

New Makar officially welcomed with civic reception

On Tuesday evening a reception was held at the City Chambers to officially welcome the City of Edinburgh's new Makar, Michael Pedersen.

It was also an occasion to bid farewell to the outgoing Makar, Hannah Lavery, whose tenure now comes to an end – and to listen to some poetry from both.

Michael Pedersen the new Makar was hugely entertaining, a foretelling of things to come in this year of celebrations for Edinburgh's 900th birthday – and he professed that he “loves a birthday”.

The Rt Hon Lord Provost, Robert Aldridge, said that Edinburgh was fortunate to have had Hannah Lavery as its Makar. He said she had a legacy to be proud of “speaking the truth and always while lifting others, advocating and celebrating people, her peers and the city around her”.

Ms Lavery recited a new poem to her Nanna which had been written this year as a response to the Words from the Wards project at the Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) created in the former Royal Infirmary on Lauriston Place. In this initiative, EFI had asked those with past experience of the building as a hospital to write down their memories. Hannah's Nanna had worked there for 32 years and she told her life story in verse with her mum and aunties in the audience.

Although admitting that Hannah will be a hard act to follow the Lord Provost continued: “I have no doubt that our new Makar is someone who will rise to the challenge and indeed enjoy that challenge. Like Hannah he is someone who shares a Portobello education and a serious work ethic. He is co-founder of NeuReekie! and is writer in residence at the University of Edinburgh.

“Michael’s work is honest fearless and witty with a strong focus on mental health and friendship.”

Michael did indeed rise to the challenge from the first moment he stepped up to the lectern. He had his bag with him (“not a lot of people in the room to be trusted”) and had his red clipboard with “Michael” in sparkles across the back (“it felt the occasion justified that”). He said: “It’ is glorious to be here amongst all these gorgeous faces, old friends, new friends, family, old teachers, lovers, dreamers, some of my favourite artists, my favourite writers, some of my favourite humans. Yikes!

“I am ambitious for this role. I want to ensure poetry remains with in the heartbeat of this extraordinary, complicated, quirky shape shifter of a capital city always punching above its weight.”

He recalled his youth – [already told to us in this previous interview here](#) – when he hid the poems he wrote in his golf bag (“wasn’t a keen golfer so it was a good place to leave them”).

He explained how he will begin: “This month, I’m going to be in three state schools to run workshops and launch a poetry competition on the theme of friendship, something really dear to me, those friends here, there and elsewhere. So I’m going to be in my old high school, Portobello. I’m going to be in Craigroyston. I’m going to be in Leith Academy. And I want to say a big thanks to the incredible literary charity,

Superpower Agency, for all their panache in setting that up.”

As well as Michael and Hannah, several other former Makers attended the event at the City Chambers, including Ron Butlin, Christine de Luca and Stewart Conn, prompting the Lord Provost to ask what is the collective noun for a gathering of Makars? Ms de Luca suggested to us it could be a maudlin of Makars – any suggestions from readers will be welcomed. The Makar is a civic role which is selected by representatives of the Scottish Poetry Library, Scottish PEN, The Saltire Society, the City of Edinburgh Council and the Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust. The City of Literature Trust explain on their website: “The Makar acts as the city’s literary ambassador, and it’s their role to compose poems on Edinburgh, its people and aspects of life in the city, assist in the promotion of poetry in partnership with literary organisations, and select poetry for the Council’s website.”

Hannah also recited her poem, Tomorrow a Cathedral, an homage to St Giles Cathedral which is also celebrating its 900th birthday. She will – in her final act as Edinburgh Makar – perform this on 9 October at St Giles along with a brass band and the Edinburgh Ukrainian Choir – and young people from Abbeyhill Primary School and Portobello High School. Tickets are available below on Eventbrite.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/cathedral-into-tomorrow-tickets-1010334165687?aff=oddttdtcreator>



The new Makar, Michael Pedersen posed with his mum Janis and sister, Carrie, on the left and right of the photo respectively ,



The new Makar, Michael Pedersen posed with his mum Janis and

sister, Carrie, on the left and right of the photo respectively , and author Sir Ian Rankin



The new Makar, Michael Pedersen in full flow



Hannah Lavery the outgoing Edinburgh Makar



Hannah Lavery the outgoing Edinburgh Makar



Hannah Lavery, centre, the outgoing Edinburgh Makar