

48th ST MAGNUS INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

Friday 21 June to Saturday 29 June 2024

An unusual venue - a 50ft life-size sperm whale – runes, tunes and Scandic connections cast a spell over Orkney this summer.

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22th March 2024

Infusing the stunning landscape of the **Orkney Islands** while basking in the light nights of midsummer, the **St Magnus International Festival** creates a beautiful and distinct shape in the UK's festivals landscape.

Under the directorship of Scottish composer **Alasdair Nicolson**, this year's programme brings the signature mix of film, literature, theatre, community participation and world-class musicians that St Magnus has come to be known for. **Gerda Stevenson**, director of last year's world premiere performance of David McNeish's play, *Thora*, has her film *The Storm Watchers* shown in installation daily at the Festival, alongside innovative outdoor performances from all-women's theatre company **Circo Rum Ba Ba** who bring a **50ft life-size sperm whale** to Kirkwall within which they perform a show exploring plastic in our oceans. More theatre comes from Aotearoa / New Zealand company **Trick of the Light** with their one-man-show *The Bookbinder*. Literary conversations are littered throughout the Festival, with poet **Kathleen Jamie**, historian **Jocelyn Rendall**, and horror writer and enthusiast **Johnny Mains** discussing their work.

And of course, a strong music line-up also courses through the eight days of the Festival.

In 2024, Nicolson continues his practice of bringing performers to Orkney to be 'in residence' at the Festival, exploring both sustainability and the deepening of relationships between artists, visiting musicians, their homelands, and the Orkney Islands.

Embracing and intertwining both Scottish and Nordic identities held close by Orcadians, the Festival welcomes Swedish chamber orchestra **Musica Vitae** with guest cellist and director **Robin Michael** to the Isles to perform an eclectic programme including music by Bach, Highland composer Lisa Robertson, the **UK premiere of cello concerto Storm Runes by Nicolson** and a programme based on Swedish folk music. Michael will also be performing a solo event at Stromness Town Hall, sandwiching Welsh composer Huw Watkins' Sonata for Solo Cello between two of Bach's famous Cello Suites. Musica Vitae and Robin Michael will be reprising their Storm Runes programme from the Festival at Kings Place in London as part of **Scotland Unwrapped**.

The **Edinburgh Quartet** enjoys a collaborative residency at St Magnus this year. In addition to their own concert, the ensemble performs alongside **Alon Sariel, Kathryn Stott**, and in a very special concert with **Erland Cooper**. The composer from Stromness buried the only existing tape of his work **Carve The Runes Then Be Content With Silence** alongside other artefacts, leaving clues as to its whereabouts. The musical time capsule has recently been unearthed, and the piece will be played with the Edinburgh Quartet with Cooper on piano as the buried trinkets dry out around St Magnus Cathedral.

St Magnus is a festival where youthful talent is offered the opportunity to flourish on the Orkney stage, and this year's offering is no different. The Festival continues its ongoing collaboration with **Live Music Now Scotland**, with the guitar and soprano **Morris Begg Duo** and the fiddle and accordion of **Roo and Neil** representing the charity. The former perform in two events, one of which is a dazzling multi-media promenade concert at St Magnus Cathedral with musicians from the Nicolson-founded **Assembly Project** and stunning video mapping from **Illuminos**. Roo and Neil perform in one of two late-night "**Sound of Local Folk**" concerts, with young Orcadians pianist **Jennifer Austin** and fiddler **Eric Linklater** performing in the other. Austin also plays a magical concert in-the-round at St Magnus Cathedral, bringing her new compositions to Kirkwall by candlelight.

Top names in classical music also make their way to the islands for this celebration. These include percussion ensemble **O Duo** and soprano **Elizabeth Llewellyn** performing the long-awaited **UK premiere of George Crumb's American Songbook III: Unto The Hills**, supported ably by the talent of the **Royal Birmingham Conservatoire percussion department**. Ensemble **Hesperis** plays baroque music with a Scottish flavour; acclaimed mandolin player **Alon Sariel** performs Plucked Bach; and **Kathryn Stott** joins us on her farewell to the piano tour.

The Orkney community is at the heart of the Festival, and these highlights of the programme certainly reflect this: the **world premiere of new commission The Rhythm Of The Stones** from **Stephen Deazley** and Orkney Voices performed by hundreds of local school children and the Assembly Project; and Carl Orff's monumental Carmina Burana performed by the **Festival Chorus** of many local volunteer singers alongside acclaimed choir **Sonoro**, O Duo and Royal Birmingham Conservatoire percussion, and a litany of starry soloists in the Pickaquoy Arena.

Rounding off the Festival in style are two performances from **Scottish Opera** on their Pop-Up Opera tour. Audiences in Stromness on Friday and St Margaret's Hope on Saturday can look forward to 30 minute shows for all the family - A Little Bit of The Merry Widow and A Little Bit of Don Giovanni brought to life by a storyteller, singers, instrumentalists, narration and colourful illustrations.

The Festival spans venues from Ship of Fools Gallery to St Magnus Cathedral, stunning churches nestled scenically on the coast, Stromness Town Hall, Library, and Academy Theatre, The Writing Room at Kirkwall Hotel, and the Pickaquoy Centre.

The magical atmosphere of St Magnus Festival should be on every experience seeker's bucket list.

