

Edinburgh International Festival Lights Up the City and Reveals a Digital Line-Up of Scottish Artists



Scottish Ballet dancers rehearse on stage ahead of filming for the Edinburgh International Festival. The festival announces its digital programme today. More information at eif.co.uk. Photo: Ryan Buchanan

- Scottish national companies, National Theatre of Scotland, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Scottish Ballet and Scottish Opera as well as independent artists including Laurence Power, Aidan O'Rourke, Honeyblood and Breabach create a new series of original digital content with Edinburgh International Festival
- Activity launches on **Saturday 8 August** at 9:30pm on BBC Scotland TV, Edinburgh International Festival's YouTube channel and Facebook page, with a one-hour gala programme celebrating the Festival City and featuring **Alan Cumming, Fiona Shaw, Anna Meredith and Akram Khan**
- Iconic venues across Edinburgh, including the Castle Esplanade, Festival Theatre and Usher Hall, are to be illuminated by beacons of light marking what would have been the opening weekend of the 2020 summer festival season

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3 August, Edinburgh: Edinburgh International Festival, the world's leading performing arts festival, today unveils *My Light Shines On* – a series of video works and light installations across Scotland's capital to mark the beginning of the festival season and celebrate the enduring spirit of the Festival City.

Through a series of digital commissions, the Edinburgh International Festival is partnering with Scottish artists and national arts companies, spanning the worlds of theatre, music and dance, to film original performances in venues including the **Edinburgh Festival Theatre**, **The King's Theatre**, **Leith Theatre**, **The Hub**, **Usher Hall** and **The Queen's Hall**. All films premiere on Edinburgh International Festival's [YouTube channel](#) on **Saturday 8 August at 9:30pm**.

The films include a personal love letter to Scottish theatre from the **National Theatre of Scotland**, directed by award-winning filmmaker **Hope Dickson Leach** and co-conceived with National Theatre of Scotland Artistic Director **Jackie Wylie** and dramaturg **Philip Howard**, along with **Scottish Opera's** modern-day interpretation of Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Telephone*, starring Soraya Mafi and Jonathan McGovern, filmed in the bar of the King's Theatre.

The **Royal Scottish National Orchestra** features mezzo soprano **Karen Cargill** in a recorded performance led by Music Director **Thomas Søndergård** in his International Festival debut. The Orchestra performs a rich programme in celebration of Mahler's 160th birthday. A series of films from **Scottish Ballet** includes new work from emerging choreographer **Nicholas Shoesmith**, as well as a revival of acclaimed American choreographer Helen Pickett's *Trace*. The **Scottish Chamber Orchestra** presents Beethoven's *Second Piano Concerto* with acclaimed pianist **Paul Lewis** in celebration of the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth.

My Light Shines On also features an outdoor light installation in which Edinburgh's festival venues, including the **Usher Hall**, **Edinburgh Festival Theatre**, **Bristo Square** and the **Castle Esplanade**, are illuminated by hundreds of beams of light, reaching up into the night sky. Each venue will also be lit from within by glowing lanterns, which shine and pulse behind closed doors, celebrating the people and artists who play a key role in the festival community. Scottish lighting designers Kate Bonney and Simon Hayes have been commissioned to design the project.

As the beacons of light are visible from across the city, Edinburgh residents are encouraged to view the spectacle from their windows or a high vantage point, staying within government distancing guidelines and without gathering in crowds.

On **Saturday 8 August 9:30pm**, a one-hour gala film hosted by journalist and TV presenter Kirsty Wark and cellist Su-a Lee previews the *My Light Shines On* activity. This specially commissioned production is premiered on BBC Scotland TV and the International Festival's YouTube channel to mark what would have been the opening of the 2020 festival. The film features famous faces from festivals across the years, collaborations with **Edinburgh**

Festival Fringe, Edinburgh International Book Festival and The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, showcasing Edinburgh role's as the Festival City.

Other artists featured in the International Festival's digital offering include violist **Laurence Power** with the world premiere of a composition by **Esa-Pekka Salonen**, West African supergroup **Les Amazones D'Afrique**, *Declan*, a reimagined version of **Traverse Theatre's** multi-award-winning *Mouthpiece*, contemporary folk music group **Breabach**, a collaboration of pioneering folk performers led by fiddler **Aidan O'Rourke** and Glasgow indie rock musician **Honeyblood**.

From **10–28 August** the activity continues with a chamber music soundscape in Princes Street Gardens each lunchtime from Monday to Friday. Each 40-minute specially recorded chamber music performance will be audible throughout the gardens, allowing socially distanced audiences to enjoy the music whilst having a picnic or taking a walk. Artists will include **Mark Padmore, Angela Hewitt, Dunedin Consort** and the **Hebrides Ensemble**. Videos of the full concert series, recorded behind closed doors in The Hub, will be released on the [Edinburgh International Festival YouTube channel](#). Highlights from the concert series will be broadcast on **Classic FM** in a special edition of **The Classic FM Concert with John Suchet** and streamed on the station's Facebook page. Classic FM is both the UK's most popular classical music station and has the highest Facebook following in UK radio.

