

Edinburgh International Festival Celebrates the Return of Live Performance to Edinburgh



The 2021 Edinburgh International Festival has drawn to a close following 170 live performances in bespoke outdoor venues across the city, including at the University of Edinburgh's Old College Quad. Photo: Ryan Buchanan

- The 2021 Edinburgh International Festival featured **170 live performances** from **988 artists** of **25 nationalities**
- Artists that took to the stage include international stars **Joyce DiDonato, Valery Gergiev, Domhnall Gleeson, Renée Fleming** and **Damon Albarn** alongside local legends **Alan Cumming, Nicola Benedetti** and **Anna Meredith**

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IMAGES – see [here](#)

FESTIVAL SUMMARY VIDEO – see [here](#)

31 August, Edinburgh: The 2021 **Edinburgh International Festival** has drawn to a close following **170** live performances in bespoke outdoor venues and iconic theatres across the city. This return to live performance marked a significant turning point for Scotland's cultural sector by providing a platform for artists to return to festival stages after an absence of almost two years.

The world's leading performing arts festival welcomed **988** artists of **25** nationalities throughout August, bringing internationally renowned conductors and soloists to Edinburgh and celebrating the artistic riches of Scotland and the UK.

With a programme spanning classical and contemporary music, theatre, opera, dance and spoken word, the 2021 International Festival saw highlights including: the world premiere of **Enda Walsh's** *Medicine* featuring star of stage-and-screen **Domhnall Gleeson**; **Nicola Benedetti** in residence with three projects including the Benedetti Baroque Orchestra; **Alan Cumming** with his new show *Alan Cumming Is Not Acting His Age*; international stars including **Joyce DiDonato**, **Renée Fleming**, **Valery Gergiev** and **Marin Alsop**; a contemporary music line-up featuring **Damon Albarn**, **Laura Mvula**, **Nadine Shah** and **The Snuts**; and traditional music from across the globe including **Sona Jobarteh**, **Talisk**, **Breabach**, **Vincent Segal** and **Ballaké Sissoko**.

The majority of the International Festival was staged in three temporary outdoor pavilions designed especially for live performance and with a focus on audience safety. Situated at **Edinburgh Park**, **Edinburgh Academy Junior School** and the University of Edinburgh's **Old College Quad**, the outdoor venues ensured the safety of up to 3,376 audience members per day, with measures including shorter performances with no intervals, two-metre physical distancing, regular cleaning and contactless ticketing.

As part of the Gateway process, International Festival organisers worked closely with representatives from **Scottish Government**, **City of Edinburgh Council** and **EventScotland**, from planning to delivery, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of audience members, artists and staff.

Over **51,200** tickets to live performances were sold during the three-week festival, with over **350,000** viewers joining online from **50** countries, including Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan and the USA. Viewers tuned in to watch full length, free performances via Edinburgh International Festival At Home with abrdn on the Festival website, as well as selected excerpts on Festival media partner Classic FM's Facebook page and on the International Festival's social media platforms.

Although ticket availability was reduced by 63% compared to 2019, **over 8,700** tickets were discounted as concessions, given to community groups or allocated to young people studying music as part of the **Young Musician's Passport** scheme. Audience demand was high, with **64%** of performances selling out completely. Local audiences embraced the return to live performance, with **60%** of bookers coming from Edinburgh and the surrounding areas. 18% of audience members were from the rest of Scotland and 17% from the rest of the UK.

New films will continue to be released on eif.co.uk throughout autumn, including the **Royal Philharmonic Orchestra** with **Vasily Petrenko** and **Isata Kanneh-Mason** (7 October); spoken word artists **Inua Ellams** and **Saul Williams** (28 October); the **Zehetmair Quartet** (14 October); **Fatma Said** and **Malcolm Martineau** (4 November); performances from poets **Hollie McNish** and **Wana Udobang** (11 November); and the **Royal Scottish National Orchestra** with **Elim Chan** (25 November).

BBC Radio 3 In Concert will broadcast four evening concerts from Edinburgh Academy Junior School: the **BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra** with **Marin Alsop** (13 September), the **Royal Scottish National Orchestra** with **Valery Gergiev** (14 September), **Joyce**

DiDonato with **Il Pomo D'Oro** (15 September), and the **Benedetti Baroque Orchestra** (16 September). All BBC Radio 3 recordings are available for 30 days after broadcast on BBC Sounds. Highlights of the classical music programme will be broadcast on **Classic FM** on Friday 3 September.

