Scottish Legend Dougie MacLean to Lead Edinburgh International Festival's Opening Weekend Big Singalong

Dougie MacLean, photo by Sean Purser

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1–24 AUGUST 2025
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- For the opening weekend of the International Festival, Scottish national treasure **Dougie MacLean** headlines free event *The Big Singalong* with iconic song *Caledonia,* joined by a range of community choirs led by choir director **Stephen Deazley**

- Famed Scottish folk musician **Donald Shaw** leads *The Ceilidh Sessions* for an afternoon of music and dance inspired by the Gaelic ceilidh tradition

- Festival Director **Nicola Benedetti** and jazz pianist **Joe Webb** lead improvisational music sessions alongside up-and-coming young musicians in The Hub

19 June, Edinburgh: A lineup of world-class musicians at the forefront of their fields are today added to the Edinburgh International Festival programme to lead performances this August that celebrate the joy of music-making. Highlights include Scottish music icon **Dougie MacLean** headlining free event *The Big Singalong,* celebrated folk musician **Donald Shaw** leading *The Ceilidh Sessions* with traditional Gaelic music and dance, and Festival Director **Nicola Benedetti** and jazz pianist **Joe Webb** leading improvisational sessions featuring emerging young talent.

In a free, outdoor event to mark the start of festival season in Edinburgh, one of Scotland's most beloved musical figures, **Dougie MacLean** will lead *The Big Singalong* on Sunday 3 August. Set against the stunning backdrop of Princes Street Gardens, the Perthshire-born singer-songwriter and composer behind the iconic anthem *Caledonia* will start a mass singalong that welcomes all voices, curated by Edinburgh's Love Music Community Choir Artistic Director, **Stephen Deazley.** Choirs include **The Phoenix Choir, the Maryhill Integration Project Joyous Choir** and the **Westerton Male Voice Choir**. Tickets are free and available at midday at www.eif.co.uk.

The joy of music making continues the next day with *The Ceilidh Sessions,* also in Princes Street Gardens. Scottish tradition meets Baroque flair, as Norwegian folk ensemble **Barokksolistene** join forces with **Donald Shaw,** known as founding member of Scottish folk legends Capercaillie, accompanied by his ceilidh band. Alongside beloved ceilidh tunes like the "The Gay Gordons" and "Strip the Willow", Barokksolistene add Baroque music, sea shanties and alehouse tunes to the mix for a truly international afternoon of music and dance. Both events are presented with support from EventScotland, part of VisitScotland.

Jazz takes the spotlight at The Hub on the Royal Mile, with acclaimed pianist and composer **Joe Webb** leading the *Up Late Jazz Jam* on Friday August 15th. Originally from Wales and now one of the most exciting forces on the UK jazz scene, Webb brings his distinctive energy and improvisational flair, honed through his work with Kansas Smitty's and as part of the Wynton Marsalis Quartet, with whom he made his Festival debut last year. The late-night session sees seasoned professionals and fresh talent share the stage for an electrifying night of improvisation and raw creativity in action.

Renowned violinist and Festival Director **Nicola Benedetti** leads a cohort of the world's most promising young musicians in *Rising Stars: Classical Jam*. This spontaneous, informal concert brings emerging and professional musicians together for a dynamic, performance where audiences choose the repertoire. This event is inspired by the behind-the-scenes energy of rehearsal rooms and post-concert jams that classical musicians usually enjoy off stage.

For the third year running, the International Festival's Rising Stars programme unites up-and-coming young musicians with mentors for professional development and performance opportunities. This year's performances include the first cohort of vocalists in *Rising Stars of Voice* on 19 August, *Rising Stars of Woodwind* with clarinettist **Mark Simpson** on 8 August, and a return from the original 2023 cohort of Rising Stars in *Benedetti and Sitkovetsky's Tribute to Menuhin* with **NFM Leopoldinum** on 11 August. To read more about the Rising Stars selected to perform at this year's International Festival, see here.

Nicola Benedetti, Festival Director, Edinburgh International Festival said:
"At the heart of our Festival is a commitment to connection – providing a closer communion between artist and audience. From our mass ceilidh dancing, to singing Dougie MacLean's iconic anthem 'Caledonia' at the top of our lungs in the Princes Street Gardens, to spontaneous jam sessions for jazz lovers and classical enthusiasts alike, these events invite everyone to take part in the magic of live performance. We are all about celebrating artistry in its most human, communal form, and I can't wait for everyone to experience it with us in August."

Stephen Deazley, Artistic Director of *The Big Singalong,* said: "*Caledonia has become more than just a song—it's a reflection of Scotland's spirit. Nearly 50 years on, it still speaks powerfully about what it means to find home, especially for those who are new to Scotland or have journeyed far. Singing it together in Princes Street Gardens this August for the International Festival opening weekend isn't just about music; it's about connection. It's a way for people to feel they belong, to share in something bigger. When thousands of voices come together, you feel that sense of welcome, of joy, of community—and that's what Scotland is all about."*

Rob Dickson, Director of Industry and Events at VisitScotland, said: *"The Edinburgh International Festival is one of Scotland's signature events, and we're proud to support The Big Singalong and The Ceilidh Sessions as part of the festival's opening weekend. These events not only celebrate our rich musical heritage—with icons like Dougie MacLean and Donald Shaw—but also play a vital role in growing the value of Scotland's visitor economy. Free, inclusive events like these are essential in ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to experience the joy and connection that live events bring. Together with our enviable portfolio of cultural and sporting events, the Edinburgh International Festival reinforces Scotland's global reputation as a world-class destination for tourism and events."*

Tickets to all performances at the 2025 Edinburgh International Festival are available at www.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 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 77 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 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 .**

EventScotland
EventScotland is working to make Scotland the perfect stage for events by securing and supporting an exciting portfolio of sporting and cultural events. It provides funding opportunities and access to resources and information to develop the industry.

EventScotland is a team within VisitScotland's Events Directorate, the national tourism organisation, alongside Business Events and Development teams. For further

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