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**Media Release**

**The Queen’s Hall to be one of the UK’s most autism friendly music venue**

* **Project led by composer Ben Lunn in partnership with Drake Music Scotland, Hebrides Ensemble and The Queen’s Hall**
* **Pioneering commitment will see The Queen’s Hall embed access into more aspects of concert going**

Three leading organisations - [Drake Music Scotland](https://drakemusicscotland.org/), [Hebrides Ensemble](https://www.hebridesensemble.com/)  and [The](https://www.thequeenshall.net/) Queen’s Hall - have come together in a ground-breaking collaboration which will lead to the Edinburgh music venue becoming one of the UK’s most autism friendly concert halls it was revealed today, 5 December 2019.

The project is being led by rising composer [Ben Lunn](https://benlunncomposer.tumblr.com/), who is himself autistic. Currently trainee Artistic Director with the acclaimed classical music group, Hebrides Ensemble, Lunn is researching the challenges facing autistic people in orientating themselves through the physical, sensory, and emotional experience of concert going and how venues could address these concerns.

The project coincides with a musical collaboration which will see Drake Music Scotland’s celebrated Digital Orchestra and Hebrides Ensemble give the World Premiere of Lunn’s work *Symphonies of Instruments* at The Queen’s Hall on 12 December.

*“There are many external influences which affect autistic (or neurodivergent people) wishing to come to a live music event,”* explains Ben. *“It starts with arriving at the venue and orientating through the physical space. This can be a daunting experience for an autistic person. Add to that the many rituals that will be faced from where you get your ticket to when to clap in a performance and you will understand how easy it is for anyone to become anxious, and this anxiety is multiplied for people with autism.”*

As part of the project a member of Drake Music Scotland’s Digital Orchestra, Joseph Cox, who also has autism, has been filmed walking through the experience of arriving at/using The Queen’s Hall.

*“I enjoyed making the film – it was interesting to have to do lots of takes in the box office,”* says Joseph.

*“I hope that the film will help people to know it’s fine, it’s ok – you don’t have to worry about coming to The Queen’s Hall, anyone can feel anxious about coming to a concert, not just people with autism.”*

 *“We have been introducing a number of developments to increase accessibility for the disabled and are delighted to collaborate with Drake Music Scotland and Hebrides*,” says Emma Mortimore, Marketing Manager of The Queen’s Hall *“Working with Ben and Joe has been a revelation, and we have learned a lot from both of them.”*

*“Walking in someone else’s shoes is the only way to really understand their experience, and through the making of the film we have been given that chance,”* she adds*. “By introducing initiatives such as the film and making accessibility information more widely available we hope to make The Queen’s Hall the most autism friendly music venue in Scotland, if not the UK.*

The film, which is live on The Queen’s Hall website now, has the dual benefit of offering all people, but particularly autistic (and neurodivergent) people, the chance to prepare for their arrival at the venue in advance and for the venue to address the issues highlighted in the walk through.

*“As a large proportion of the anxiety comes from the unknown the filmed footage will shine a light on what happens going to a concert,”* says Ben. *“Once, all information is there, an autistic person has complete control to assess how capable they are to attend.”*

 *“As mental energy fluctuates, one day we can conquer anything, others we cannot get out of bed. If we know what is ahead of us, we can make an educated judgement about plans; thus, reducing any anxiety,”* he explains.

*“This is the first step in The Queen’s Hall’s plans to improve accessibility,”* says Emma Mortimore, Marketing Manager of The Queen’s Hall. *“Sitting alongside the video on the website, are downloadable documents explaining other aspects of a visit to the venue that may be challenging, such as different flooring, what the public announcements mean and setting expectations on applause, encores and lighting.”*

*“ If anyone is feeling anxious ahead of their first visit they will have the opportunity to book a recce when the venue is quiet. Focusing on autism is just the start; The Queen’s Hall is already one of only a handful of venues in the UK to provide a Mobilift for disabled access to their stage and we aim to be pioneers in this area.”*

For Ben the collaborative project at The Queen’s Hall is just a starting point. He has also recently set up a group of composers from across the UK to work together and support each other as they address the many particular challenges faced by disabled composers.

*“The industry is not built for disabled people - be it as performer or composer,”* Ben adds. “*Despite having a history of disabled composers like Holst, Beethoven, Smetana, or arguably Satie we are not taught about the disabled-ness of the composers lives*.”

*“Because of this, and various other influences, I cannot keep trying to fit to a world and industry built against me. So, instead of constantly falling into a defeatist cycle I wanted to help my other disabled composers.”*

In March, Ben led an event in the Scottish Music Centre in collaboration with **sound***festival*. The day was a simple get together of all the autistic composers he know in Britain. *“We got together, shared our music, and discussed our experiences. Hopefully as a catalyst for more activity together.”*

*“December’s concert with Drake Music Scotland and Hebrides Ensemble gives us two opportunities,”* says Ben. *“Firstly, it is arguably one of the first concerts with repertoire written solely by disabled people. Secondly, the aims of improving access are not as a bolt-on but as an integral part of the programming.”*

Ben’s research work has been supported with via an Open Project Fund grant to Hebrides Ensemble from Creative Scotland.

“Ben Lunn is one of the most brilliant young composers currently based in Scotland,” says **Alan Morrison, Head of Music, Creative Scotland** said: His work extends the palette of sounds that can be brought into contemporary classical music, redefining both modern composition and concert-hall inclusion. It’s also inspiring to see a chamber group of Hebrides Ensemble’s stature dedicate a significant part of their Creative Scotland-funded activity to working with Ben and partnering with Drake Music Scotland. The resulting concert is one of the most important live events in the Queen’s Hall’s 40th anniversary programme, as Symphonies Of Instruments receives its world premiere on a stage that, this year alone, has hosted some of the world’s biggest names in classical music.”

