

Cumnock Tryst tackles big topics with big hearted performances by big community forces, alongside wonderful world-leading musicians flocking to East Ayrshire for the 2023 festival



29th April 2023

The Cumnock Tryst: A meeting place for music Thursday 5 – Sunday 8 October 2023

Founder and Artistic Director, Sir James MacMillan

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A collaboration with the **Coalfields Community Landscape Partnership**, BIG Saturday will see performances of new music from no less than ten local music groups – Strings N Things, Things Tae Dae, Doon Academy Dalmellington, Robert Burns Academy Cumnock, Logan Primary School, Netherthird Primary School, The Cumnock Tryst Festival Chorus, Cumnock Youth Musical Theatre, Cumnock Area Musical Production Society and Dalmellington Brass Academy.

Under the direction of Sir James MacMillan, the **BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra** perform two concerts with these groups, **totalling around 350 local people**, showcasing the new music the community groups have written themselves under the guidance of expert workshop leaders. The Tryst has also **commissioned four Ayrshire composers, Gillian Walker, Michael Murray, Electra Perivolaris and Jay Capperault** to write linking episodes between each new community song.

Rounding off each concert is a piece called *Eleven* **specially composed by James MacMillan** for this project. There have been various pieces of music inspired by sport over the decades, and by football in particular. *Eleven* is another one, inspired specifically by the local teams in East Ayrshire and dedicated to the supporters of Auchinleck Talbot, Cumnock Juniors, Glenafton Athletic, Lugar Boswell Thistle and Muirkirk Juniors.

Sir James MacMillan said: *“The Coalfields project has been one of the most ambitious ventures undertaken so far by The Tryst, but it represents a dream come true for me. It has always been a priority for me to cast the musical net ever wider in East Ayrshire, and this substantial and sustained activity has enabled us to connect with more and more groups in our community, children and adults. The idea of encouraging people to make their own music, to compose their own material, has always been at the core of The Tryst’s raison d’etre, but this has given us a unique opportunity to grow and develop our work in truly fruitful ways. We really are deeply indebted to the Community Coalfields Landscape Partnership for helping to make it happen. And it all comes together with orchestral accompaniment! And what an orchestra! It is very exciting to bring my friends at the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra to Cumnock for the first time.”*

Nicola Benedetti CBE, Patron of the Cumnock Tryst said: *“What a feast you have in store! Another amazing line up of local, national and international musicians, all heading to Cumnock for four days of extraordinary music-making. And of course, to bring a symphony orchestra to Cumnock has been a long-time ambition of James MacMillan’s. Could there be a better way to introduce the power of an orchestral sound than by giving 350 local people the opportunity to perform alongside the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra? I think not. BIG Saturday! will be a momentous day in the musical history of Cumnock.”*

The Tryst’s reputation for its breadth of music making continues with appearances from international acclaimed artists, exciting emerging talents and the corner stone pillars of the Festival Service and the Festival Ceilidh.

One of the coolest singers on the circuit, multi-faceted **Danielle de Niese** regularly appears on the world’s most prestigious opera and concert stages. In her debut at Cumnock Tryst she performs Poulenc’s powerful one-act opera for solo voice *La Voix Humaine* (The Human Voice) and premieres two new works by James MacMillan – The Vows and Soul Song.

Students of the Robert Burns Academy’s Supported Learning Centre and students from the **Royal Conservatoire of Scotland** come together, led by Matilda Brown and James MacMillan, with a programme of music of their own in *The Way We Are*.

Award-winning choir **Tenebrae** is one of the world’s leading vocal ensembles, renowned for its passion and precision. A highlight of the concert will be the Scottish premiere of MacMillan’s **I Saw Eternity**. Based on a text by Henry Vaughan and designed specifically to be performed alongside the Bach motets, this new work was composed specially for Tenebrae, receiving its premiere at the London Bach Festival in 2021.