Festival Director, Alasdair Nicolson said: *"We pride ourselves on bringing the Orkney midsummer days and nights to life with all kinds of artistry, so we couldn't be more thrilled to be presenting a 2024 Festival programme with a wide array of music, theatre, literature, and more. With this year's resident artists we explore and strengthen the connections we have between Scotland and the Nordic countries, with the Edinburgh Quartet bringing their versatility and talents from the capital, and Musica Vitae bringing their Swedish flair. I'm of course very personally excited to have Musica Vitae and Robin Michael perform the world premiere of my new cello concerto, Storm Runes, among a programme of Orkney-inspired works.*

“There’s really some outstanding works on show this year from across the artistic spectrum. After Thora’s success last year, I’m delighted we can show director Gerda Stevenson’s film at the Ship of Fools Gallery. We have some very innovative and interactive theatre performances from Circo Rum Ba Ba and Trick of the Light, and of course our thought-provoking and fulfilling Literary Hour conversations with brilliant poets, novelists, and historians.”

“Our community events are a step bigger this year, with monumental works performed by our school and Festival choirs alongside some fantastic names in classical music. We have had an overwhelmingly positive response to our promenade concerts as well in past years, so we can’t wait for our Magnus Mixtape event with music and lights on show in the beautiful St Magnus Cathedral. As usual, many nooks and crannies of the Orkney Islands will be explored over the course of the Festival, with some events held in venues not often visited with chances to sample local baking. We look forward to welcoming faces old and new to these magical Islands in June.”

Nick Hewitt, Culture Team Lead at Orkney Islands Council said: *“St Magnus Festival’s 2024 offer spans an incredible range of artforms and genres, and it is really exciting to see such strong live performances building on last year. Orkney Islands Council is pleased to be in partnership with the Festival as a funder and excited to see its ongoing development.”*

Emma Campbell, Music Officer at Creative Scotland commented: *“St Magnus Festival continues to provide a stellar opportunity for islanders and visitors alike to experience world-class culture in Orkney during the height of summer. The sheer variety and quality of artistic offering in the programme this year ensures that the 2024 festival will be yet another truly vibrant and unique experience for attendees.”*

Paul Bush OBE, VisitScotland Director of Events, said: *“EventScotland is delighted to be supporting the St Magnus International Festival through our National Events Funding Programme. Orkney is the perfect stage for this annual celebration of music and the arts, with the event offering fantastic support to the islands’ local talent and international performers alike.*

“Events play an important part in our communities by offering visitors and locals the chance to come together and share memorable experiences. I’m sure visitors will be greeted with a warm Orcadian welcome as they come to the area from far and wide to enjoy this uniquely Scottish event.”

MAGFEST MEMBERS PRIORITY BOOKING from 10am on 8th April 2024.
GENERAL BOOKING from 10am on 15th April 2024.

Social Channels:

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LISTINGS

Music

EVENT 1 – STORM RUNES

St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall
Friday 21 June 19.00

MUSICA VITAE

ROBIN MICHAEL Director/Cello

The first concert in a residency by this string orchestra from Växjö in Sweden brings together music mainly from Scotland contrasting contemporary with baroque. A strong connection with Orkney brings a brooding new concerto based on the work of George Mackay Brown alongside Lisa Robertson’s sound picture of the Old Man of Hoy and ends with Maxwell Davies’ ever-popular piano pieces in string arrangements

EVENT 7 UNTO THE HILLS: SONGS OF SADNESS, YEARNING AND INNOCENCE

St Magnus Cathedral
Saturday 22 June 20.00
ELIZABETH LLEWELYN Soprano
O DUO
ROYAL BIRMINGHAM CONSERVATOIRE Percussionists

A UK premiere for one of the America's most original composers, George Crumb, sees the nave of St Magnus Cathedral joined by percussionists from Birmingham Conservatoire accompanying the stellar soprano Elizabeth Llewellyn who has been seen most recently as Ellen Orford at ENO and Bess in the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

EVENT 8 SOUNDS OF FOLK: JENERIC

The Sound Archive, Kirkwall
Saturday 22 June 21.30
ERIC LINKLATER Fiddle
JENNIFER AUSTIN Piano

Jennifer and Eric are two of the young generation of Orcadian traditional performers who already have a vibrant career separately as solo performers and as members of various groups. Their combined talents can only lead to a burst of creative energy which celebrates the living tradition of Orkney music making.

EVENT 9 – FOLK FROM THE NORTH LANDS

Harray Hall, Harray
Sunday 23 June 11.00
MUSICA VITAE
ROBIN MICHAEL Director/Cello

As part of their residency, the player from Musica Vitae presents a concert of music from Scandinavia interspersed with folk music arrangements from their native Sweden. The Norwegian Grieg's evergreen baroque-inspired Holberg Suite is peppered through the programme which draws on the talents of the ensemble's violinist Märten Sundén as arranger of a fascinating and toe-tapping selection of traditional music. Following the Swedish theme, the concert is followed by coffee and cinnamon buns from Orkney's own Eviedale Bakehouse.

FESTIVAL SERVICE

St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall
Sunday 23 June 11.15
ST MAGNUS CATHEDRAL Choir
MICHAEL MAPPIN Organ

EVENT 10 – OH, WHAT COMES OVER THE SEA

Stromness Town Hall
Sunday 23 June 15.00
ELIZABETH LLEWELLYN Soprano
SIMON LEPPER Piano

A survey of music by Coleridge Taylor is peppered with music by a range of his contemporaries that exploits the talents of this longstanding duo partnership. Elizabeth Llewellyn's voice has been described as 'radiant' and she is one of the UK's finest singers. She is joined by her long-term collaborator Simon Lepper who is well known as a collaborative pianist for singers and as one of the accompanists for Cardiff Singer of the World.

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