The International Festival worked with **3,096** children, young people and community members on projects throughout August. The Festival Favours initiative, which sees 30 organised groups granted an artistic experience from an artist or creative individual, continues into September. Festival Favours gifted so far have included a movement workshop for Oxgangs Walking Group from **Curious Seed**; a performance from **Shona the Musical Choir** for dementia choir Forget Me Notes; and a creative writing workshop for Health All Around in Saughton Park from **Wana Udobang**.

Fergus Linehan, Festival Director at Edinburgh International Festival said:

“The success of the 2021 International Festival can be measured in the joy of audiences attending live performance once again, artists returning to the stage and giving exceptional performances in unfamiliar settings, the seamless experience of our outdoor venues, our beloved theatres opening their doors once more and the engagement of communities right across the city from Moredun to South Gyle. We even enjoyed good weather that added to the collective delight and good humour that seemed to pervade every performance.”

“We commissioned new work by companies from Brazil, South Africa and Lebanon, presented world premieres from Enda Walsh, Anna Clyne and Ayanna Witter-Johnson and worked with Scottish companies including the National Theatre of Scotland, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Curious Seed and the Dundee Rep. We celebrated Scottish artists such as Alan Cumming, Nicola Benedetti, Hannah Lavery and Karine Polwart and welcomed visiting performers such as Saul Williams, Renée Fleming and Barrie Kosky. Our music programme expanded to embrace traditional, folk, jazz, electronic and progressively experimental artists from Gambia to the Isle of Skye.”

“We are grateful to our audiences who cheered us on throughout the past 18 months and returned to our venues in healthy numbers, and also to those who joined us digitally from around the world. We are privileged to be able to innovate in the way that we have done to make this Festival a reality. The return to live performance was carefully planned with the Scottish Government, City of Edinburgh Council and EventScotland through the Gateway process and with the support of our donors, stakeholders, audience members and of course our Trustees.”

“We salute our sister festivals for their innovation and creativity. Together we hope we gave Edinburgh a festival season to remember.”

Visit eif.co.uk/at-home for further information about Edinburgh International Festival At Home with abrdn.

– ENDS –

NOTES TO EDITORS

Edinburgh International Festival At Home in partnership with abrdn

Free tickets available at eif.co.uk/at-home

Dancing in the Streets films (live now, until 18 September 2021)

Access: Audio Described versions available

- **Dancing in the Streets: Alice Ripoll**
- **Dancing in the Streets: Gregory Maqoma**
- **Dancing in the Streets: Janice Parker**
- **Dancing in the Streets: Omar Rajeh**

Sona Jobarteh (live now, until 25 September 2021)

Talisk (live now, until 9 February 2022)

Malcolm Martineau & Friends (live now, until 13 February 2022)

Chineke! Orchestra & William Eddins (live now, until 20 February 2022)

A Soldier's Tale (live now, until 25 February 2022)

Ariadne auf Naxos (live now, until 27 February 2022)

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (live 7 October until 5 December 2021)

Zehetmair Quartet (live 14 October until 12 December 2021)

A Toast to the People: Inua Ellams & Saul Williams (live 28 October until 27 November 2021)

Access: British Sign Language interpreted & captioned versions available

Fatma Said & Malcolm Martineau (live 4 November 2021 until 2 May 2022)

A Toast to the People: Hollie McNish & Wana Udobang (live 11 November until 10 December 2021)

Access: British Sign Language interpreted & captioned versions available

Royal Scottish National Orchestra & Elim Chan (live 25 November 2021 until 23 May 2022)

Schedule of Remaining Media Broadcasts

BBC Radio 3 – In Concert

BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra with Marin Alsop (13 September, 7:30pm)

Royal Scottish National Orchestra with Valery Gergiev (14 September 7:30pm)

Joyce Di Donato and Il Pomo D'Oro (15 September 7:30pm)

Benedetti Baroque Orchestra (16 September 7:30pm)

Classic FM

Highlights from the 2021 Edinburgh International Festival (3 September)

Linn Records Release via Apple Music

Orchestral Highlights (29 October)

A Grand Night for Singing (5 November)

A Soldier's Tale (12 November)

Ariadne auf Naxos (19 November)

Chamber Music Highlights (26 November)

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2021 International Festival highlights images - available [here](#)

Festival summary video – available [here](#)

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 enduring human spirit, the International Festival normally serves as an annual cultural exchange, every August, for an international audience.

The 2021 Festival pioneered the return to live performance in Scotland 7-29 August 2021 with 170 music, theatre, opera and dance performances. For more information visit www.eif.co.uk.