

# **365: STORIES + MUSIC**

JAMES ROBERTSON · AIDAN O'ROURKE

**Press release for immediate use**

**365: Stories + Music, an epic cross-artform collaboration by Aidan O'Rourke and James Robertson, comes to Celtic Connections for an exclusive performance**



- **Collaboration from leading Scottish author James Robertson and famed folk musician Aidan O'Rourke weaves 365 stories and tunes to create *365: Stories + Music***
- **O'Rourke to perform special concert at Europe's largest winter festival, Celtic Connections, featuring long-time collaborator Kit Downes on piano and harmonium, Sorren Maclean on guitar and special guests**
- **The stunning performance in The Mackintosh Church also features James Robertson who will read a selection of his original stories - featuring guest readers Tam Dean Burn, Gerda Stevenson and Iona Zajac**
- **O'Rourke's music and Robertson's stories encased within a newly created immersive installation designed by Yann Sezec on display at Glasgow Royal Concert Hall foyer for duration of Celtic Connections**

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**Image and trailer available to download [here](#)**

The UK's premier celebration of folk, roots and world music, **Celtic Connections**, hosts a very special, one-off performance of **365: Stories and Music** – an epic cross-artform collaboration by leading Scottish artists Aidan O'Rourke and James Robertson on February 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020. The beautiful new art installation - designed by Yann Seznec and built by Old School Fabrications - to house the collection of 365 stories and tunes for the public to enjoy will be located at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall foyer for the duration of the festival.

It all started in 2013, when **James Robertson** – one of Scotland's most prominent authors – set himself the challenge of writing a short story every day for a year. Each story was to be 365 words, no more, no less. It became an enchanting, roaming collection of fairytales and memories and provocations published in 2014 by Penguin as *365: Stories*. That was only the beginning.

In 2016, enchanted by the potent atmosphere of Robertson's tiny prose pieces and intrigued by the notion of an inescapable daily creative ritual, **Aidan O'Rourke** – fiddler, composer, curator and one third of Lau – decided to write a tune every day in response. The result is a major new body of 365 tunes – a significant addition to the Scottish traditional music canon.

Lighting up the stage of **The Mackintosh Church on 2<sup>nd</sup> February** for a very special concert, O'Rourke will play some of his sparse and emotive fiddle tunes, paired with kaleidoscopic harmonies from Mercury-nominated **Kit Downes** on harmonium and piano and guitarist **Sorren Maclean**. Joining them on stage for this bold and tender epic, **James Robertson** will read a selection of his stories along with special guests including **Tam Dean Burn, Gerda Stevenson and Iona Zajac**.

## INSTALLATION

Robertson's stories and O'Rourke's music now form a touring installation designed by inventor **Yann Seznec** in collaboration with design team **Old School Fabrications** which will be at **the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall foyer** for the duration of Celtic Connections. The installation is a piece of art in itself, beautifully crafted from wood and brass with no digital screens in sight encasing the spoken-word recordings of all 365 stories: Robertson reads many himself, and other storytellers provide rich and varied accents from artists, actors and young people around Scotland including; Gerda Stevenson, Cathy Macdonald, Matthew Zajac and Kate Molleson.

The free-to-enjoy installation allows up to six people at a time to browse through all 365 stories and listen through headphones. Commissioned by the Edinburgh International Book Festival and supported by Creative Scotland and PRSF, it launched in August 2019 before touring to **Linlithgow Palace, Scottish International Storytelling Festival, Shetland Word Play Festival, Orkney Library and Huntingtower** throughout the Autumn and Winter months.

**SUBSCRIBE TO 365**

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From January 2020, readers can receive a daily story and tune to be delivered to their email inbox. With no need to buy a CD or book, the **365 Stories and Music will arrive every day free of charge** – a daily miniature piece of public art. A son might sign his mum up to receive a tune and short story every day via email. A tourist might fall in love with Scottish fiddle playing. Couples will nod in recognition to one of James's wise tales; children will get the creeps from his ghost stories; budding composers might feel inspired to create their own 365-day challenge.

This project has grown in ways James Robertson couldn't have imagined when he began writing his stories. It has become a vast, rich and multiform patchwork of fiction woven with stunning melody – an expansive catalogue of public art whose multimedia format means it can be enjoyed in numerous ways.

Tickets for *365 featuring Aidan O'Rourke & James Robertson* at Celtic Connections are available now via [www.celticconnections.com](http://www.celticconnections.com)

Sign up to *365 Stories and Music* here: <https://three-six-five.net/Subscribe>

**Celtic Connections executive producer Jade Hewat said:** “We’re really looking forward to welcoming the 365 Stories And Music art installation as part of Celtic Connections 2020. It’s exciting to be showcasing cross-artform in this way and we believe the festival audiences will really embrace this piece of work as part of their Celtic Connections experience. Aidan and James’s concert in the beautiful setting of the Mackintosh church on the final night of the festival is also sure to be a wonderful night of music and art.”

