

# Edinburgh International Festival – festival first for Benedetti

This year is the first that Nicola Benedetti has been in charge of the event as Festival Director.

As a celebrated violinist she knows a great deal about music and the arts, but she has posed a question as the title for this year's festival – where do we go from here?

The question is itself a response by Ms Benedetti after reading some of the works written by the late Martin Luther King Jr who believed that no matter what their circumstances people have a capacity to unite.

The festival will ask how the arts and their transformative powers can impact most on society today. There are three strands to the programme inviting audiences to consider matters such as identity, community and resilience.



Dancer Millie Thomas performs outside The Hub, the Edinburgh International Festival HQ to mark the festival programme launch. PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

Ms Benedetti said: “After we have celebrated 75 years of our Festival, we now enter into a new phase of redefining, together, where we go next.”

It would have been easy for the violinist to simply collate this festival with a bunch of friends, but although there are many people on the programme she admires, Benedetti was quick to point out what she was trying to do. She said: “Obviously, there’s a lot of people you’ll see in this year’s programme that I know personally and have admired for many, many years from Gustavo Dudamel to a group called Geza & the 5 Devils to who’s closing our entire Usher Hall season, and Karina Canellakis the fantastic conductor.

“But it’s not really a job for me to invite my friends, you know, I’m solely focused on what is going to be best for the audiences, but looking also at the broad presentation that we’re trying to get across this summer and who best ignites and enlightens the question we’re asking, and also who has

that flexibility to look at different ways of communicating with audiences and bringing them very much deeper into what it is we present?"



Nicola Benedetti, CBE, the Director of Edinburgh International Festival announcing her first programme for the 2023 Edinburgh International Festival PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

There will be 295 separate events from 4 to 27 August with work from more than 2,000 local and international artists from 48 countries. Some of the artists are a surprise even though we have enjoyed more in the way of contemporary artists in recent years with former Director, Fergus Linehan, introducing the likes of Mogwai and Anna Meredith at opening events in past years.

There will be music, opera, dance and theatre featuring in the programme which the Director hopes will deliver the highest quality performances to the broadest possible audience.





Dancer Millie Thomas performs outside The Hub, the Edinburgh International Festival HQ to mark the festival programme launch. PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter

And there will be a mini Edinburgh International Film Festival amidst the programme, with final details being announced in June. Due to the collapse of their parent charity, Centre for the Moving Image, the festival is not standing on its own feet this year, but will be sheltering under the EIF umbrella.

We asked how that collaboration will work. The Director replied: "From the very beginning of taking on this role, it's been really important to me to look at ways that all the festivals can collaborate more. And in that sort of deeper conceptual sense, we're presenting something that sits alongside each other.

"We are part of one family – and a lot of people come to Edinburgh to dip in and out of many of the festivals. So in respect of what is a really tragic circumstance with the Film Festival, it is so wonderful to be able to collaborate with them in this way, that not only gives them a sort of practical support at this point, but it's also looking at ways from a

creative and curatorial standpoint that it's possible for festivals to collaborate. So I'm really excited to see how that functions."

She herself will be performing at the opening event, and at the Hub which has been reimagined this year. She said: "I will be taking out my violin only in the opening weekend- the opening celebration of music from all over the country that will be taking place in the gardens. And then I'll actually be playing here for the opening of the Hub Series. It'll be a really eclectic programme with lots of different artists, I won't be playing for the whole thing myself, but I'll be very much sort of taking part. Throughout the festival, I will be getting on stage a number of other times presenting concerts and just trying to feel out the back and forth between myself, between all of our artists and and the audience.

"I think I'm really asking Where do we go from here? on so many different levels, but the festival celebrated its 75th anniversary, it's a hallmark moment. And this is really the beginning of a new chapter, and I want us all to feel a part of that new chapter."

The Hub Series is a new concept and will feature a series of intimate concerts and events at the building almost at the top of The Royal Mile.

The Hub will be open in afternoons and some evenings when there are performances on with relays of concerts, open discussions, films and conversations with artists. The programme describes it in this way: "It's the Festival's Green Room that's open to all of us." It is here that you will find artists such as the Jupiter Ensemble a young group playing Baroque chamber music, Geza & The 5 DeVILs playing Hungarian gypsy music, violinist Catriona Price & Friends, Aly Bain and Phil Cunningham, Dame Evelyn Glennie in conversation, (the first time in 15 years Dame Evelyn will have appeared in Edinburgh) and some of the musicians from the Simón Bolívar

Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela.

