

The Scotsman Sessions

'We've moved a lot, and this is where we'll stay'

ANDREW J BROOKS

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Sessions Week 78

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DAVID POLLOCK



MONDAY 18 OCTOBER 2021

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Reviews

Debut delivers, from myths to new makar

PUSHY REVIEWS

SCOT'S Thomas Zehetmair

Even with an altered programme, Thomas Zehetmair led the SCO in a deepening of its musical making.

One of these days, we might get to hear the bass concert. Original SCO's it be alive!

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Andrew J Brooks

Reviews

Debut delivers, from

POETRY REVIEWS:

Push the Boat Out Festival

Summerhall
★★★★

Scotland's newest poetry festival, founded by Jenny Niven and Neu!Reekie's Kevin Williamson, is a welcome debut in a difficult year.

Some events were live-streamed, others will be released after the festival as podcasts, and the flagship project is an app. A Poetry Mile, which showcases 70 new commissions on walking tours around the city. But the majority of events were live, with both performers and audience expressing relief at hearing poetry being read, performed, rapped and sung to a live audience.

Push the Boat Out draws on the energy of Edinburgh's spoken word scene and the rich seam of talent based here, with highlights including Blood Salt Spring, the new performance by the city's new makar, Hannah Lavery, the book launch of Harry Josephine Giles' Deep Wheel Orca, and performances by rapper Nova Scotia the Truth and Solareye/Dave Hook of Stanley Odd.

While the "international"

element of the festival was necessarily restricted this year, organisers still managed to bring together a broad range of voices, from India-born Irish writer Nidhi Zak to Uganda-born Nick Makoha and Malaysian-American Cynthia Miller. Jamaican poet laureate Lorna Goodison appeared on screen as an honoured guest in a pre-recorded performance.

We learned a lot about what poets have been writing in lockdown – Miller's clever reimagining of figures from Greek mythology taking part in video calls was a stand-out example. However, in Friday evening's event, Poems for a Dangerous Year, the focus was less on the pandemic than on a wider exploration of "danger", from Makoha's surreal study of the Entebbe hijacking to Zak's poignant analysis of the power dynamic in a male-female relationship.

And there were opportunities to hear some of the UK's best poets, including a double bill featuring Fiona Benson and Andrew Macmillan in which the writers took on mythology and cockroaches, depression and Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake, as well as speaking about their work.

SUSAN MANSFIELD



myths to new makar



PICTURE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Jamaican poet laureate Lorna Goodison appeared on screen as an honoured guest in a pre-recorded performance

MUSIC

SCO & Thomas Zehetmair

Queen's Hall
Edinburgh
★★★★

Even with an altered programme, Thomas Zehetmair led the SCO in a deeply satisfying evening of impeccable music making.

One of these days, we might get to hear the new double bass concerto Aurora by Hungarian composer Péter Eötvös. Originally scheduled for the SCO's concert in March 2020, it became one of the first casualties of lockdown – and was then bumped again from the orchestra's concerts this week.

What we got in its place was an alternative "new" work, devised by the concert's conductor and solo violinist Thomas Zehetmair. He'd taken an unfinished String Trio fragment – barely 100 bars – by Mozart, and fashioned a substantial work for string orchestra from it, beginning with the intimate interplay from three SCO string principals before blooming across the full string section, and taking a few liberties with harmonic sidesteps

along the way. It was a fascinating, old-meets-new concoction, gently provocative but always respectful, and the strongly projected account that Zehetmair goaded from the SCO players summed up his approach.

He'd begun with a crisp, buoyant Bach A minor Violin Concerto, in which the liberties in rhythm and inflection that he took as soloist (not to mention his abundant vibrato) contrasted fascinatingly with the clean, clear, precise

playing from the orchestra. He took a similar high-contrast, urgent perspective on the Mendelssohn Die schöne Melusine Overture that followed, with Maximiliano Martin's clarinet lines conjuring its eponymous water-nymph, and Zehetmair's high-energy, high-impact approach really came into its own in the concert's closer, Haydn's "Oxford" Symphony, from a shapely, stylish slow movement to a boisterous minuet and trio that would have made its dancers break a sweat.

