Edinburgh International Festival Launches Global Ideas Stage with Ken Burns, Gordon Brown, Bryan Stevenson and Amy Goodman

L-R: Bryan Stevenson, Gordon Brown, Amy Goodman, Ken Burns

MEDIA IMAGES AVAILABLE HERE
2026 VIDEO TRAILER AVAILABLE HERE
7–30 AUGUST 2026
eif.co.uk / @edintfest

- The Edinburgh International Festival expands its 2026 programme with inaugural Global Ideas Stage, with panellists Former Prime Minister **Gordon Brown**, filmmaker **Ken Burns,** lawyer and social justice activist **Bryan Stevenson** and broadcast journalist **Amy Goodman**
- Curated and hosted by **Professor Sarah Lewis** (Harvard University) and Festival Director **Nicola Benedetti**, the event combines discussion with live performances from stars of the 2026 programme
- Taking place at the newly redeveloped **King's Theatre** on 11 August, the Global Ideas Stage explores this year's Festival theme **All Rise** through a conversational format, in

collaboration with Adam Smith's **Panmure House**

10 June Edinburgh: The Edinburgh International Festival expands its 2026 programme with the inaugural **Global Ideas Stage** on 11 August 2026**,** bringing together some of the world's leading thinkers, artists and cultural voices.

Curated and hosted by Harvard professor and award-winning author **Sarah Lewis** and Festival Director **Nicola Benedetti,** the Global Ideas Stage brings together **Former Prime Minister Gordon Brown,** filmmaker **Ken Burns**, lawyer and social justice activist **Bryan Stevenson** and journalist **Amy Goodman** to explore this year's Festival theme, All Rise, a rallying cry of resilience and ascendance marking the 250th anniversary of American independence.

Designed as a model for future editions, the Global Ideas Stage marks an ambitious new format for the International Festival. The event features intimate dialogues on topics including the Scottish Enlightenment's influence on America, the arts as a medium for ideas and the state of democracy today, before all speakers come together for a full hour-long panel discussion.

Presented in collaboration with Professor **Adam Dixon** and **Panmure House**, the last home of Scottish economist and philosopher Adam Smith, the Global Ideas Stage also takes inspiration from both the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and the 250th anniversary of the writing of *The Wealth of Nations,* reigniting the coffeehouse discussions of Edinburgh's enlightenment at a time when the significance of these works is being revisited.

Nicola Benedetti, Festival Director, Edinburgh International Festival said**:**
"This year's Edinburgh International Festival examines both the dark and dazzling possibilities of the American Dream, under our theme All Rise, marking 250 years since the Declaration of Independence. Exceptional artists from across the United States and around the world present stories and artistic achievements born from – and inspired by – its cultural melting pot, with all the friction and energy that this inspires.

"When we rise, we question. Our first ever Global Ideas Stage brings together a curated group of influential thinkers as we tackle urgent universal questions around justice, liberty and the role of the arts in expressing ideas. This inaugural gathering is a testament to our belief that when the abstractness of art and the pragmatism of conversation come together, the deepest impact is possible.

"With a call to action that resonates far beyond one nation, our Global Ideas Stage and full Festival programme celebrates the peak of human creativity, proposes how we can rise above adversity and implores us to stand together."

Professor Adam Dixon, Director of Panmure House said:
"This August Edinburgh International Festival and Panmure House, the last home of Adam Smith, will reignite the old coffeehouse discussions of Edinburgh's enlightenment past. These conversations gave the world a new language, of freedom, rights and human potential, and

reaffirm the Festival's founding conviction: that through culture and exchange we will see each other more truthfully and more tolerantly.

"The Global Ideas Stage brings together perspectives from politics, law, music, film and the arts to confront the defining questions of our time. What does a just world look like – and what will it take to build one? I look forward to exploring these questions together in Edinburgh this August."

More information about the 2026 Global Ideas Stage curators and panellists:

Former Prime Minister the Rt Hon Gordon Brown:
Gordon Brown is the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education and WHO Ambassador for Global Health Financing. He served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 2007 to 2010 and as Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1997 to 2007, making him the longest-serving Chancellor in modern history. As UN Special Envoy for Global Education, he works with governments, international institutions and the private sector to mobilise investment in education worldwide. Gordon holds a PhD in History from the University of Edinburgh. He lives in Scotland.

