

Festival programme has community at its heart

The Edinburgh International Festival 2024 will this year bring audiences and artists together more closely than ever under its new theme Rituals that Unite Us.

The 2024 theme takes inspiration from philosopher Byung-Chul Han. His book *The Disappearance of Rituals* reminds us that “what we do, over time, defines who we are, and that our collectively experienced rituals help ground us and bind us closer together. A central idea of the book is the humility, sacrifice and participation required to maintain community rituals”. This will be explored in the programme through events marking the 900th anniversary of the city of Edinburgh in 2024 and particularly in the Opening Event.

Festival Director Nicola Benedetti, CBE, explained that the central provocation of last year’s festival “Where do we go from here?” had indeed elicited many answers but none more affecting for her than meeting someone as she was about to get in the car after the festival ended. The person said to her: “You need to understand that the answer is community – you have to bring us deeper into that feeling. We want to find purpose to be bound together to be brought together.” She believes that the festival has a unique place to be able to do just that and there are many community strands throughout the programme, and ways of bringing audiences closer to artists.



Festival Director Nicola Benedetti, CBE

The large scale opening event in the city will be staged in collaboration with Principal Partner, The Macallan, and it will somehow create a new ritual, and although there are no real details released as yet it is expected to involve around 10,000 people.

There will be more than 2,000 artists from 42 nations, all joining in the fun of the festival this summer from 2 to 25 August 2024.

In an effort to make festival events accessible more than half the tickets are priced at £30 or less, there will be free tickets for young musicians and £10 tickets for all performances.

There will be more beanbag concerts in Usher Hall which proved so popular with audiences last year, and some rehearsals will become drop-in events to engage with more people.

In an effort to be more eco-friendly orchestras including the

Philharmonia Orchestra are invited not just for one performance but for a residency during which they perform several times and engage in open rehearsals and a family concert as well as a VR experience ahead of the festival.

There will be a site specific promenade version of Stravinsky's opera Oedipus Rex taking place at the National Museum of Scotland (involving a 100-strong community chorus) where we met up with Festival Director Nicola Benedetti, CBE.

The programme for the 2024 Edinburgh International Festival is announced today with the theme Rituals That Unite Us – trying to offer a response to last year's theme of Where do we go from here? We spoke to Nicola Benedetti about one small part of the programme [pic.twitter.com/eJGpbuK35w](https://www.pic.twitter.com/eJGpbuK35w)

– Edinburgh Reporter (@EdinReporter) [March 7, 2024](#)

Ms Benedetti said: "In this spectacular venue we are collaborating with Scottish Opera in a performance of Stravinsky's Oedipus Rex involving communities from across Scotland. It is a piece that I absolutely love and I have no doubt that this will be a fantastic event.

"Our opening celebration last year was a highlight for me and for many of us. We had 360 non-professional musicians all join hands on a massive big stage and it was very symbolic for me and the festival to say that mass participation breaks down boundaries of professional and non-professional involvement in the arts is vital. It is so important to try to involve communities and not be hierarchical about who owns the sound of music or stories. This year we will be doing something similar in collaboration with Scottish Ballet and the World Health Organisation. Details will be announced but it is important to have that symbolic moment every year."

There are five operas in the programme, three staged and two

which will be performed in concert, including Opéra Comique's Carmen, Komische Oper Berlin's The Marriage of Figaro, Richard Strauss's final opera Capriccio, and Così fan tutte by Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

Performances from the Queen's Hall will as usual be broadcast live and recorded on BBC Radio 3.

In theatre highlights will include the world premiere of Fifth Step a new David Ireland play starring Scottish actor, Jack Lowden, in his first return to the Scottish stage since Black Watch in 2010.

In contemporary music Cat Power will take on Bob Dylan's 1966 Albert Hall concert at Edinburgh Playhouse – in a song by song recreation of the setlist – and yes the first half is acoustic and the second half electric.

The programme will include accessible performances with ten audio described performances, ten audio described performances, five BSL interpreted performances, and nine captioned performances.

In dance Aakash Odedra will perform a new dance work in the premiere of Songs of the Bulbul, exploring an ancient Sufi myth about a bulbul, a songbird common throughout Asia and Africa. When captured the bird sings an exquisite tune reaching a pitch before it perishes from despair. This is promised to be "ferocious and contemplative".

And at The Hub five piece Scottish folk band Breabach will perform on the preview night 1 August – and this is just one name on an extensive list of a new generation of Celtic musicians.

The programme is launched today 7 March. Tickets will be on sale on 21 March 2024, with priority booking for members.

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Left to right Dancer Aakash Odedra, Festival Director Nicola Benedetti, CBE, and members of Breabach, Calum MacCrimmon and Conal McDonagh



Left to right Dancer Aakash Odedra, Festival Director Nicola

Benedetti, CBE, and members of Breabach, Calum MacCrimmon and Conal McDonagh



Opening Fanfare Day in the gardens 2023 PHOTO Andrew Perry