

## **Scottish Ensemble collaborates with Aidan O'Rourke and Kit Downes in their first-ever co-commission, *Elemental***

**Sat 9 Nov - Wed 13 Nov**

**Aberdeen, Dundee, Glasgow, Edinburgh**



**Images and biogs for Aidan and Kit:**

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/0uj5n23i1x24c23/AADq6ph5CEZLhxwseCxj5TxCa/Elemental%20with%20Aidan%20O%27Rourke%20and%20Kit%20Downes?dl=0>

- Collaborative concert between Scottish Ensemble and two musicians from the non-classical world, Aidan O'Rourke (on fiddle) and Kit Downes (on piano and harmonium)
- Features programme of contemporary classical works inspired by Scotland's landscapes and the forces of our elemental natural world
- Centres around world premiere of new SE commission by Aidan and Kit, inspired by Edwin Morgan's 1984 poem *Slate* and performed by SE, Aidan and Kit
- *Elemental* will tour to Aberdeen (9 Nov), Dundee (10 Nov), Glasgow (12 Nov) and Edinburgh (13 Nov)
- First time Aidan and Kit have been commissioned to compose a piece together
- The concert is part of SE's 50th Anniversary Season, a series of events weaving together elements from SE's past and present identities
- Tickets on sale at [www.scottishensemble.co.uk](http://www.scottishensemble.co.uk)

## The idea behind *Elemental*

*Elemental* is a concert evoking the elements of Scotland's landscape, from its rocks, sea and air to the changes and processes that have shaped its land and its people.

The concert centres around **Aidan O'Rourke** and **Kit Downes'** *There is no beginning*, written for harmonium, piano, fiddle and string orchestra and commissioned by Scottish Ensemble for this concert. The piece takes its inspiration from **Edwin Morgan's** 1984 poem *Slate*. Written in the wake of the 1979 Scottish referendum, it is generally accepted as a love letter to a politically- and environmentally-battered Scotland.

Through their composition, Aidan and Kit explore not only the poem's intrinsic musicality but its themes of time, change and transformation, particularly in relation to the current political and environmental landscape of Scotland and the world. Bringing together their separate influences, the piece fuses the visceral energy and haunting beauty of Aidan's traditional roots with elements of jazz, folk and modern classical.

Alongside this, Scottish Ensemble will also perform a clutch of contemporary works inspired by all things elemental – space, silence, waves and air – intertwined with melodies which echo an ancient Scotland. Pieces will include Dave Fennessy's *Hirta Rounds*, inspired by one of the islands of remote Scottish archipelago St. Kilda, and György Ligeti's *Ramifications*, which conjures an awe-inspiring impression of raw, wild natural elements through its construction. Kit Downes will also perform his track *Obsidian*, from the 2018 album of the same name, and Aidan will perform pieces from *365: Volume 2*.

### About the artists

London-based keyboard player **Kit Downes** is a composer and multi-keyboardist, performing on the piano, harmonium and organ in bands including ENEMY and Troyka as well as recording his own solo albums on ECM Records - for which he has won a BBC Jazz Award, a British Jazz Award and been nominated for the Mercury Music Prize.

**Aidan O'Rourke** is a pioneering and highly-acclaimed musician and composer who, particularly through his solo projects and many collaborations, is finding new ways to present and reframe the traditional music of his roots. Aidan is well-known as a member of politically-charged Scottish folk act **Lau** (who have won Best Group at the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards an unprecedented four times) as well as for other projects including **Blazin' Fiddles**, **Kan** and **The Atlantic Arc Orchestra**.

### Aidan and Kit as a duo

Aidan and Kit recently worked together on Aidan's *365* solo project. Inspired by Scottish author James Robertson's short story collection *365: Stories*, for which the writer composed a story a day over the course of a year, Aidan spent a year writing daily musical responses to each of Robertson's stories.

Having started a duo with Kit around the same time, Aidan sent some rough recordings to which Kit supplied harmonies - in Aidan's words, "informed by jazz, Ravel, and the church organ repertoire he grew up playing" - and they decided to explore further together. After making a demo and embarking on a low-key tour of rural Scottish gigs, the duo have since recorded two double albums, *365: Volume*

*I* (released May 2018) and *365: Volume 2*, both on the Reveal Records imprint. The tunes, stories and audio recordings form a touring installation designed by inventor **Yann Seznec** in collaboration with design team Old School Fabrications. The installation launched in August 2019 at Edinburgh International Book Festival and now embarks on a tour to Linlithgow Palace, Scottish International Storytelling Festival, Shetland Word Play Festival, Orkney Library, Celtic Connections and Huntingtower.

*There is no beginning* is their first joint commission as composers.

## **Celebrating a 50 year anniversary**

*Elemental* is the third tour of SE's 50th Anniversary Season, a series of events exploring SE's rich past at the same time as celebrating the distinctive adventurous spirit of the group today.