Filmmaker Ken Burns:
Ken Burns has been making documentary films for fifty years. Since the Academy Award nominated *Brooklyn Bridge* in 1981, Ken has gone on to direct and produce some of the most acclaimed historical documentaries ever made, including *The Civil War; Jazz; The National Parks: America's Best Idea; Prohibition; Country Music;* and, most recently, *The American Revolution*. Ken's films have been honoured with dozens of major awards, including seventeen Emmy Awards, two Grammy Awards and two Oscar nominations.

Broadcast journalist Amy Goodman:
Amy Goodman is the host of *Democracy Now!,* a daily, independent, award-winning news programme airing on over 1,500 public television and radio stations worldwide, with millions of subscribers across all major social media platforms. Amy was the first journalist to receive the Right Livelihood Award for 'developing an innovative model of truly independent grassroots political journalism.' Goodman has co-authored six New York Times bestsellers, and is the subject of the new documentary *Steal This Story, Please!*, by Oscar-nominated directors Tia Lessin and Carl Deal.

Lawyer and social justice activist Bryan Stevenson:
Bryan Stevenson is the founder and Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative, a human rights organisation in Montgomery, Alabama, and has initiated major new anti-poverty and anti-discrimination efforts that challenge inequality in America. Mr. Stevenson led the creation of EJI's highly acclaimed Legacy Sites, including the Legacy Museum, the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Freedom Monument Sculpture Park and Montgomery Square. He is the author of the critically acclaimed New York Times bestseller, *Just Mercy*, which was adapted as a major motion picture.

Award-winning author and Harvard University Professor Sarah Lewis:
Sarah Lewis is the John L. Loeb Associate Professor of the Humanities and African and African American Studies at Harvard University, and founder of Vision & Justice, a publishing and

research initiative examining the role of visual culture in America's democracy. Her award-winning books include *The Unseen Truth: When Race Changed Sight in America* and the bestseller *The Rise: Creativity, the Gift of Failure, and the Search for Mastery*. Named to the 2026 TIME List: The Closers for her work toward equality in the United States, her mainstage TED talk *Embrace the Near Win* has received over three million views. Before joining Harvard, she held curatorial positions at MoMA New York and Tate Modern London.

Violinist and Edinburgh International Festival Director Nicola Benedetti:
Nicola Benedetti is one of the most sought-after violinists of her generation, performing with the world's leading orchestras including the London Symphony, Chicago Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, and Orchestre de Paris. A GRAMMY Award-winner for Best Classical Instrumental Solo (2020) and two-time Classical BRIT Award-winner, she records exclusively for Decca and is the founder of The Benedetti Foundation, a charitable organisation dedicated to music education. Appointed CBE in 2019 and the youngest ever recipient of the Queen's Medal for Music, she became Director of the Edinburgh International Festival in 2022.

Director of Panmure House and Adam Smith Chair, Adam Dixon:
Professor Adam Dixon is an American professor based in Edinburgh, where he leads Panmure House, the final home of Adam Smith. A sought-after speaker and moderator, he addresses geopolitics, economics, and global affairs. As the Adam Smith Chair, he applies Smith's insights to modern challenges, from government intervention to global competition and business ethics. An Oxford-trained political economist, he offers clear, informed perspectives on power, priorities, and the forces shaping today's world.

The Global Ideas Stage is supported by James and Morag Anderson.

Tickets to the Global Ideas Stage on 11 August 2026 and all performances in the 2026 Edinburgh International Festival are available at www.eif.co.uk.

– ENDS –

Media contacts:
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 / eif.co.uk

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 7–30 August 2026, 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 79 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.

Membership at Edinburgh International Festival
As a charity, the Festival relies on support from members, donors, funders and partners to fulfil our mission and vision. Membership starts from £60 and includes perks such as priority booking, and access to backstage tours and rehearsals during the Festival. For more information visit www.eif.co.uk/membership.

Panmure House
Panmure House is the final home of Adam Smith, one of the most influential thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment, and today serves as an independent think tank affiliated to Heriot-Watt University and Edinburgh Business School. The residence where Smith revised The Wealth of Nations and The Theory of Moral Sentiments now provides a platform for contemporary ideas and public debate. Drawing on the intellectual legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment, Panmure House brings together leading thinkers, policymakers, business leaders and citizens to explore the defining economic, social, technological and moral challenges of our time, translating ideas into policy, practice and public engagement.