

James MacMillan launches festival in home town of Cumnock

DAVID KETTLE

Composer James MacMillan has launched a brand new music festival for southern Scotland, with the aim of bringing together international artists and local schools and community groups. The Cumnock Tryst will take place in October 2014 in the East Ayrshire market town and former mining community of Cumnock, where MacMillan grew up.

'My earliest musical experiences were of making music with friends, relatives, schoolmates and teachers in the town,' he explained. 'Because of those experiences I have followed a life in music, and now I want to bring something of that back.'

The four-day inaugural event will invite international artists to Cumnock, both for traditional classical performances and to engage in longer-term education and community projects with local groups. MacMillan has enlisted violinist Nicola Benedetti as the event's patron, and she

is also expected to be involved in festival performances and education work.

Mr MacMillan is artistic director of the Cumnock Tryst, and he acknowledges the influence of both Britten's Aldeburgh Festival and Maxwell Davies' St Magnus Festival in the thinking behind his new project. 'British composers have long been distinguished in their commitment to music in the community. My memories of the earliest St Magnus festivals, and their fusion of the local, the national and the international, have been incubating in my mind for many years as an idea that could be reborn in Cumnock.'

With the last remaining segments of the festival's funding still being finalised, the full details of its programme will only be revealed in spring 2014. Its aim, however, is to build on an already thriving community music scene in Cumnock. 'There are two strong currents of musical life in this area – brass music and



Homecoming: James MacMillan at Cumnock Parish Church

RICHARD CAMPBELL

choral music – and both will be running themes in the festival,' Mr MacMillan said. It will also draw on the successes of Cumnock's Greenmill Primary School, where an innovative project making string-orchestra classes compulsory for all pupils has brought wide benefits across the curriculum.

Mr MacMillan has indicated that he will be writing a substantial new piece for the first festival, to bring together professional and amateur musicians, and that he is planning a larger-scale music-theatre work for a future festival. He also hopes to establish a composition course for local composers in future, and intends to play a central role in the event as it develops. 'I'm looking forward to being very plugged into this, and that means being here a lot. I'm committed to the festival for the rest of my life.'

www.thecumnocktryst.com