Edinburgh International Festival Celebrates Record-Breaking Youth Participation with 25 Years of *Art of Listening* Workshops

Children at an Art of Listening workshop in The Hub, image credit: Andrew Perry

MEDIA IMAGES AVAILABLE HERE

2025 FESTIVAL PROGRAMME RUNS FROM 1–24 AUGUST 2025

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- Edinburgh International Festival's **Art of Listening** workshops **celebrate 25 years** of inspiring schoolchildren through live classical music, reaching a record 3,000 young people in 2025, and expanding with a new **family-friendly workshop open to the public**.

- A **summer programme for young people** includes an interactive *Family Concert,* a free outdoor singalong event *The Big Singalong*, and the Young Musician's Pass, a programme offering over 2,000 free concert tickets to young music fans.

- From Discover Opera school tours set to **introduce over 1,000 pupils to opera** this year, to ongoing initiatives that bring events to community and healthcare settings, the

Festival's year-round programmes deeply engage with Edinburgh's communities, enhancing wellbeing and expanding access to live performance.

8 May, Edinburgh: This year the Edinburgh International Festival's flagship workshop *Art of Listening* celebrates 25 years of bringing live classical music to schoolchildren across Edinburgh. Across this quarter century, the workshop has been delivered to an approximate **23,000 pupils**, and so far in 2025 has reached an unprecedented **3,000 young people** — its largest audience to date.

Designed for pupils aged 10-12, *Art of Listening* introduces children to the artforms of classical music and opera through an imaginative blend of live performance, songs and activities. Taking place at the International Festival's home, The Hub, these two-hour workshops feature music ranging from Beethoven and Britten to the Harry Potter film scores and Taylor Swift.

Led by a facilitator, professional opera singer and pianist, the sessions encourage participants to engage their imaginations, strengthen listening skills and respond creatively to music. For many children, this is their first experience of live classical music.

The workshops have been delivered across every ward in Edinburgh, and are offered every year to every state primary school in the city, anchoring the International Festival's strong commitment to culturally impacting the cultural and civic life of the city.

For the first time, *Art of Listening for Families* will also be open to the public as part of the International Festival's 2025 programme, with an interactive workshop designed for children aged 7-11 and their accompanying adults to discover the joy of active listening together.

Back due to popular demand, the **Family Concert** is recommended for ages 7-11, but suitable for all ages. In a special interactive introduction to classical music, Scottish musical traditions are contrasted with the sounds of America, performed by the inspirational young musicians of **the National Youth Orchestra 2** from New York's prestigious Carnegie Hall, with presenter **Lucy Drever** introducing the musicians and the music.

During the International Festival's opening weekend, singing enthusiasts of all ages are also invited to Princes Street Gardens' Ross Bandstand for *The Big Singalong,* a free event led by **Stephen Deazley**, artistic director of Edinburgh's Love Music Community Choir.

Every year, the International Festival's **Young Musician's Pass** opens up opportunities for young people who live in Scotland and play a musical instrument or sing to discover a world of music for free. With over 2000 tickets available, each budding musician can claim up to three pairs of free tickets for Festival performances from the world's finest orchestras and ensembles. A free scheme that is open to anyone aged 8-18, the full details and range of performances will be released today and can be found at www.eif.co.uk/ymp.

Secondary school pupils are invited to performances and activities during August across music, theatre, opera and dance in the **Discover series**, an annual commitment to creating pathways

to each artform and foster a lifelong love of the arts. This year, **Discover Opera** tours Edinburgh schools in June to introduce 1,000 students to the story and music of ***Orpheus and Eurydice***, as well as offering 500 tickets to students to attend the spectacular opera for free in August, enabling many to see opera on stage for the first time.

This summer will also see flagship projects that bring groups into the heart of August's performances, developing long-term connections with Edinburgh's communities to find ways to reflect the ideas, ambitions and creative interests of different groups within the International Festival's year-round work.

In 2025, for the first time the International Festival has established a Youth Collective, inviting fifteen young people from across Edinburgh to co-create the youth experience of the 2025 Festival, such as a **Youth Takeover Day** for senior pupils from across Edinburgh.

Culture Clubs for community groups, and pop-up performances at NHS settings, with the NHS Lothian Charity, extend the joy of the International Festival beyond concert hall and theatres, into local communities.

The International Festival's multi-year **Community Connections Hub** partnership with **Space @ Broomhouse Hub** also continues, creating work experience opportunities for young people, co-curated projects and inviting artists including Aga Khan Masters, London Symphony Orchestra and Scottish Ballet to connect with the Broomhouse community.

