

Edinburgh International Festival Announces First Performances and Theme for its 2024 Programme



Carmen photo by Stefan Brion; *Assembly Hall* photo by Michael Slobodian

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2 – 25 AUGUST 2024

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- ‘**Rituals That Unite Us**’ is the theme underpinning the 2024 Edinburgh International Festival. The theme responds to an overwhelming desire for togetherness from artists and audiences following on from 2023’s question ‘Where Do We Go From Here?’
- The 2024 programme features the Scottish premiere of ***Assembly Hall***, a new work from four-time Olivier Award-winning Canadian choreographer **Crystal Pite** and includes five operas, a highlight of which will be the major international staged opera, ***Carmen***, from the **Opéra-Comique**
- The Edinburgh International Festival brings world-leading opera, music, theatre and dance to Edinburgh from **2 - 25 August 2024**

14 November, Edinburgh: Edinburgh International Festival today unveils the first details of the 2024 Festival, and the second from Festival Director **Nicola Benedetti**, taking place **2-25 August 2024**.

After a resoundingly successful 2023 Festival, which posed the question: ‘Where Do We Go From Here?’ the 2024 Edinburgh International Festival explores ‘**Rituals That Unite Us**’. Reasserting the need for reconciliation and the value of shared experiences in today’s increasingly disconnected world, the curated programme of live music, theatre, opera and dance celebrates the practices, traditions and festivities that give us meaning and connect us – as a festival, a city, and as a society.

This promises to be a thrilling year for opera lovers as five operas feature in the 2024 International Festival programme, three fully staged and two in concert. The first of these to be announced is the iconic ***Carmen***, from globally celebrated Parisian opera house **Opéra-Comique**, the venue in which the opera premiered in 1875.

This production, led by German director **Andreas Homoki**, celebrates *Carmen*'s 149-year legacy on a replica stage of the Opéra-Comique recreated on the stage of Edinburgh's Festival Theatre, complete with seven iron doors constructed by Gustave Eiffel, the creator of Paris' famous tower.

The score also remains true to the 'opéra-comique' style, where musical pieces are interspersed with dialogue, emphasising the comedic elements of Georges Bizet's visionary writing.

The cast includes; **Gaëlle Arquez** as Carmen, a role in which she has captivated audiences since 2017; star tenor **Saimir Pirgu** as Don José; **Elbenita Kajtazibi** as Micaëla; and **Jean-Fernand Setti** as Escamillo.

In an exciting collaboration that sees the International Festival once again working with Scottish national companies on an international stage, the **Scottish Chamber Orchestra** performs under the direction of **Louis Langrée**, General Director of Opéra-Comique and Music Director of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.

Assembly Hall is a major new dance-theatre work, Scottish Premiere, and International Festival co-production, from Canadian choreographer **Crystal Pite**. Described by the Guardian as "a 21st-century dance genius", Crystal Pite, alongside playwright **Jonathon Young**, present a dance-theatre hybrid that promises the company's signature wit and invention.

Also taking place at the Festival Theatre, but set in a community centre, *Assembly Hall* follows a group of medieval re-enactors coming together for their annual general meeting, a tradition that for the group serves as a bridge between the past and the present. The event they are organising has fallen on hard times, and unless they take bold measures, this venerable order faces dissolution. As the meeting progresses, the line between reality and re-enactment begins to blur, ancient forces are awoken, and it becomes clear that there is much at stake.

Delving into the very human need to gather, *Assembly Hall* explores what stories we tell and repeat, and how those customs reflect our identity.

The theme 'Rituals That Unite Us' responds to feedback on the International Festival's 2023 theme, from audiences, artists and the public, that wherever we go next – and despite our differences – we must go together. The 2024 theme takes inspiration from philosopher **Byung-Chul Han**. His book *The Disappearance of Rituals* reminds us that what we do, over time, defines who we are, and that our collectively experienced rituals help ground us and bind us closer together. A central idea of the book is the humility, sacrifice and participation required to maintain community rituals. This will be explored in the programme through events marking the 900th anniversary of the city of Edinburgh in 2024. Other key ideas include the sacred rituals of life and death, and rituals around the art of seduction.

