‘Culture Gives Hope’ says Benedetti as 2026 Edinburgh International Festival Removes Barriers to Arts

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- A major new global poll unveiled at the 2026 Edinburgh International Festival found that **68% of people** worldwide say **culture gives them hope.**

- The International Festival tackled barriers that keep audiences from world-class live performance: over **50,000 tickets were priced at £30 or under**; a record **3,000 free tickets were given to Scotland’s young musicians**; over **8,000 half-price and free tickets** for Deaf, disabled & neurodivergent audiences; **and more than double the number of £10 tickets** were available across every performance.

- A deep connection was forged between audiences and world-leading thinkers, artists and cultural voices: **86% of audiences** rated their experience **4 or 5 stars**.

31 August, Edinburgh: The **2026 Edinburgh International Festival** concluded yesterday, with the last of 146 performances across music, dance, opera and theatre in a 24-day celebration of the performing arts. This year's programme, **All Rise,** put America in the spotlight, featuring the largest representation of American artists in the

Festival's history. With over 2,000 artists from 46 countries, hand-picked for their cultural resonance, the 2026 Festival was defined by extraordinary artists and thinkers who presented a range of contemporary perspectives, and a vision for the future.

In its inaugural Global Ideas Stage event, the International Festival unveiled a major new poll conducted on culture and hope, the largest of its kind ever undertaken on this subject. Focaldata surveyed 35,000 people across 34 countries and found that **68% say culture gives them hope**, with a single cultural moment, whether a live performance, a book, a film or a piece of theatre, helping them feel more hopeful about an uncertain future.

This year's programme brought together some of the world's leading thinkers, artists and cultural voices, including: Former **Prime Minister Gordon Brown,** filmmaker **Ken Burns,** Pulitzer-Award nominee **Zora Howard**, trumpeter and educator **Wynton Marsalis,** Oscar-nominee **Wagner Moura**, lawyer and social justice activist **Bryan Stevenson** and journalist **Amy Goodman.**

The Festival also presented a landmark exhibition **The Legacy of Slavery**, which gave a comprehensive history of the legacy of racial injustice, from Scotland to America. This Festival commission drew more than 7,500 people during its three-week run at the Playfair Library, in its first ever international outing outside of The Legacy Museum site in Montgomery, Alabama.

Nicola Benedetti, Festival Director, Edinburgh International Festival said*:*
"These new findings confirm what I have always known, culture gives us hope. This Festival, and the audiences who have been changed by what they saw on our stages, are proof of that.

"This year's Festival theme, All Rise, was a rallying cry for collaboration and resilience, based on our firm belief that through artistic endeavour we can learn to see one another more truthfully, and more tolerantly. The 2,000 artists that joined us in Edinburgh answered our invitation with courage and generosity, grappling with urgent and profound issues – everything from AI and fake news to the opioid crisis and police brutality – holding up a mirror as well as showing us a way forwards.

"We asked audiences to take a leap with us, embracing risks with an exceptional number of bold new commissions by the International Festival. They responded with curiosity and bravery. This is what it looks like when culture gives us hope."

This year, the International Festival asked for a deeper connection between audiences and artists. Across all artforms, opera, music, theatre and dance, 86% of audiences

surveyed rated their performance experience 4 or 5 stars. The new **'Lights Down, Phones Off'** initiative encouraged audiences to switch off distractions during all performances: resulting in a significant reduction in phone-related disturbances.

The Festival also rolled out its broad range of industry-leading concessions and initiatives, to ensure that cost isn't a barrier to cultural discovery. More than **50,000 tickets** across the programme were priced at **£30 or under**, and a record **4,894 £10 tickets** were offered across every single performance, a more than 50% increase on last year. Over a third of these were bought by audiences who had never attended the Festival before.

Alongside this, over **8,000 tickets** were issued to **Deaf, disabled and neurodivergent** audience members and their companions, a number of tickets that has grown consistently over the past three years. A record **3,000 Young Musician Pass tickets** were issued this year, giving Scottish young musicians free access to the International Festival and creating pathways into transformative cultural experiences. Young Musician Pass holders were also given opportunities to meet and ask questions of artists including members of the Berliner Philharmoniker, Colin Currie, Nicola Benedetti and some of the Festival's Rising Stars.

The Festival's Discover series also brought over 2,000 opportunities for Edinburgh secondary school pupils to encounter opera, dance, music and theatre at performances and in their own schools, many for the first time. Taking the Festival experience out of the concert halls, weekly NHS Festival Sessions brought artists into healthcare settings for pop-up performances for staff, patients and visitors. Families also enjoyed Art of Listening workshops introducing them to live classical performance, which took place in Space @ The Broomhouse Hub for the first time.

Francesca Hegyi, Chief Executive, Edinburgh International Festival said:
"This year we have seen the unique role Festival plays in bringing together significant thinkers, political leaders, and some of the best artists in the world to Edinburgh.

"The International Festival hosted artists from 46 countries, taking to stages alongside over 700 artists from across Scotland. We welcomed 23 international delegations and served as a launchpad for the Creative Trade Forum, a new initiative to promote trade and investment for the UK's creative sector.

"What sets the International Festival apart is the global role it plays, while rooted resolutely in Scotland - more than half of our tickets go to Edinburgh residents. We provide a global stage, a meeting place for cultures and ideas, where audiences gather

every year."

– ENDS –

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Further Questions on the Focaldata Survey:

KEY FINDINGS

Focaldata interviewed 35,000 adults across 34 countries.

Key findings include:

- 68% of people say a piece of culture, whether music, art, a film, a book, or a performance, has helped them feel more hopeful when the future felt uncertain.
- Among people who say a piece of culture "definitely" made them feel more hopeful, 26%, (nearly one in four), say people in their community always pull together in a crisis.
- That is more than double the rate among people who say culture helped only "a little" (12%), and almost three times the rate among those who say culture did not help at all (9%).
- Among people who say a piece of culture "definitely" made them feel more hopeful, 62% say it is definitely possible to build a better future for the next generation.
- Compared to 36% of people who say culture helped only "a little", and 24% of people who say culture did not help at all.
- People who found culture made them hopeful were more than twice as likely as those who found it unhelpful to see a better future as achievable.

METHODOLOGY

Which 34 countries and how were they chosen?
Countries, listed alphabetically: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, France, Germany, Ghana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States, and Uruguay.

These were chosen to be reflective of a cross-section of countries from the global north and south and samples reflect nationally representative statistics.

What methodology was used for the survey?
All respondents participated via online panels, where volunteers take surveys and are compensated for their time. The same methodology was used consistently across all 34 countries.

Fieldwork was carried out concurrently across all countries between 21 July and 5 August 2026.

The question was identical across all countries but translated into the local language where the main language is not English:

"Think of a time when the future felt uncertain, did a piece of culture — music, art, a film, a book, a performance — help you feel more hopeful?"

Response options:

1. Yes, definitely

2. Yes, a little

3. No

4. I can't recall a time like that

The poll was revealed at the International Festival's inaugural Global Ideas Stage which is supported by James and Morag Anderson.

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 in 2027, 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. In addition to membership, the Festival appreciates donations of any level—and for a

limited time, a generous donor is matching all donations 1:1, so every gift creates double the impact. For more information visit www.eif.co.uk/membership.