DAVID KETTLE



The Scottish Chamber Orchestra

OPERA

Scottish Opera –

The Gondoliers

Glasgow
★★★★

WS Gilbert's satirical language, however dated, can so easily resonate in today's terms. Take the line "where everybody is someone, then nobody's anybody", a sentiment disguised as frippery in Gilbert and Sullivan's The Gondoliers, but which could allude to so many present day social and political issues.

The joy of Stuart Maunder's new production for Scottish Opera – a collaboration with D'Oyly Carte and State Opera South Australia – is that he avoids any such temptations, opting instead to stage a sumptuously traditional version through which we can make our own oblique references.

Or we can simply enjoy it, as the unsurpassed laughter of a sizeable first-night audience – Scottish Opera's long-awaited resumption of live shows in its home theatre – clearly suggested.

Designer Dick Bird's grandiose Venetian backdrops, the



William Morgan as Marco Palmieri at the Theatre Royal

luscious and ludicrous costuming (the Duchess of Plaza-Toro's outlandish comedy dress) and, of course, the nifty song and dance routines are a titillating reintroduction to the magic of live opera.

If anything, given the crafty sentimentalism of Sullivan's melodies, the verbal athleticism of Gilbert's prose, and the odd customary liberties taken to update the latter (cynical swipes at current political figures), there's a definite whiff here of Christmas panto.

Besides G&S veteran Richard Suart's stylised conviction

as the imperious Duke, and Yvonne Howard's softly assertive Duchess, the pairing of Ellie Laugharne (Gianetta) and Sioned Gwen Davies (Tessa) is touching and exuberant. William Morgan and Mark Nathan are a neat double act as the Gondoliers, in need of a couple more performances to fully click.

The orchestra and chorus, under conductor Derek Clark, are colourful and responsive. Welcome back, Scottish Opera.

KEN WALTON



Steven McNicoll and Cath Whitefield in Perth Theatre's Don Juan

A Don Juan for 21st century and a short, vital drama

THEATRE

Don Juan –

My Name is Sarah and...

★★★★

A benighted island, a suffering population, and a lord and master whose only credo is freedom, self-indulgence, and the enlargement of his own wealth and power, particularly over comely women.

Oyes, there's something very familiar about the scenario sketched out by Grant O'Rourke – one of Scotland's leading actors, and a star of Outlander – in his first venture as a stage writer, now playing at Perth Theatre, and his chosen vehicle is an update of Moliere's 1665 version of the story of Don Juan, the tale of a man who believes he can get away with having no moral sentiments at all.

Don Juan, though, is not Moliere's easiest play. Unlike his rollicking and tightly-structured domestic comedies, it wears its political and satirical intentions on its sleeve, using its wandering picaresque structure to make space for long scenes satirising the absurdities of contemporary society, notably the posturing bluster of a cowardly and dim-witted aristocracy.

In rewriting the drama in a modern Scots vernacular, O'Rourke therefore adopts the same strategy, letting rip with

thoughts on entitlement, impunity, failures of accountability, and sexual abuse perpetrated by the powerful, that have a strong contemporary ring, although Moliere would have recognised them all.

The result is sometimes more like an extended two-and-a-half hour sketch show than an absorbing drama; and the sketch-like effect is greatly exaggerated by the sheer pressure of trying to deliver this drama – which in Moliere's version has 18 speaking parts – with a cast of just three actors, brilliantly poised and versatile though they are.

Despite all these difficulties, though, Lu Kemp and her company succeed in delivering a hugely entertaining evening of thought-provoking jokery, thanks largely to the energy of O'Rourke's script, to Steven McNicoll's commanding performance as the money-grubbing Don – at once charismatic and repellent – and to Cath Whitefield as his long-suffering servant Sganarelle, who is not only by Don Juan's side in every scene of the story, but is also tasked with introducing and framing the tale, as Sganarelle finally appears to indict the Don before some ultimate court of divine justice.

Add a superb Amy Kennedy as the betrayed Donna Elvira and other victims of Don Juan's charm, and a memorable voice-

over from Brian Cox as the Don's murdered dad, speaking from beyond the grave, and the result is a thoroughly memorable piece of 21st century theatre.

