

The Cumnock Tryst Scores Big with Major Funding for Community Led Project



The Cumnock Tryst has been awarded a major grant to work with local communities to create a musical celebration of their own heritage, culture and environment.

The Musical Celebration of the Coalfields is part of the Coalfield Communities Landscape Partnership for which East Ayrshire Council raised £2,220,500 through the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Made up of 22 projects, The Coalfield Communities Landscape Partnership aims to benefit local people by improving the cultural, natural and industrial heritage of the area.

Created and led by The Cumnock Tryst, The Musical Celebration of the Coalfields will involve around 15 local community groups and will culminate in two major productions performed in Barony Hall, the new Robert Burns Academy concert hall, as a highlight of The Cumnock Tryst festivals in October 2021 and 2022.

The local community groups involved will be at the heart of every part of writing, composing, producing and performing their stories and will be supported by industry professionals in the field of opera and musical theatre, who will bring production, logistics, stage direction and technical skills to the table.

The Musical Celebration of the Coalfields, created and led by The Cumnock Tryst, will involve around 15 local community groups who will be at the heart of every part of writing, composing, producing and performing their stories. It will involve industry professionals in the field of opera and music theatre to bring production, logistics, stage direction and technical skills to the project. With significant experience of working with community groups and with the musical direction of Sir James MacMillan, The Cumnock Tryst will draw on a

wide range of knowledge and resources to ensure the highest quality experience for all participants and the creation of a truly spectacular community musical.

Sir James MacMillan, Artistic Director of The Cumnock Tryst, said: “We are absolutely thrilled to receive such strong support from the Coalfield Communities Landscape Partnership and National Lottery Heritage Fund for our ambitious, musical celebration of the coalfields. It will make possible a two-year-long creative project with community groups, music organisations and young people from across the area. The Cumnock Tryst exists because of the communities in East Ayrshire so we are delighted that investment from such an extraordinary grant can now have a positive impact on so many lives. Huge thanks to the National Heritage Lottery Fund and all of you who play the National Lottery.”

More about The Cumnock Tryst

The festival’s name was inspired by a piece of music James wrote in the 1980s - the setting of William Soutar’s love poem, *The Tryst*. *Tryst* is an old Scots word which means a meeting place, or a romantic rendezvous. The town of Cumnock itself ties into this sense of coming together as its Gaelic name, *comunn achadh*, means place of confluence, as the town sits where the Glaisnock River and the Lugar Water meet.

The Tryst was borne out of a niche-model of music festivals taking its inspiration directly from two of the UK’s pioneering composer-led festivals; the Aldeburgh Festival founded by Benjamin Britten and the St Magnus Festival, founded by Peter Maxwell Davies. These two musical icons created wonderful festivals *of* and *for* communities which were important to them - Aldeburgh and Orkney.

Six festivals later the appetite for, and the interest in, what we do has proven to be so successful that The Cumnock Tryst is now a meeting place for music lovers all year-round.

James MacMillan’s musical interests began in his home town of Cumnock where he was raised alongside three generations of his family. As a boy, he was active in music-making at school playing the recorder, tin whistle and later on, the piano. His grandfather was a coalminer, but his true love was music. He played euphonium in local colliery bands and sang in his church choir, and James followed in his grandfather’s footsteps, playing cornet in the local brass band.

James credits the support and guidance he was given from his grandfather, music teachers, band leaders and mentors in Cumnock as being of critical importance in the development of his own musicianship.

The sense of belonging and emotive connection with Cumnock has remained with James throughout his life since leaving the town in 1977 and he, through the work of The Tryst, is giving something back to the community that shaped him.

Cumnock and its surrounding communities have experienced significant infrastructural challenges in the post-industrial period including the closure of the local mining industry and a steep decline in manufacturing: leading to pockets of significant unemployment, and subsequently a wide range of complex social and health issues.

These changes undoubtedly have an impact across generations, particularly the young and can seriously affect the collective ambitions and aspirations of a community. However, within the area there has remained a love of music, choral singing, participation in church choirs, brass bands, music theatre and instrumental learning.

Six years ago, James took the opportunity to establish a festival to reignite this latent enthusiasm for music-making. James knows from his own experience of directing creative and performance projects in schools and communities across the country that there is a strong connection between creativity and social regeneration.

Whilst James is the catalyst and vision behind The Cumnock Tryst, he's the first to say it's not about him - it's about the place, the people and the music. The Tryst believes it is contributing to bringing a sense of pride and passion back into its community.

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