As well as a programme of live performances and discussions with the world's finest artists and rising stars, the International Festival continues its commitment to stage large-scale events, inviting participation from communities across Scotland. In 2023, 500 amateur and professional musicians joyously performed in Princes Street Gardens for thousands of audience members. In 2024, the International Festival will collaborate with the World Health Organisation and Scottish Ballet to host the first ever nationwide Healing Arts campaign, Healing Arts Scotland. The week-long activation will begin on 19th August 2024, and will include performances, exhibitions, workshops and high-profile policy discussions.

Nicola Benedetti, Festival Director, Edinburgh International Festival, says: *"Next year's Edinburgh International Festival celebrates the unifying force of collective live experiences. We continue to pursue an openness towards diverse perspectives, and in exploring 'Rituals That Unite Us', reflect our deeply human need to connect with one another."*

“When beliefs differ, when we are not aligned over a shared singular fight, it is always an effort, always tricky, always messy. But this is what our festival was founded to do. People use the word ‘soft’ when speaking of the power of the arts, but to open hearts and minds is the toughest and most serious thing we can offer people. It all starts with belief and trust. We led with this feeling in 2023, and we will deepen it in 2024.”

Full programme will be announced with tickets going on sale in March 2024, with priority booking for members. Sign up to the Edinburgh International Festival newsletter for up-to-date information at www.eif.co.uk.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About Edinburgh International Festival

Edinburgh International Festival is a **global celebration of performing arts**, bringing the **finest performers of dance, opera, music and theatre** from around the world to Edinburgh for **three weeks every August**.

The next International Festival takes place **2-25 August 2024**, under the direction of Festival Director and Scottish violinist **Nicola Benedetti**. Benedetti's vision is to create the deepest level of experience, through the highest quality of art, for the broadest possible audience.

The International Festival's impact also extends beyond the annual programme, with community learning, engagement and professional development programmes running throughout the year, contributing to the cultural and social life of Edinburgh and Scotland.

For more information visit www.eif.co.uk

Rituals That Unite Us

In 2023, Nicola Benedetti's inaugural year as Festival Director, the question posed was 'Where Do We Go From Here?'. The resounding feedback pointed towards unity.

Reflecting this sentiment, the 2024 Edinburgh International Festival explores 'Rituals That Unite Us', emphasising the importance of togetherness and shared experiences in a fragmented world. The theme draws inspiration from philosopher Byung-Chul Han's book *The Disappearance of Rituals*, a critique of modern society's move away from the discipline of rituals, which he argues provide structure, meaning, and a sense of community.

Han sees rituals as symbolic acts that ground us, contrasting the depth they offer with the shallow, commodified nature of contemporary life. He laments the loss of communal experiences that rituals provide, such as in religion or cultural festivities, and warns that individuals and society are at risk of losing identity without them.

As a result, in 2024, the Edinburgh International Festival will reassert the need for reconciliation and the value of shared experiences in today's increasingly disconnected world. The International Festival's curated programme of live music, theatre, opera and dance will celebrate the practices, traditions and festivities that bring us together.

Through live performances and discussions with the world's finest artists as well as rising stars, the International Festival will explore collective rituals, and their power to shape our identity, give us meaning and connect us – as a festival, a city, and as a society.

Membership at Edinburgh International Festival

Tickets go on sale in March 2024, with priority booking for members. 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

About Healing Arts Scotland

Healing Arts Scotland 2024 is a country-wide week-long event celebrating and advocating for improved physical, mental and social health through the arts. Spearheaded by Scottish Ballet as part of the Jameel Arts & Health Lab's global 'Healing Arts' campaign in collaboration with the World Health Organisation, the one-week activation event will be produced together with a national coalition of organisations across culture, science, health, education and government.

The initiative will launch on 19th August 2024 as part of the Edinburgh International Festival and will include celebratory performances, exhibitions, public art programmes, workshops, dialogues, media partnerships and high-profile policy discussions.

Alongside Scottish Ballet and the Edinburgh International Festival, the partners helping to shape the week include Luminate, Health and Social Care Alliance (ALLIANCE), Intercultural Youth Scotland, Scottish Opera, Sistema Scotland, National Galleries of Scotland, International Teaching Artists Collaborative, Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Imagine, Independence, Mental Health Foundation Scotland. Other organisations and groups are now invited to join Healing Arts Scotland by registering their proposed activity, project or event in November 2023. Sign-up will be facilitated via an online portal.