Ms Benedetti explained how The Hub will feel like your own living room. She said: “The Hub is being totally reimagined for this summer. And it’s a really eclectic programme itself that’s going to be in the evenings and a lot of free activities during the day as well. But the vibe of the place is going to be one that’s incredibly unintimidating and welcoming for people. The space is going to really feel almost like you’re hybrid – in someone’s living room and in a formal concert venue. So it will be somewhere that’s going to feel welcoming, with slightly shorter performances, a lot of informality around performance, food and drink and things that people can just feel engaged in, and the art becomes a part of that whole social experience.”

Some of the performances from Usher Hall and The Queen’s Hall will be broadcast live on BBC Radio 3.



**We have whittled the [extensive programme](#) down to just a few events that we feel are not to be missed – some of these are free. But the variety of genres, events and shows is very wide and a full list can be picked up from many outlets in the city from today.**

**The Opening Celebration** on 6 August welcomes everyone to take part in the fun, with a free celebration of professional and community music-making from artists from across Scotland at a live music event in Princes Street Gardens.

**The Closing event** will take place in Charlotte Square Garden over the final weekend of 26 and 27 August. The garden will be opened to the public as a “musical oasis”, where a soundscape of recorded music from the International Festival classical music concerts can be enjoyed in a collective listening experience for all. Rather surprising to use this garden which was vacated by the Edinburgh International Book Festival in recent years, and using recorded music when the month will have been full of live events. And no mention of any fireworks. (When we asked Ms Benedetti about this she explained: “I think the idea for us is just a little bit more of a casual and social interaction with music. So things that you can happen upon. For some people, the notion of sitting still for an hour or two hours, that’s not for everyone. So we want to be able to still make the greatest of art available for those who would like it in more of a sort of fluid environment.”)

Two exceptional programmes will be performed by powerhouse

dance company, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater who have not been in Edinburgh since the 1960s. The performances showcase recent works from the company's dynamic choreographers as well as classic repertoire by founder, **Alvin Ailey**, including one piece featuring local Scottish dancers alongside the professional company.

**The Budapest Festival Orchestra** will perform Dvořák's Eighth Symphony at the Usher Hall on 8 August when Ms Benedetti will be presenting and will be conducted by Iván Fischer. Some of the seats in the Usher Hall will be removed and you might relax on a bean bag instead. The orchestra will mingle with the audience in an informal performance in the round.

**The Edinburgh International Film Festival** is back. The festival folded amid the administration of the parent charity the Centre for the Moving Image in October last year, and now the Filmhouse has been sold to Kevin Doyle's Caledonian Heritable for £2.65 million with more details about that expected this week. The bespoke film programme hosted by the Edinburgh International Festival will celebrate the work of exceptional local and global filmmakers and ensure that the "flame of EIFF burns bright for future generations of passionate cinema fans". The full programme will be announced in June.

In theatre three UK premieres from genre-defining stars of international theatre will be performed: **Barrie Kosky's *The Threepenny Opera*** from the **Berliner Ensemble**, Brazilian film and theatre director **Christiane Jatahy's *Dusk***, based on **Lars Von Trier's *Dogville***, and **Tiago Rodrigues' *As Far As Impossible***, recounting the everyday lives of humanitarian workers in war zones.