*Elemental* celebrates SE's history of collaboration with artists from other musical traditions, a drive which helps to break down barriers between different musical forms and present classical music in a new way, widening its potential audience and rethinking its place in contemporary life.

SE's first collaboration with a musician from the folk tradition was in 1995 with celebrated Scottish fiddler **Aly Bain** on his *Follow The Moonstone* album. SE has since formed a long-term partnership with Celtic-inspired duo **Chris Stout** and **Catriona McKay**, which began in 2013 with Sally Beamish's evocative work *Seavaigers* and has since continued through various concerts, projects and workshops together, including multiple performances at Celtic Connections festival.

In recent years, SE has collaborated with artists from the worlds of electronica (composer/producer **Anna Meredith** and DJ/producer **Alex Smoke**) and reggae/dub (**Ghetto Priest**) as well as other musical traditions from across the world (Persian classical music, with Keyvan & Bijan Chemirani).

As well as attracting new audiences through the choice of collaborator, by performing in **non-traditional venues for classical music** - such as Glasgow's SWG3 and Edinburgh's Assembly Roxy - SE continues its mission to widen and diversify the audience for classical music in Scotland. This follows success with previous events hosted in multi-arts venues and previously-derelict spaces, which have attracted a different and wider audience than traditional concert halls, helping to create an open and welcoming experience for a larger number of people.

## **Full programme**

### **Aidan O'Rourke and Kit Downes**

*There is no beginning*

### **Tansy Davies**

*The Beginning of the World*

### **Dave Fennessy**

*Hirta Rounds*

### **György Ligeti**

Ramifications

**Ruth Crawford Seeger**

Andante for Strings

**Kit Downes**

Obsidian

Plus pieces from Aidan O'Rourke's recently released *365: Volume 2*

## Notes for editors

[Aidan O'Rourke](#) is a fiddler, producer and award-winning composer who has pioneered a new sound in folk music and redefined traditional forms. As well as performing with his band Lau – who have won Best Group at the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards an unprecedented four times – Aidan performs as a solo artist, finding new ways of articulating the tradition.

[Kit Downes](#) is a pianist, organist and harmonium player. He has toured the world performing on various keyboard instruments with his own bands – ENEMY, Troyka, Elt and Vyamanikal – as well as artists such as Squarepusher, Thomas Strønen and Django Bates, and collaborated with filmmakers, video game developers and classical composers. A BBC Jazz Award winner, Kit has also been nominated for a Mercury Music Award.

Amongst their many collaborations and solo projects, Kit and Aidan perform together as a duo.

### Scottish Ensemble

Scottish Ensemble (SE) is the UK's leading string orchestra; a core of outstanding string players who perform together under Artistic Director **Jonathan Morton**. Based in Glasgow, Scotland, SE inspires audiences in the UK and beyond with vibrant performances which are powerful, challenging and rewarding experiences, crossing genres, styles, musical periods and artistic forms to offer fresh perspectives on classical music.

SE regularly **collaborates with high-profile guest artists**, from trumpeter Alison Balsom and mezzo-soprano Sarah Connolly to cellist Pieter Wispelwey and violinists Patricia Kopatchinskaja and Nicola Benedetti. SE is also becoming increasingly known for its **international collaborations with artists from other disciplines**, from dance and theatre companies to visual artists. Starting in 2014, their series of annual cross-artform collaborations has so far included immersive projects with **visual artist Toby Paterson**; Swedish contemporary dance company **Andersson Dance**; electronic-classical crossover composer **Anna Meredith** and visual artist **Eleanor Meredith**; and, Scottish theatre company **Vanishing Point**.

Alongside performances across Scotland, SE presents concerts across the UK, London and the globe. Recent invitations to tour abroad have resulted in engagements in Taiwan, China, Brazil, the USA and across Europe, performing at prestigious venues from the **Shanghai Concert Hall** (China) and the



**John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts** (USA) as well as festivals including the Edinburgh International, Edinburgh Fringe and Thuringia Bach Festivals.

SE is also **committed to expanding the string repertoire**, with recent commissions including new works from John Tavener, James MacMillan, Sally Beamish, Martin Suckling and Anna Meredith.

## Listings

Sat 9 Nov at 7.30pm

Music Hall, Aberdeen

Book online: <http://bit.ly/2IEM5Nx>

Call 01224 641 122

Sun 10 Nov at 7.30pm

Caird Hall, Dundee

Book online: <http://bit.ly/2Ydspji>

Call 01382 434 940

Tue 12 Nov at 7.30pm

SWG3, Glasgow

Book online: <http://bit.ly/2XVNLHz>

0141 332 5057

Wed 13 Nov at 7.30pm

Assembly Roxy, Edinburgh

Book online: <http://bit.ly/2Ku4UF4>

0131 623 3030