



Edinburgh International Festival line-up announced



Macbeth / Teatro Regio Torino / Edinburgh International Festival 2017 Picture: Franco Lannino /Studio Camera

Spectacular explosions of colour will burst onto the streets of Edinburgh's New Town to commemorate the emergence of its world-leading cultural celebration in the aftermath of the Second World War.

A huge swathe of the New Town will be transformed into a "magical night garden" for several hours under plans for the biggest ever curtain-raiser for the Edinburgh International Festival to mark its 70th anniversary.

Tens of thousands of people are expected to fill the streets until the early hours of the morning for the event, which aims to recall the "outpouring of joy" created by the original festival and its transformation of the city in the post-war years.

It is expected to be one of the highlights of a "celebration of internationalism" theme for this year's festival, which is set to be staged against a backdrop of intense debate this summer about Brexit and the Scottish independence referendum.

The festival will feature guest appearances from Pulp frontman Jarvis Cocker, double Mercury Prize winner PJ Harvey, Welsh opera star Sir Bryn Terfel and Scots Makar Jackie Kay, the latter leading an exploration of Scotland's historic links with the slave trade.

There will also be a celebration of the psychedelic Scottish folk outfit Incredible String Band, the creation of an "underwater grotto" in the festival's Royal Mile headquarters for a late-night cabaret version of The Little Mermaid and the world premiere of a marathon new play by Alan Ayckbourn.

2

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Director Fergus Linehan has lined up 10 days of special events tackling the current political landscape in the UK and around the world, exploring “what it means to be European” and how the event’s founding ideals still resonate.

Artists and companies from across Europe have been invited to this year’s festival, which will tackle “the fracturing of civilisation” and also “stay true to the belief the arts have the power to bring people together.”

Around 30,000 tickets will be given away for a performance starting at 10.30pm, but organisers hope to win permission from the city council to leave the various sound and light installations running until the early hours of the morning to allow as many people as possible to experience them.

Mr Linehan said: “When we started thinking about the 70th anniversary a couple of years ago, a lot of the ideas that were connected to 1947 seemed quite antiquated, such as using art as a way of guiding us back to civilisation and not taking things for granted in the way they seemed before. They’ve taken on a sort of resonance recently.

Mr Linehan added: “We’re very conscious of Scotland’s place in the world. I don’t know anywhere else I’d rather live right now. If you take the political rhetoric you are hearing around the world at the moment it is still a very enlightened place relative to the way things are going.

“There’s something to be said about having just a great celebration of internationalism. There are very direct and overt discursive elements in the programme, but that’s not really how the festival came about in 1947. It said: ‘Let’s concentrate on those things that we share and investigate each other’s cultures.’ It’s that old thing about it being hard to hate someone whose stories you know.”

PJ Harvey will be playing two shows at the Playhouse to showcase a new album inspired by her travels through Kosovo, Afghanistan and Washington.

“We want to capture that moment of everything being drab, dark and overly serious and then everything suddenly exploding into colour. We want to warm the soul up a little bit and create something that everyone can share.”

Among the big-name European companies visiting Edinburgh in August will be the Budapest Festival Orchestra, the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, Nederlands Dans Theater, the Mariinsky Orchestra from St Petersburg, and the Filarmonica della Scala, the orchestra of Milan’s world-renowned La Scala opera house.

There are a number of nods in this year’s programme to the festival’s 1947 origins, including a major new production of Verdi’s version of Macbeth, the first ever opera to be performed at the inaugural event, which will be performed by Teatro Regio, from Turin, the EIF’s resident company for 2017.



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Pulp frontman Cocker will be joining forces with Canadian musician Chilly Gonzales to showcase a new set of songs inspired by the Chateau Marmont hotel in Los Angeles, where the likes of Jean Harlow, Marilyn Monroe and Howard Hughes all stayed. The same stage will play host to an array of big-name stars on when Edinburgh-based Canongate stages its star-studded celebration of the power of written correspondence.

Benedict Cumberbatch, Gillian Anderson, Neil Gaiman, Nick Cave, Juliet Stevenson, Jude Law and Russell Brand are among those to have brought to life letters by Elvis Presley, David Bowie, Janis Joplin, Charlotte Bronte and Che Guevara.

Half a century on from their emergence from the Edinburgh folk scene, Incredible String Band founder Mike Heron will be joined by a host of guest musicians to revive the sound that inspired the likes of the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin.

Edinburgh-based playwright Zinnie Harris, a key player on the Scottish theatre scene for the last two decades, has three works in the 70th anniversary line-up, including her version of the Greek drama Orestia, premiered to huge acclaim at the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow last year, and a new play which see the Traverse Theatre make a rare appearance in the EIF programme.

Glaswegian Turner Prize winner Martin Creed, who has work on display at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, will take over the Festival Theatre's studio for a show billed as a cross between "contemporary music hall" and "art lecture."

The festival will branch out into the cinematic world with the daily screening at the National Library of Scotland of a new film shot on the Hebridean islands of Staffa, inspired by composer Mendelsshon's 1829 visit to Fingal's Cave.

Australian cabaret diva Meow Meow, a previous star of the Fringe, will be transforming The Hub into a late-night "underwater grotto" for her take on Hans Christian Andersen's Little Mermaid fairytale.

The festival has secured the world premiere of a marathon new play by Alan Ayckbourn, *The Divide*, which will have a running time of more than six hours and will be divided into two parts.

East London hip hop outfit Blue Boy Entertainment, one of the biggest stars of the EIF dance programme, will be staging two special shows at a pop-up venue in the gym hall at Castlebrae Community High School in Craigmillar, which pupils will be helping to create and run to mark the culmination of a three-year partnership with the festival.

The Church Hill Theatre, in Morningside, will be deployed by the festival for the first time in 25 years when it hosts the plays *Flight* and *Krapp's Last Tape*.

Scottish culture secretary Fiona Hyslop said: "The Edinburgh International Festival has entertained, delighted and provoked audiences for 70 years, helping to shape Scotland's identity as progressive, welcoming and world-renowned in its delivery of high-quality arts. Countless countries have followed our example ever since to develop their own festivals.

"As in 1947, the festival's inclusive ethos towards international artists and audiences is just as important and relevant today."

Tickets for all events go on sale on 25 March.

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