by Alexander McCall Smith. *Dottyville* draws on Ailie's distinct blend of traditional and contemporary music to capture the restorative nature of Craiglockhart Hill to the 'soul-injured' who

recuperated in the nearby veterans' hospital.

The concert, *Landscapes and Dances, Songs She Scored Out*, takes place at Canongate Kirk on Wednesday 26 October at 7.30pm. The one-hour concert has been developed in collaboration between St Mary's Music School, the Scottish International Storytelling Festival, Robertson and GAIA Duo. In addition to Ailie Robertson's new work it features music by Rebecca Clark, Elizabeth Maconchy and music by anonymised historical Scottish female composers of the 1850s – the names of these women were often scored out with black pen – which will be performed by junior pupils of St Mary's Music School. All of the works tell musical stories about surrounding landscapes, geographic and cultural, by female composers, each with a different experience of their 'place' in their surrounding musical landscape.

Ailie Robertson, who has composed works for some of the world's most prestigious cultural institutions including the BBC Proms and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, was the 2018-21 composer in residence for Sound Scotland and Glyndebourne Opera. Commenting on the premiere of *Dottyville*, and working in the unique collaboration with Scotland's national music school and the Storytelling Festival, she said:

"The idea for entitling my piece 'Dottyville' comes from the poet Siegfried Sassoon. Craiglockhart Hospital was one of the most famous shell-shock treatment centres, set up after the battle of the Somme in 1916. Two of the finest war poets were treated there—Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. It was Sassoon who nicknamed the place 'Dottyville' in a letter of 1917."



Valerie Pearson, Head of Strings at St Mary's Music School is leading the Seven Hills Project, which celebrates new music composition and performance as part of the build-up to the School's 50th anniversary in 2023.

She added: "There was always an idea to bring Ailie's piece into the SISF but I didn't imagine how naturally things would develop. It has been wonderful working with Donald Smith (Director of SISF), Ailie Robertson and GAIA Duo to shape this programme together. They share an artistry for connecting tradition to the now – harnessing the qualities and preciousness of the past in refreshing ways that push tradition forward and keep it relevant today and tomorrow.

"It is this blend of the classical and contemporary that I hope to achieve in this event and in the Seven Hills Project as a whole – the core aims of the Seven Hills Project are about celebrating Scotland, the School's home, and Scottish new music. We deliberately focused on female composers because their voices felt most relevant now. It has been a great

opportunity to build partnerships with different areas of the arts world that create new links to classical music, which is very much part of the school's forward thinking."

Landscapes and Dances, Songs She Scored Out tickets £10 full price £8 concessions under 18s free. Available via St Mary's Music School website. www.stmarysmusicschool.co.uk

www.sisf.org.uk