**Discussing the 365 project, Aidan O’Rourke said:** “This project was never meant to be quite so... public! Nobody was necessarily going to hear any of it. That wasn't the point. My 365 tune cycle started as an entirely personal writing exercise – to see what might happen if I imposed a daily writing ritual upon myself. I read James's stories; I felt a tangible connection. I loved how succinct and emotive he could be with his words. I appreciated the power of his understatement, of saying less in a world when everyone seems to be shouting more. I wondered whether there might be a musical parallel.

The older I get, the more quietly I seem to want to play, James warned me off setting myself such an absurdly epic task. He already knew the pitfalls. But I'm driven by a creative challenge– or maybe I'm just a glutton for punishment – and so for a year, these tunes became the punctuation and grammar of my everyday. I had to force myself out of my comfort zone because default settings sound pretty hackneyed after a week or two. And now the cycle has grown and spiraled. It's been mind-expanding working with Kit and James, both of whom take me in directions I would never go without them”.

**James Robertson said:** “I love the way the 365 project has built new layers of creativity and performance on my original collection of stories. It's been a total joy and privilege to work with these talented musicians, and I am still astonished that my words have provoked such a rich range of responses in Aidan's compositions. Then there is the installation, a thing of beauty in itself, and all the readers who have lifted the stories off the page, adding such a range of voices and moods. It's been a huge collaborative effort but also great fun, and I am just grateful to be part of it”.

**365: Music + Stories** created in partnership with Edinburgh International Book Festival, with support from Creative Scotland, PRS for Music Foundation's The Open

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Fund, the University of Glasgow's Scottish Literature department, BBC Scotland, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Scottish Poetry Library, An Tobar, Reveal Records and Penguin Books.

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## Listings

### 365: Stories + Music

**Aidan O'Rourke, James Robertson and Kit Downes plus special guests**

Sunday 02 February, 7:30pm (£17.60)

The Mackintosh Church, Glasgow

### 365: Stories + Music

#### Installation

Thursday 16 January – Sunday 02 February 2020, free

Glasgow Royal Concert Hall foyer

## NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. *365: Stories and Music* is a not-for-profit venture. Our thanks extend to Reveal Records and Penguin Books for allowing the music and stories to be included in the installation
2. The installation is free; it is un-ticketed and will tour public spaces
3. Principal partner: Edinburgh International Book Festival
4. Principal funder: Creative Scotland
5. With support from: PRS for Music Foundation's *The Open Fund*, the University of Glasgow's Scottish Literature department, BBC Scotland, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Scottish Poetry Library.

## About James Robertson

James Robertson has published more than forty books and pamphlets, including novels, short stories, poetry, non-fiction and books in Scots for young readers. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Scottish Literature at Glasgow University. He is a contributing author to and general editor of the Scots language children's imprint Itchy Coo, for which he has translated works by A.A. Milne, Roald Dahl, Julia Donaldson and Alexander McCall Smith. His 2003 novel *Joseph Knight* won both the Saltire Society and Scottish Arts Council Book of the Year awards, *The Testament of Gideon Mack* (2006) was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize, and *And the Land Lay Still* (2010) was also the Saltire Society's Book of the Year. His most recent book (2017) is *Arrest This Moment*, a biography of his friend, the late Dundee songwriter and performer, Michael Marra.

## About Aidan O'Rourke

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Aidan O'Rourke is a fiddler, composer, producer and curator. With his trio Lau, in multiple solo projects and in collaborations, he has pioneered a new sound in Scottish folk music and redefined traditional forms. He joined Blazin' Fiddles in 2008; in 2010 he formed the quartet Kan with whistle player Brian Finnegan; in 2016 he formed a duo with the jazz pianist Kit Downes; in 2017 he joined folk-legend Donal Lunny's new collective The Atlantic Arc Orchestra. Lau came together in 2006 and their debut album set a precedent for politically-charged folk music that expands the form and experiments with sound while staying rooted in tradition. They have released five critically-acclaimed studio albums and won Best Group at the BBC 2 Folk Awards an unprecedented four times. As a composer, Aidan is a three-time winner of the PRSF New Music Biennial commission at the Southbank Centre; other commissioners include the Scottish Ensemble, Royal Scottish National Orchestra and Sage Gateshead. As a curator, Aidan has co-directed multiple editions of the Lau-Land festival.

## **Celtic Connections**

Renowned as a musical cure for the wintertime blues, Celtic Connections is Europe's largest winter music festival which began in 1994 when it offered 66 events at one venue. Since then it's grown more adventurous, experimental and diverse each year. The 2020 edition takes place from Thursday 16 January to Sunday 2 February and features musicians from across the world presenting over 300 events throughout Glasgow. The 18 days of entertainment will brighten up the dark, wet January nights with a mixture of concerts that include a host of one-off musical collaborations alongside talks, workshops, film screenings, theatre productions, ceilidhs, exhibitions, free events and late-night sessions.

[www.celticconnections.com/](http://www.celticconnections.com/)

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