The **Edinburgh Festival Chorus** features in the International Festival's summer activity with a brand-new recording of **Carl Orff's** *Carmina Burana*. From their own homes, over 120 chorus members have rehearsed and recorded their parts for two movements of Orff's iconic masterpiece. The recordings and videos have been mixed together until the unmistakable grandeur of 'O Fortuna' and hopeful energy of 'Ecce Gratum' are recreated in all their richness. The two films premiere on [Edinburgh International Festival's YouTube channel](#) on 8 August.

Highlights from the Festival's archives will be celebrated by a series of five Usher Hall concerts including **Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia**, **BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra's** *Verdi Requiem* and **Cleveland Orchestra** with **Franz Welser-Möst** and **Joela Jones**. These will sit alongside the 15 concerts from **The Queen's Hall** between 10–28 August on **BBC Radio 3** as part of **BBC Arts Culture in Quarantine**. The Queen's Hall Series includes pianist **Elisabeth Leonskaja**, mezzo soprano **Sarah Connolly**, **Trio Zimmermann** and **Les Vents Français**. Full details can be found on the [Festival's website](#).

Additionally, Edinburgh International Festival is holding **Artists in the Age of Covid** – a range of digital conversations for the global performing arts industry, hosted virtually between 8–15 August. This series, in partnership with [The Edinburgh International Culture Summit](#), will seek to explore the challenges and opportunities for the performing arts in a post-COVID world. International creatives discuss subjects ranging from the power dynamics exposed by coronavirus, to the relationship between organisations and communities, to artists reimagining the future and collaborations between different artforms to create work suitable for present conditions. Participating speakers include Chief Executive of Eden Court **James Mackenzie-Blackman**, curator of Glasgow's After the Pandemic Summer School **Graham Hogg**, Artistic Director of Melbourne Arts House **Emily Sexton**, poet and novelist **Jenni Fagan** and Chief Conductor of Antwerp Symphony Orchestra **Elim Chan**.

The International Festival is partnering with all Edinburgh's August festivals to create **Faces of Edinburgh Festivals**, a collection of portraits and interviews that shine a light on the people who help to transform Edinburgh into the Festival City every summer. This rich pool of stories about the individuals who bring the festivals to life, from performers and technical staff to taxi drivers and business owners, will be on display on posters across the city and on the [Festivals Edinburgh website](#).

The Festival's Learning and Engagement work continues throughout the summer, including a new partnership with **Hermitage Park Primary School** to provide an outdoor stage for learning, play and creative exploration. This structure will help to the school to embed outdoor creative arts in the curriculum and deliver a solution to the social distancing challenges facing schools as they re-open.

Additional events appearing in association with the Festival's summer activity include *Night Walk for Edinburgh* by **Janet Cardiff** and **George Bures Miller** which sold-out its premiere at last year's International Festival and now can be safely experienced through its own mobile app, while **Edinburgh Art Festival** revives **Peter Liversidge's** 2013 *Flags for Edinburgh*, placing flags reading 'HELLO' at venues around the city, including at The Hub.

In *The New Real*, **The Edinburgh Futures Institute** commissions two digital installations – *Mechanized Cacophony* from **Anna Ridler** and **Caroline Sindors** and *Zizi – A Virtual Show* from **Jake Elwes** – that reflect on humanity's journey into the new real and how we make sense of differing realities. *The New Real* launches online on 17 October 2020.

Edinburgh International Festival also platforms a work from **Festivals for Compassion**, in which festivals around Europe come together in recognition of the severe difficulties they collectively face in the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Double bassist **Nikita Naumov** performs a specially composed solo from Greek-Dutch pianist **Calliope Tsoupaki**, available on the [International Festival's YouTube channel](#) and the [Festivals for Compassion website](#).

On 25 September, *The Portal*, a new podcast from **Martin Green**, **Wils Wilson** and **David Greig**, follows the story of lovers Etteridge and Angela. This audio tale of love, music, drugs and deceit features an original score from Martin Green – fresh from winning an Ivor Novello Award for *Aeons* – with contributions from **James Holden** (WARP/Border Community) and BBC Folk Award-winner **Brighde Chaimbeul**. *The Portal* will be available on all major podcast platforms including Apple, Spotify and Google.

Fergus Linehan, Festival Director at Edinburgh International Festival said:

“For most of us, the past few months have been a time spent at home. For some, a time spent with family and for many a time overcoming adversity. For artists, home can mean different things; there are the buildings where they live and the relatives and friends they love. But beyond these, there is another home and another family at the centre of their creative lives. This home is the concert platform, the proscenium arch and the rehearsal room. This family is their fellow actors, musicians or dancers as well as directors, choreographers, conductors, designers, technicians and stage managers. COVID-19 has not dimmed the creativity of our artists, but it has physically isolated them from each other.