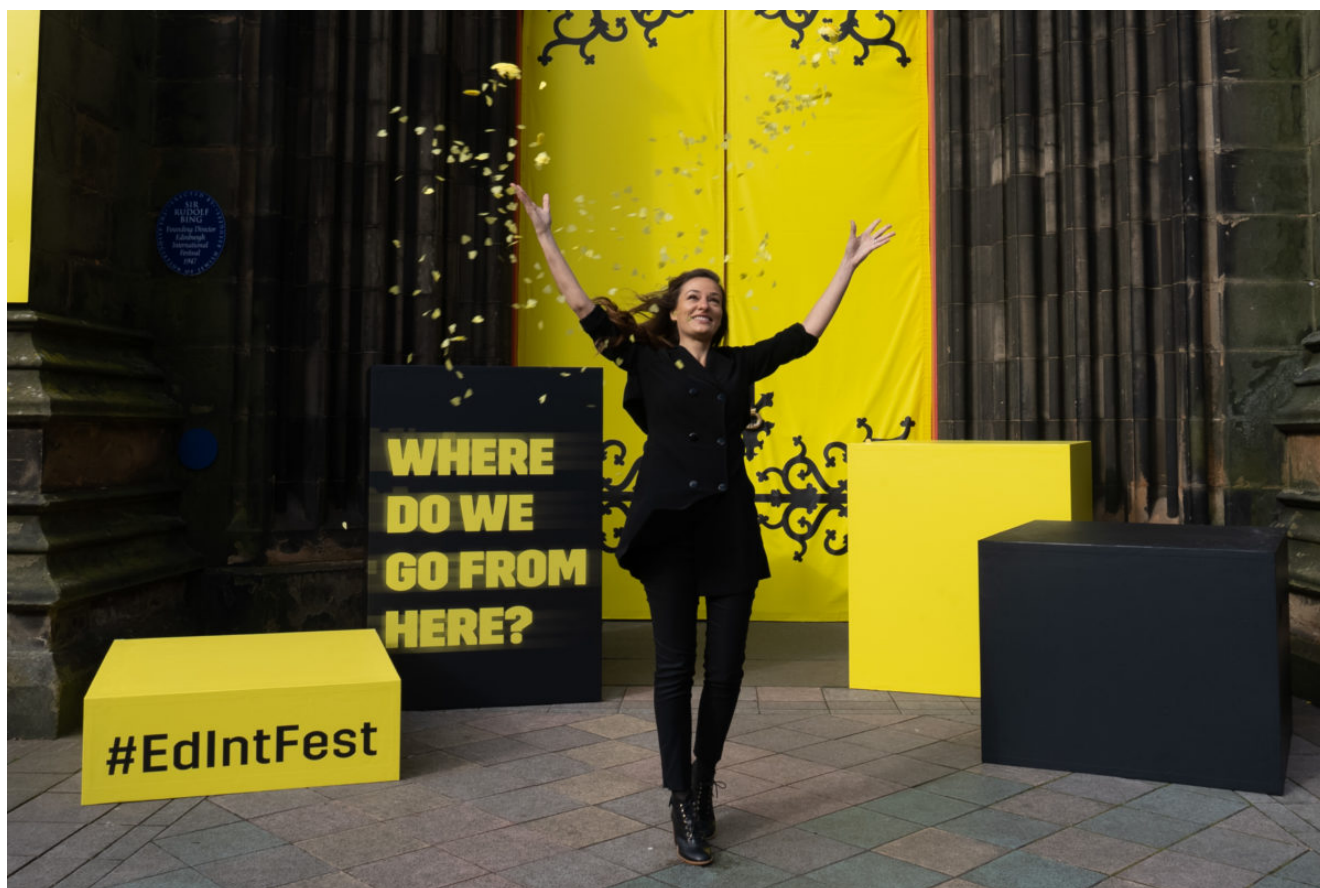
During the final week one of Latin America's greatest orchestras, the **Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela** will perform at the Usher Hall and at The Hub. Bringing their famed young ensemble of players, aged 18-25, that were



educated through the renowned El Sistema music program, they are joined by conductors Gustavo Dudamel and Rafael Payare, for a series of performances including Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Described as 'a beautiful model for society' by Gustavo Dudamel, the orchestra addresses the theme of a perspective that's not one's own, by offering an example of music as a vehicle for social change.

In 2023 **Jake Bugg** will appear and "show an artistic complexity that refuses to be defined". Goldfrapp

And in a real headline grabbing move for those of a certain age, John Cale who formed The Velvet Underground in 1964 has a new album out and will be here to show some of it off.



Nicola Benedetti, CBE, the Director of Edinburgh International Festival announcing her first programme for the 2023 Edinburgh International Festival PHOTO ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter  
Culture Minister Christina McKelvie said: "The Scottish Government is proud to support the Edinburgh International Festival and it's wonderful to see such an exciting and

diverse line-up in this year's programme. The International Festival is the jewel in our summer festival crown, attracting people from across Scotland as well as visitors from further afield to this world-class event in Edinburgh."

Cllr Val Walker, Culture and Communities Convener at The City of Edinburgh Council said: "The capital has a long history of promoting the value of culture and we look forward to this year's programme of 295 events that will celebrate world-class music, opera, dance and theatre across our wonderful city. I'm delighted the Council is yet again able to support this year's Festival, and I would encourage everyone to explore this year's programme and grab their tickets – it's not to be missed."

Iain Munro, Chief Executive, Creative Scotland said: "As we emerge into a new post-pandemic world, the Edinburgh International Festival is perfectly placed to address the big issues of our times, just as it was when founded 76 years ago. Nicola Benedetti's vision uses our most vital universal language – the arts – to draw together world-class performances that challenge and inspire, affect, and entertain, placing Scotland at the forefront of the cultural calendar. Creative Scotland is proud to support such an exhilarating programme of home-grown and international artists."

<https://www.eif.co.uk/whats-on>