

NYOS set for a summer proving the power of collaboration



David Kettle

I'm an enormous believer in the power of collaboration." National Youth Orchestras of Scotland chief executive and artistic director Nicholas Zekulin said a similar thing in these pages just a year ago. And indeed, the new partnerships he encouraged in 2017 for the young players in his several ensembles – from an ongoing collaboration with Drake Music Scotland to an Edinburgh Fringe show with composer/comedian Vicky Stone – took them to places they'd never been before.

This year, however, NYOS's events are coming thicker and faster than ever. Following summer concerts from the NYOS Junior and Senior orchestras over the last couple of weeks, early August marks a peak of activity. And, in line with Zekulin's faith in collaboration, many of his events connect NYOS with others. "We're in a challenging environment in the arts," he admits, "and that's not going to change. But we can find strength by working together, and we can do so much more as a collective than we can do on our own."

The highest profile is the Symphony Orchestra's much-anticipated evening at the Usher Hall for the Edinburgh International Festival on 9 August, featuring music by Debussy, Lili Boulanger and Kirkcudbright-born Cecil Coles, who died on the Western Front in 1918.

Zekulin feels the concert is a milestone for the organisation. "It's our first time there in 30 years," he says – and it follows a barnstorming BBC Proms performance in 2016. "Obviously for an orchestra, there are certain platforms in the world that are undeniably among the finest, and playing in the Usher Hall as part of the International Festival is one of them."

High-profile though the Edinburgh date is, however, it's probably also NYOS's most conventional this summer. Across in Glasgow, at the European Championships' Festival 2018, the NYOS players join musicians from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and – via live video link – from Berlin's University of the Arts



Photograph: KK Dundas

Nicholas Zekulin says the NYOS members will develop a breadth of skills

in a free outdoor concert in George Square on 7 August.

Glasgow Meets Berlin, as the opera gala has been dubbed, is a celebration of European links with nods to both the centenary of the First World War and also our current Brexit travails. But according to Zekulin, it also offers a crucial opportunity for the young NYOS players. "We don't often get a chance to play opera, but in the professional world they will have to. If you don't have the language of opera, it can be quite daunting as a young professional."

Most intriguing of all – and continuing the First World War centenary theme – is Tell Us Who We

workshops going back to Easter," says Zekulin, "and of course for a lot of the musicians – both our instrumentalists and the NYCOS singers – that's not necessarily a process they're used to."

It's crucial, Zekulin feels, that the NYOS musicians are able to develop the breadth of skills that Tell Us Who We Are will bring. "Those jobs where you come out of college and go straight into an orchestra are so rare now – and frankly orchestras are looking for versatile, diverse artists who are able to play across many genres, and share their craft in education and outreach work."

He believes, too, that NYOS's own wide-ranging collaborations set the tone for how its young musicians should themselves be thinking: "It's a way to show them as an institution that it's a priority for us, and that it should be for them as artists and as collaborators."

He says he feels lucky, however, to be casting his collaborative net in Scotland. "The breadth of opportunity, and the openness of organisations to work collaboratively, I don't think that's equalled anywhere else. Hopefully as our young people go out into the profession, they'll take that collaborative spirit into all their work." ■

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Are at Glasgow's Old Fruitmarket from 7 to 9 August, an ambitious collaboration between Scotland's premier youth arts organisations – NYOS, the National Youth Choir of Scotland, Scottish Youth Theatre and YDance – in a brand new devised work contrasting young people's lives today with those of a century ago. It's a special challenge for the NYOS musicians: rather than simply turning up and playing the notes, they'll help devise the show themselves, alongside writer Gary McNair and composer Claire McCue. "All the young people have been involved in a series of

NYOS play the Caird Hall, Dundee, on 6 August and the Usher Hall, Edinburgh, on 9 August. The orchestra will also feature in Glasgow Meets Berlin, George Square, Glasgow, 7 August and in Tell Us Who We Are, Old Fruitmarket, Glasgow, 7-9 August. www.nyos.co.uk