

TOGETHER WE ARE

EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

THE ALEHOUSE SESSIONS

AUDIO INTRODUCTION TRANSCRIPTION

KATE MOLLESON Hello and welcome to The Warm Up, the all-you-need-to-know guide to this year's Edinburgh International Festival. I'm Kate Molleson. Along with the Festival Director Nicola Benedetti and special guests who were involved in the creation of the performance you're about to experience, I'm here to give you extra insights and context to help you enjoy it all the more.

The Edinburgh International Festival's theme this year is "Rituals That Unite Us", so our guests will be sharing their own rituals around the creative process that help to bring the performance you're about to witness to life. These can be habits or routines that they always touch on in the months and weeks leading up to this show, on the day of the performance, or maybe just that moment when they're about to step onto the stage. Join me and Nicola Benedetti as we guide you into the world of The Warm Up.

Today, we are having a knees-up with *The Alehouse Sessions*, from the slightly warped mind of creator Bjarte Eike. We asked Bjarte about *The Alehouse Sessions*, and more specifically his rituals around the creative process when making and performing it. First, here is our Festival Director, Nicola Benedetti.

Nicola Benedetti: Part of our beanbag concerts is an experience that's going to be not quite like any other, called *The Alehouse Sessions*. This is a presentation by a fantastic baroque ensemble, called Barokksolistene. They have really scrutinised and analysed performance practice across time. So, harking back as far as Purcell, so the very sort of early elemental stages of baroque style. But fast forwarding to today, but also looking in detail at what is a sense of community in music making. And that can be singing, it can be people having a drink, it can be a pub-type environment. So I think it's safe to say the Usher Hall is not going to feel like your average Usher Hall during that performance.

Folk songs, sea shanties, and overtures and more traditional repertoire, all devised by their music director, Bjarte. And his approach really melds storytelling, improvisation, movement, a lot of mixed components of how it is possible to bring people together, have a good time, but with the musical integrity and quality being of the highest level.

BJARTE EIKE: My name is Bjarte Eike. I'm the Musical Director of Barokksolistene. It's a Norwegian group, and we are doing *The Alehouse Sessions* at the Edinburgh Festival in Usher Hall on 15th August. *The Alehouse Sessions* is based on a historical narrative, if you like, that's the sort of background for it. It's from a time in especially English London history, with Cromwell, and he closed down all the theatres. Music was not in high fashion, or not prioritised at all. So unemployed musicians and dancers and actors and singers, they had to go into pubs, ale houses and taverns in order to express their art. And these meetings that happened in the pubs, public houses, turned into sessions. They became very, very popular. And I think it's likely because of the mixture of music done by highly educated people, who had been employed in courts and in churches and stuff, meeting the local people, if you like, and these meetings of these two cultures created a sort of a new type of music, if you like.

I've been fortunate enough to be able to gather all these incredible musicians, who are extremely talented, and are interested in doing multiple things. We're all singing, we're all dancing, we're all stepping out of comfort zones, if you like. And then there's a lot of improvisation. So we remix our old repertory again and again. That's the most important thing with this project.

Engaging the audience is very, very important for us. So people will feel that they are taking part in an event where the audience and the stage are equally important, I think. And we do a lot of singalongs. We tend to drink beer on stage, and cheers with the audience, and hopefully... I mean, many places, they get up and start dancing with us as well. So, as long as they're open minded and prepared to be surprised, then I think we're going to have a great time together.

When we're on tour, because we live in so many different countries, we don't have time to rehearse a lot. We meet half an hour before the concert, and then I have my black book, and I've written down today's set list. And then we go through, what are we going to play today? They get it half an hour before, and we go in fresh onstage, and you just jump into it. And I do that very consciously, because I don't want it to become a fixed show. I want it to be fresh, feel fresh. And I want there to be a lot of risk taking and a lot of improvisation. And when somebody makes some mistakes or, you know, screws up something, that it's OK, and that we have fun with it and, you know, make fun of each other on stage. I think it's extremely important for this show, otherwise it becomes like a fixed thing, which then becomes predictable for us. And if it's predictable for us, then it translates into something for the audience. So it's important to keep it genuine.

I think our Alehouse Sessions deepen the connections between the audience and the performance. If you have a real connection between the auditorium and the stage, then you can really feel that you are taking part in something special. This sort of community building, feeling together, is something that we really need, especially in our day and age where everything becomes more and more digitalised, and we have the threat of AI. Then people seek company of each other. You understand that it's important to interact. Music, community, people, interaction. It really matters. Music, and especially live music, is a key in this. And I think the type of shows that we do can, you know, at least for a brief moment, feel extremely life affirming.

KATE MOLLESON: Bjarte Eike, creator of the riotous Alehouse Sessions. You can see that band at the Usher Hall on 15 August at 7.30pm. The duration is one hour 15 minutes with no interval. *The Alehouse Sessions* is part of the Beanbag Concert Series and is supported by Sir Ewan and Lady Brown.