

EIF programme launched for 2024

EDINBURGH International Festival director Nicola Benedetti, CBE, has hailed the Scottish capital as “the world’s true festival city” as she announced a summer event of world-leading opera, music, theatre and dance.

The violinist, 36, announced the programme for this summer’s Festival, which will open with a “monumental” outdoor event for 10,000 people “evoking the mythology and history of Scotland’s rich heritage”.

She said this year’s theme, “Rituals That Unite Us”, was a response to “an overwhelming desire for togetherness from artists and audiences” following last year’s question Where Do We Go From Here?

The second International Festival under Benedetti’s direction will feature 161 performances by over 2000 artists from 42 nations, including five world, eight UK, two European and four Scottish premieres as well as five operas, running from 2-25 August.



Festival Director Nicola Benedetti, CBE

Benedetti said: “It is important to remember that we were the original festival, the one that started all the chaos and the beauty in Edinburgh at summertime, which we all love so much.

“It was us that ignited the spark, which established Edinburgh as the world’s true festival city back in 1947.

“Our scale, eclecticism, internationalism, and commitment to new and large scale productions is stronger and bolder than ever.

“This summer we have 161 performances spanning across music, opera, dance and theatre from over 2000 artists across 42 nations, as well as nurturing homegrown talent here in the UK.

“We begin with a celebration that is going to be truly monumental in scale and ambition, in collaboration with our principal partner The Macallan. This opening event will welcome over 10,000 people to the streets of Edinburgh and reach countless more across the globe.

“Our aim is to tell a story that is both Edinburgh born and bred and is also a story of Scotland but is very much the best of our stories which of course is outward looking and incredibly international.

“We are looking to unleash the power and potential of the city and also harness our own capacity for storytelling and creativity.

“This will be an invitation to see ourselves and our collective history on the grandest of stages and also an invitation to a vast number of people to unite in a new ritual for us, one that is presented by us but very much owned by us all.”



PHOTO Lawrence Winram

Following the large-scale opening event in collaboration with leading whisky brand The Macallan, other highlights in this year's programme include two world premiere Scottish theatre productions.

They include *The Fifth Step*, a new play written by David Ireland and starring BAFTA-nominated Scottish actor Jack Lowden, and the stage adaptation of Amy Liptrot's bestselling memoir, *The Outrun*, brought to life by Olivier Award-winning playwright Stef Smith, director Vicky Featherstone and Edinburgh's Royal Lyceum Theatre Company.

Operas will include productions of Bizet's Carmen and Mozart's The Marriage of Figaro, while a new production of Stravinsky's Oedipus Rex by Scottish Opera will take over the National Museum.

Meanwhile, the Festival will see the return of "beanbag concerts", inspired by Budapest Festival Orchestra's founder Iván Fischer's shows last year, with the audience seated on beanbags to experience classical music in a unique way.

Elsewhere, the contemporary music programme includes indie-pop sensation Bat for Lashes; polymath composer and piano personality Chilly Gonzales; orchestral-pop group The Magnetic Fields and one of the most famous voices in African music, Youssou N'Dour.

Benedetti, who last year became the first woman and the first Scot to be appointed director of the Festival, will also perform at this year's event – three months after she is due to give birth to her first child in May.

The world-leading violinist is scheduled to join the Philharmonia Orchestra to deliver "a relaxed, family-friendly performance" of Vaughan Williams' masterpiece The Lark Ascending.

The Grammy and Brit Award winner will also present Brazil's leading Sao Paulo Symphony Orchestra in a rehearsal for schools, as part of the Festival's ambition to foster a lifelong love of the arts through projects for Edinburgh's young people.

She added: "As we move into my second year with the Festival we are doubling down on our vision to deliver the deepest possible experience through the highest quality of art to the broadest possible audience."

As part of the Festival's commitment to reach the broadest possible audience, 50% of tickets will be sold at £30 or under

and £10 affordable tickets will be available for all performances in the programme. Thousands of free tickets will also be available for young musicians.

Edinburgh's Culture and Communities Convener, Cllr Val Walker, said: "It's fantastic to see the 2024 programme for the Edinburgh International Festival. This promises to be a unique and exciting chapter in the Festival's rich history with over 2000 of the world's extraordinary artists performing here this August.

"It's particularly encouraging to see initiatives such as making free tickets available for young musicians, and £10 tickets available for all performances.

"Given we are in the midst of a challenging cost of living crisis and our festivals have a key role in providing us all with opportunities to enjoy exceptional and entertaining experiences, these will hopefully contribute towards the goal of choice and access for everyone in our city."

Arts and Heritage Minister Lord Parkinson said: "For more than three quarters of a century, the Edinburgh International Festival has provided a platform for the world-class music and performing arts we are so proud to have in this country, as well as for brilliant artists and musicians from across the globe.

"The millions of people who flock to Edinburgh to enjoy and take part in it each year enrich our lives and fuel our shared economy. That's why the UK Government is so proud to support it.

"The arts have a unique power to bring us together, and to help us see the world through others' eyes. I'm delighted that, this year, the International Festival will focus on the rituals that unite us – and look forward to seeing the diverse and dynamic work that theme inspires."

Iain Munro, Chief Executive, Creative Scotland, said: “Nicola Benedetti continues to drive the Edinburgh International Festival programme forward in her second year as Director with another inspired artistic offering.

“This year’s thematic focus on unity and togetherness provides opportunities to blur the lines between artist and audience, promoting connection and communal experience in our increasingly divided world.

“The International Festival continues to earn its reputation as a shining light in the global cultural calendar by uniting people through great art.”

Kaukab Stewart, Scottish Government Minister for Culture and International Development, added: “As we raise the curtain on another Edinburgh International Festival, we’re reminded of the power of art to unite and inspire us all.”



Budapest Orchestra and the beanbag concerts