“For the first time since lockdown, orchestras, ballet companies, traditional musicians, theatre ensembles and designers have come together to perform in and light up the venues they love. This has been achieved with great care to ensure the safety of all involved. It

represents a cautious but essential step towards the re-emergence of the performing arts in our country.

“The programme of events that we announce today is not so much a curated season as a reunion – it is time for our artists to make theatre together, to play music together, to sing together, to dance together and to light up the skies together.

“We are working hard to engage and employ artists and freelance workers in the festival ecosystem and to help companies take the first steps in performing together in venues. Through these projects, we are providing employment for over 500 Scottish artists, creatives and technical staff.

“To all who have participated and all those who have supported them, thank you.”

Fiona Hyslop, Culture Secretary, said:

“The loss of Edinburgh’s festivals this August will be felt across the world. Every year since the Edinburgh International Festival’s inception in 1947 the city has heralded the best of international talent, alongside some of the finest performers that Scotland has to offer.

“It’s wonderful to see that despite the difficulties the world is facing, the Edinburgh International Festival has harnessed that creative spirit to create a digital programme focusing on Scottish artists, once again bringing them to the global audience.

“Whilst we can enjoy this special programme from our own homes wherever they may be, we can look forward to the day when the Festival is able to return to Edinburgh’s theatres, concert halls and performance venues.”

Councillor Donald Wilson, Culture and Communities Convener, said:

“Since the very beginning our festivals have fought against all odds – acting as a beacon of hope to unite people from all over Europe after the Second World War. Over the last 73 years they have turned a small city like Edinburgh into the world’s biggest stage and, while we have to do things very differently this year, they will continue to light up our City and our screens.

“The festival organisers have very creatively designed a programme which will bring audiences from across the world together to enjoy a one-of-a-kind celebration of culture, proving that Edinburgh’s festival spirit shines on. Of course, it will be tempting to watch displays live and in person, so we’ll be encouraging everyone to stay indoors or at a safe distance. This August, the best festival views are to be found at home.”

Ian Munro, Chief Executive, Creative Scotland said:

“In these challenging times for culture in Scotland and around the world, it’s fantastic to see Edinburgh International Festival keeping the world’s leading Festival City alive through these innovative events.

“This digital celebration will enable a global audience to connect with many of Scotland’s finest artists and celebrate the spirit of the Edinburgh International Festival, wherever they are.

“Creative Scotland is proud to support this celebration which will bring a moment of light and joy in these turbulent times.”

Edinburgh International Festival is encouraging those who are able donate to the [Theatre Artists Fund](#) and [Help Musicians UK](#), two hardship funds that have been set up to support individuals across the performing arts in the UK who have financially affected by the impact of COVID-19.

Visit eif.co.uk for further information about *My Light Shines On* and Edinburgh International Festival's summer activity.

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Images and video:

For **behind-the-scenes images** of the videos being filmed – see [here](#)

For **media call images** launching the projects – see [here](#)

For a **trailer** introducing the activity – see [here](#)

For **b-roll for broadcast** – see [here](#)

National Company Films – more information:

- [National Theatre of Scotland](#) – *Ghost Light*
- [Royal Scottish National Orchestra & Karen Cargill](#) – Mahler Symphony No.7 and Rückert-Lieder
- [Scottish Ballet](#) – A series of dance films
- [Scottish Chamber Orchestra & Paul Lewis](#) – Beethoven Piano Concerto No.2
- [Scottish Opera](#) – *The Telephone*

About Edinburgh International Festival

Edinburgh International Festival is the world's leading performing arts festival, featuring the finest performers from the worlds of dance, opera, music and theatre. Created in 1947 to celebrate the human spirit, the International Festival normally serves as an annual cultural exchange, every August, for an international audience exceeding 400,000 per year.

The 2020 Edinburgh International Festival was cancelled for the first time in its history due to concerns around the Covid-19 pandemic, but remains actively engaged in Edinburgh's community and in creating cultural content for both Scotland's capital city and the world.

2020 Edinburgh International Festival supporters

The core investment that the Edinburgh International Festival receives from the City of Edinburgh Council, Creative Scotland and the Scottish Government plays a critical role in ensuring our stability and success.

The International Festival would also like to extend a special thanks to James and Morag Anderson, Sir Ewan and Lady Brown, Dunard Fund, Aberdeen Standard Investments, Baillie Gifford Investment Managers, Virgin Money and EventScotland for their ongoing support as well as to all the other corporate partners, trusts and foundations and our individual donors in enabling us to celebrate the spirit of the Festival City in August. For a full list of supporters please see our website, eif.co.uk.