

EIF – Opening Event – Where To Begin

The grounds of George Heriot's School are not normally accessible to members of the public, so it was a novel experience for some in the audience to enter the hallowed ground that may or may not have something to do with Joanna Rowling's Hogwarts.

This was a low key, meandering way to begin the festival – set over three nights and certainly not as much of a spectacle than those staged in Edinburgh in past years. But the event was ticketed at £15, and marshalled, and there was no crowding or pushing at the back of the school where the light show illuminated the building with its turrets.

The theme of this year's festival is Rituals that Unite Us – and the first part of the show on arrival was a representation of distilling – with The Macallan as a sponsor, there had to be a nod to the national drink, a ritual of its own. It was a strange ethereal scene viewed from above, but those who ventured down to the “factory floor” were offered the opportunity of playing a small part by adding a piece of coal on the fire. This was reminiscent of the citizens of Edinburgh who had to donate their coal ration to get the 1947 Festival off the ground.

Where to Begin was billed as: “The event tells a story of the extraordinary creative power that pervades Edinburgh every August and invites the audience to play their part in a new ritual to ignite the festival.”

We have had many light shows as opening events in the city in the past – begun by former director Fergus Linehan who was this year visiting Edinburgh, back from his new home in Sydney for a while, and who saw for himself the opening of this year’s festival. His light shows were on a bigger scale, and used the Usher Hall and the Castle Rock as the projection screen – and then there was the footage of trains which appeared to career around St Andrew Square for the significant 75th anniversary year in 2019. This year’s offering was much more Scottish in many ways, physically smaller, using drone footage of Edinburgh streets rather than abstract designs or animations as they have in the past.

The music, some provided by Karine Polwart and the Festival Chorus, was quite beautiful. But then so was the music provided by the LA Philharmonic under the direction of conductor Gustavo Dudamel at Tynecastle Park at the 2019 Opening Event. That was a free concert for a seated audience of 15,000 – and it was believed at the time that almost three quarters of the people there were attending a classical music concert for the first time.

With music from the movies being performed live on stage, it was the most accessible and spectacular opening event – with Stormtroopers roaming over the (covered) turf of Tynie – and not a light projection in sight. Last year there was free music at the Ross Bandstand with the Opening Fanfare culminating in the new Director, Nicola Benedetti, CBE, playing with young musicians in a set from the GRIT Orchestra and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Again less spectacle, more music and more accessible to everyone.

The only downside at Tynecastle was that the concert did not make the best subject matter for photographers who have been extremely busy over the last few nights capturing the scenes at Heriot's as you can see below.



PHOTO Brian Anderson



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PHOTO Tom Duffin



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