Described as Michael Marra meets Elvis Costello, **Findlay Napier’s** performances are full of earthy humour, hopeless love and biting satire. One of the most highly regarded performers and creative forces on the Scottish music scene, he made his name touring and recording with multi-award winning traditional Scottish folk band Back of the Moon. Napier has worked with Strings N Things in Auchinleck as part of Music of the Coalfields and this year appears as a solo performer in one of the late Dumfries Arms spots.

The Tryst’s collaboration with the **Boswell Book Festival**, *The Cumnock Hour*, this year brings a conversation between poet **Michael Symmons Roberts** and James MacMillan about their existing work together on opera and music theatre pieces and their plans for the future. The new songs heard in Danielle de Niese’s opening recital on Thursday evening in Trinity Church are settings from the poet’s Drysalter collection and may be the beginnings of a new cycle.

The Tryst’s audiences love the **Festival Promenade Concerts at Dumfries House**; the setting of three different short recitals in three different but beautiful spaces in a stunning favourite venue. This year the Great Steward’s Dining Room, The Tapestry Room and the Main Entrance Hall will be the backdrops for recitals from percussionist Noah Chalamanda, finalist in Scottish Young Musicians Solo Performer of the Year 2022, Schola Cantorum of St Mary’s Catholic Cathedral, and Scott Dickinson and Andrew Berridge including the world premieres new work for two violas by Errollyn Wallen, Jay Capperault and Janet Beat.

The BIG Saturday finishes with a BIG night out! **It’s No’ Reel** bring their 15 years of delighting audiences with their top **ceilidh** shenanigans to the Tryst.

The Schola Cantorum, which normally sings each Sunday morning at the Catholic Cathedral in Edinburgh, brings its beautiful sound to enhance the celebration of Holy Mass in Cumnock with Palestrina's Missa Papae Marcelli on the final morning of the Cumnock Tryst. We are delighted that Father Philip Kitchen and the congregation of St John's are hosting the liturgy for us this year.

The Tryst comes to a close on Sunday evening with the **Festival Finale**. A new commission by the **Cumnock Tryst**, Phillip Cooke's *Gloria* is flanked by Bartok's Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion and Lambert's The Rio Grande, performed by the Cumnock Tryst Festival Chorus, conducted by their principal conductor Eamonn Dougan and joined by pianists and percussionists from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Sir James MacMillan CBE, Founder and Artistic Director said: *"In addition to our community work, we continue to bring some of the most important international musicians to Cumnock, including the great soprano Danielle de Niese. She will give our opening recital, followed the next night by one of the world's most brilliant choirs, Tenebrae, conducted by Nigel Short.*

"The Tryst has been busy commissioning brand new music for this year's festival. We will hear new work by Phillip Cooke, Gillian Walker, Michael Murray, Electra Perivolaris, Jay Capperauld, Janet Beat and Errollyn Wallen. And the great composers of the past are also featured – JS Bach, Francis Poulenc, Bela Bartok, Constant Lambert and various others.

"It's always a great thrill and source of pride for me when I can present some of my own new music for our Cumnock audiences, and I'm especially delighted that Danielle de Niese has asked me for a couple of new songs which she will premiere in Trinity Church. Tenebrae also bring the Scottish premiere of a new work I wrote for them recently, as well as some other motets of mine which they will be recording soon – all this in Trinity Church.

"We will have wonderful folk music from Findlay Napier, a visit from one of Edinburgh's top choirs, a couple of incredible string players from the BBC SSO and a chat with one of the country's major poets, Michael Symmons Roberts.

"And The Tryst is committed to encouraging the next generation of musicians too. We are especially lucky to host the brilliant young percussionist Noah Chalamanda who will delight and amaze us at Dumfries House and we'll also hear the results of a major creative project with pupils from the Supported Learning Centre on the Barony Campus.

"Come and join us this October for another edition of what is becoming one of Scotland's boldest and most engaging musical events – The Cumnock Tryst."