Nicola Benedetti, Edinburgh International Festival Director, said**:** "*For a quarter of a century, Art of Listening has opened the doors of classical music to thousands of Edinburgh's young people. It's a programme rooted in the belief that live performance should be accessible to everyone, and we're thrilled to welcome a record number of eager schoolchildren in 2025. Expanding the workshops to families in our 2025 Festival marks a wonderful new chapter, inviting audiences across generations to connect with music in fresh and inspiring ways."*

Caroline Donald, Head of Discovery and Participation, said: *"Removing financial barriers and creating a welcoming space for families and schools are cornerstones of the year-round work we do. The International Festival provides workshops like Art of Listening free of charge to all participating schools, including transport costs, ensuring children from all backgrounds can experience the power of live classical music — often for the very first time. Underpinning the International Festival is an ambition to build relationships and offer meaningful, valued, world-expanding experiences through the performing arts, and we're excited to continue our work with the young people of Edinburgh and their communities."*

Tickets to experience the *Art of Listening for Families* and other performances at the 2025 Edinburgh International Festival are available at www.eif.co.uk.

For full information about the International Festival's year-round work, visit www.eif.co.uk/social-impact.

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Media contact:
Isabella Feros, Media Manager, Isabella.feros@eif.co.uk
Hugo Mintz, Head of Communications and Digital, hugo.mintz@eif.co.uk
press@eif.co.uk

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About Edinburgh International Festival
Edinburgh International Festival is the original festival. It's the one that started it all, the igniting spark that established Edinburgh as the world's Festival City.

The next International Festival takes place 1–24 August 2025, under the direction of Festival Director and Scottish violinist Nicola Benedetti. Benedetti's vision for the International Festival is to create the deepest level of experience, through the highest quality art, for the broadest possible audience.

The Edinburgh International Festival was founded in 1947, the inspired idea of Rudolf Bing, a cultural pioneer and Jewish refugee, working with a group of civic and artistic leaders. Together, they created a festival that transcends political boundaries through a global celebration of the performing arts.

Over the following 78 years the International Festival's hand-picked programme of world-leading dance, opera, music and theatre has continued to bring people of different cultures and viewpoints together every August. Meanwhile, the International Festival's sister festivals have grown up around it – each of them contributing to the atmosphere of unparalleled excitement that transforms the city each summer.

Shining far beyond what you see on stage, the International Festival also offers year-round pathways for people of all ages and backgrounds to discover and participate in live performance. Learn more at **eif.co.uk/about .**

Membership at Edinburgh International Festival
Membership starts from £60 and includes priority booking, plus access to backstage tours and rehearsals during the Festival. For more information visit **www.eif.co.uk/membership.**

Edinburgh International Festival's Discovery and Participation Programme
The International Festival connects with thousands of people around Edinburgh, from primary school pupils to emerging artists, through its year-round bespoke Discovery and Participation programmes. Underpinning the International Festival is an ambition to create a growing social impact through the performing arts, enabling enriching connections between the people and communities of Scotland with core artforms as well as the artists welcomed on stage.

In 2025, for the first time the International Festival has established a Youth Collective, inviting fifteen young people from across Edinburgh to co-create the youth experience of the 2025

Festival. Offered for the first time as part of the International Festival, an adaptation of flagship music workshop, Art of Listening, welcomes families to discover the joy of active listening together in an experience which has been hugely popular with Edinburgh's primary schools for 25 years. This summer will also see flagship projects that bring groups into the heart of August's performances, such as a Youth Takeover Day for senior pupils from across Edinburgh, Culture Clubs for community groups, and popup performances in healthcare settings, working with the NHS Lothian Charity, extending the joy of the International Festival beyond concert hall and theatres, into local communities. The International Festival's multi-year Community Connections Hub partnership with Space @ Broomhouse Hub continues, creating work experience opportunities for young people, co-curated projects and inviting artists including Aga Khan Masters, London Symphony Orchestra and Scottish Ballet to connect with the Broomhouse community.

Secondary school pupils are invited to performances and activities during August across music, theatre, opera and dance in the Discover series, an annual commitment to creating pathways to each artform and foster a lifelong love of the arts. In 2025 the International Festival is working with a range of companies and organisations to support this work, connecting with a range of performances including *Orpheus and Eurydice, Faustus in Africa!, Mary Queen of Scots* and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra.

See www.eif.co.uk/social-impact for more information.

More about Art of Listening
Art of Listening is a flagship project from the Edinburgh International Festival which introduces Primary 7 pupils aged 10–12 to classical music and the International Festival through song and live performance. The workshops first developed from a project called Connecting to Music, delivered by the International Festival's former Head of Creative Learning, Sally Hobson.

Each year, thousands of pupils take part in this two-hour workshop at The Hub, the home of the Edinburgh International Festival. Pupils are guided through the listening experience by a professional opera singer, accompanist and facilitator, learning to engage their imaginations, develop stronger listening skills and respond creatively.

See https://www.eif.co.uk/support-us/art-of-listening for more information.