

The cycling musician who is pedalling for the planet

Sarah Small doesn't do anything by half measures. Faced with the dilemma that pursuing her career as a classically trained professional musician could mean touring the world with multiple flights, she got on her bike!

Her current tour – which comes to North Yorkshire and the North East and then Edinburgh this month – will see her cycling to venues over a 2,500-mile, 69 day journey. The route takes her from Northamptonshire to Stornoway, and from Unst at the top of Shetland down via Cumbria and Wales to Southampton in Hampshire.

The issue she is highlighting through her actions is the considerable impact the cultural sector has on the environment.

According to the representative body [UK Music](#), it is estimated that the music industry produces 405,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK every year. On an individual basis it calculates that the average touring DJ emits 35 tonnes of CO₂ a year alone.

To put those figures in context, the average UK person currently has an annual carbon footprint of around 13 tonnes.

But can one woman's efforts really make a difference? I caught

up with Sarah before she set off and asked what she hoped to achieve from her efforts?

“I’m very aware that me just cycling instead of say, driving, isn’t actually making a huge impact on its own but I hope that, through the concept of the whole tour, I can appeal to people’s conscience, about how they travel and think about how they get to venues.

“Also the programs that I’ve chosen, especially the solo program, is music that I think is just incredibly beautiful and inspired by the elements. I’ve got a piece that is called The Weathervane which sounds really tumultuous and I think it is just perfect for the instability that we’re experiencing at the moment.”

A love of the natural environment and simply being outside provided the inspiration for Sarah to look for alternatives to the standard way of touring. And this concert series isn’t her first such experience.

“ I like being outside, I notice a lot of things, and I notice when they’re not there. That worries me a lot. It’s that simple, really.

“Last summer, I cycled to a concert instead of flying with the rest of the ensemble. The conversations that I had along the way were great. It can seem like we feel we’re a minority, until we speak to somebody else, and then we realise that most of us are actually really concerned about what’s going on. By cycling I’m showing that this alternative way of touring is out there.”

Via Instagram, Sarah will also be documenting the tour and observing how the country is changing with the climate. She’ll also be linking up with some RSPB reserves along the way including at Flamborough Head where she hopes to experience the nesting puffins to highlight their plight.

On the practical challenges

How can a single bike be packed with essentials for two months of travel never mind a large, delicate viola da gamba instrument?

“It’s all all on my bike, I’m completely self supported. I’ve done some trial runs like around the Midlands, and then also, I cycled around in Cornwall and checked everything worked – there’s quite a lot of hills there!

“So my gamba goes on one side of my pannier rack, my tent (because I’ll be doing some camping as well) on the middle. I see it as my house – so the back is, like my kind of sleeping arrangements and clothes and everything. Then at the front I have my kitchen and my office and my repair shed, and then essentials on the handlebars. That’s just everything I need.”

If you want to see Sarah perform, the full programme can be seen [here](#) and if you’d like to support her with a donation, there is a [Ko-Fi page](#).

Sarah will be performing at Pianodrome in Edinburgh on 27 May at 7pm.

[For tickets click here](#)

For more information and resources about flight-free travel:

[Flight Free UK](#) educates the public about the climate impact of aviation, and gives information and inspiration for travelling by other means.

Scientists, academics, and members of the public who either don’t fly or who fly less: [No Fly Climate Sci](#)

A community of aviation workers and enthusiasts who care about the future of our industry and our planet: [Safe Landing](#)

A former pilot, Todd Smith speaks in a podcast by Sci4XR Pete Knapp, [here](#)

This article was first published by Sarah Hartley on the [Northern Eco Substack](#) and is republished here with permission. Both Sarah and The Edinburgh Reporter are fellow members of [Independent Community News Network](#) (ICNN) the industry body for independent journalism.