There's a more straightforward theatrical journey for Sarah, the solo heroine of Brian James O'Sullivan's new one-woman mini-musical My Name is Sarah And..., premiered last week at A Play, A Pie And A Pint; but although her path from deepening thirtysomething alcoholism to tentative recovery is familiar in outline, O'Sullivan's 65-minute play-with-songs, superbly performed by Dani Heron, fills in the detail of Sarah's story so vividly, and with such musical energy, that it emerges as an irresistible short drama on a vital theme.

A high-functioning advertising writer based in Glasgow, Sarah at first finds it almost impossible to acknowledge the depth of her problem, until a series of painful events finally set her on the path to change.

But it proves a complicated journey, every step of which is carefully and passionately reflected both in O'Sullivan's music, and in a performance by Dani Heron (directed by Lesley Hart).

Don Juan at Perth Theatre until 30 October; My Name is Sarah And... run now completed.

JOYCE MCMILLAN



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No NHS workers should face threat of deportation CHRISTINE JARDINE, P21



Postecoglou's Celtic take positive vibe into Europa clash SPORT, BACK PAGE



Family of killed MP pleads for love and kindness

● **Police could guard MPs surgeries in wake of fatal knife attack, says Patel**

By **ALEXANDER BROWN**

The family of Sir David Amess have said their "hearts are shattered" as they urged people to be tolerant, show "kindness and love" and "set hate aside" as counter-terrorism officers investigate the Conservative MP's killing.

Sir David's family said last night they were "absolutely broken" after he was attacked while meeting constituents at Belfairs Methodist Church in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex, on Friday.

Paying tribute to the MP, who was married with four daughters and a son, a family statement released through the Metropolitan Police said: "Strong and courageous is an appropriate way to describe David. He was a patriot and a man of peace."

"So, we ask people to set aside their differences and show kindness and love to all. This is the only way forward. Set aside hatred and work towards togetherness."

"Whatever one's race, religious or political beliefs, be tolerant and try to understand. As a family, we are trying to understand why this awful thing has occurred. Nobody should die in that way. Nobody."

Home Secretary Priti Patel said police protection for MPs at constituency meetings was among the options being considered in the wake of Sir David's death, which came little more than five years after the Labour MP for Batley and Spen, Jo Cox, was murdered on her way to a constituency surgery.

She said a "whole spectrum" of measures was being considered to address safety concerns in the wake of the killing.

The statement from Sir David's family came shortly after dozens of mourners attended a special church service last night.

Tributes have flooded in from parliamentarians from across the political spectrum as well as constituents, and the family said these had given them "strength".

"The family would like to thank everyone for the wonderful, wonderful tributes paid to David following his cruel and violent death. It truly has brought us so much comfort," they said. "The support shown by friends, constituents and the general public alike has been so overwhelming."

A 25-year-old man, understood to

→ CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

Royal appeal at inaugural Earthshot



PICTURE: ALBERTO PEZZALI - WPA POOL / GETTY IMAGES

The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge attend the inaugural Earthshot Prize at Alexandra Palace where he made a plea for society to 'unite in repairing our planet' at the awards ceremony for his environmental prize Full story - Page 13

Russia 'will come to UK's rescue' in gas crisis

By **BEN HATTON**

Russia will do what it can to assist the UK and could potentially even "come to the rescue" amid problems linked to rising energy costs, the country's ambassador has suggested.

Andrei Kelin also denied that Russia is withholding gas supplies, appearing to suggest commitments to increase supply will take time to take effect.

The Russian ambassador to the UK also said no decision has yet been taken as to whether President Putin will attend COP26.

→ FULL STORY, PAGE 5

Murder probe after boy found injured at rail station

By **TOM EDEN**

A murder investigation has been launched into the death of a 14-year-old boy who was found fatally injured at a railway station.

Justin McLaughlin was found seriously hurt at High Street station in Glasgow on Saturday afternoon following what police have described as a "shocking act of violence".

He was taken to hospital in Glasgow but could not be saved.

→ FULL STORY, PAGE 9