Ends

**For further information, images and interviews contact:**

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**Listing**

**Thursday 12 December 2019 at 7.30pm**

The Queen’s Hall,

85-89 Clerk St, Edinburgh, EH8 9JG

***Diversions***

Diversions is a concert to celebrate Scotland’s creative diversity. Hebrides Ensemble and Drake Music Scotland’s Digital Orchestra have come together for a unique collaboration between acoustic and digital musicians. The programme will include the World Premiere of Ben Lunn’s Symphonies of Instruments

This performance is Autism Friendly and will include BSL Interpretation.

**Tickets priced £10 (£5 concessions) in person from the Box Office, by telephone on 0131 668 2019 and online via https://www.thequeenshall.net/**

More information: <https://www.thequeenshall.net/whats-on/diversions>

**Notes for Editors**

**Ben Lunn**

Powerful, poignant and deeply moving, Lunn’s composition certainly represents the spirit of [**Disability History Month 2018**](https://ukdhm.org/)and our current struggle for justice. – *Gemma Nash, Disability Arts Online*

His music has been described as ‘Evocative’, ‘Restrained Otherwordliness’, ‘Chilling’, ‘sophisticated and most importantly obsessive’ or ‘produces…glorious roaring sounds’ and ‘desolate monotone’. He has also been referred to as a ‘Composer of life music’.

Ben Lunn is a Mackem composer who studied in the Royal Welsh College of  Music and Drama under the guidance of Peter Reynolds, as well as studying in the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre with Marius Baranauskas. He has also received guidance from Param Vir and Stuart MacRae. Since graduating from his Master’s he now resides in Glasgow, working in various elements including conducting, musicology, teaching and composing.

His work has been featured in many leading international festivals including Vale of Glamorgan, London New Wind Festival, Arēna Festivals, Druskomanija, Leeds Leider+, Zilele Muzicale Aniversare, HASS FEST, Toronto Contemporary Music Lab, and Occupy the Pianos. He has had the privilege of working with leading international ensembles and soloists like N.A.M.E.S, Sofia Soloists, Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra, Ensemble Synaesthesis, Music Theatre Wales, Lore Lixenberg, Ligeti Quartet, OeNM, Ensemble X and Y, Nikolai Matsov, Rolf Hind, Francoise-Green Duo, Garth Knox, Lore Lixenberg, Ember Septet, Zubin Kanga, Martynas Levickis, Quadra Quartet, JVLMA, and Jauna Muzika.

In November 2018, Ben worked with DaDa Fest in Liverpool to curate a concert of disabled created music. Four musicians from Drake Music Scotland’s Digital Orchestra performed pieces written for Ipads by Clare Johnston, a brief set by Kris Halpin and his MiMu Gloves, and pieces for the Gaskell Quartet and Joseph Lunn (on trombone). Composers like Lucy Hale, Rylan Gleave, Sonia Allori, and Siobhan Dyson were featured in this concert.

As musicologist, his specialities focus around Baltic Music, Horaţiu Rădulescu, and Composing and Disability. He has had the honour of lecturing in some of the world’s leading academic institutions including Fordham University, Mozarteum, RWCMD, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Komitas Conservatory, and Amsterdam Conservatoire. His articles have been published in Germany, UK, US, Russia, Lithuania, and collected by the Arvo Pärt Centre. He has also delivered written work for the Music Information Centre of Lithuania and Latvia.

Currently he has been made an associate artist for Drake Music. And in October he was appointed Trainee Artistic Director of the Hebrides Ensemble. Ben Lunn is also featured in the [*British Music Collection*](https://t.umblr.com/redirect?z=http%3A%2F%2Fbritishmusiccollection.org.uk%2Fcomposer%2Fben-lunn&t=MTg3ODgyMzdkZDJlYjE3ZTg1MjQ3YzRjNDhhYWFhZTcyYjMyNTdlMixUbU4zdWpESg%3D%3D&p=&m=0)and the British Council’s [*Disability Arts Online*](https://t.umblr.com/redirect?z=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.orianapublications.co.uk%2Fbenlunn&t=YzQ5OWE2Njg1NWY5ZmQwNmU5NTdkZTY2OTBkYTAwZTQ3ZDhjMGIyMyxUbU4zdWpESg%3D%3D&p=&m=0) as a featured artist. He is published by Oriana Publications.

**Drake Music Scotland**

Drake Music Scotland is the nation’s leading arts organisation providing music making opportunities for people with disabilities. Our expertise in inclusive music technology and specialist teaching methods support people of all ages and a wide range of disabilities to play, learn and compose music independently. [More about our technology](http://drakemusicscotland.org/what-we-do/technology/)

Developing out of the Drake Research Project founded in England by Adele Drake in 1988, Drake Music Scotland became a separate charitable organisation ([Registered Scottish Charity No. SC026908](http://www.oscr.org.uk/charities/search-scottish-charity-register/charity-details?number=SC026908)) in 1997 and since then has worked with over 13,000 children and adults across Scotland.  [More about our history.](http://drakemusicscotland.org/about/our-history/)

Our biggest achievements to date include setting up Scotland’s first disabled youth orchestra, the [Digital Orchestra](https://drakemusicscotland.org/what-we-do/digital-orchestra/), in 2016;  [Inclusive Classroom](http://drakemusicscotland.org/what-we-do/workshops/) our flagship education programme for special and mainstream schools; implementation of our [acclaimed training and CPD programme;](http://drakemusicscotland.org/what-we-do/training/) our innovative developments in technology, and the introduction of [Figurenotes](https://drakemusicscotland.org/figurenotes).

**Hebrides Ensemble**

With programmes that are diverse, imaginative and inspiring, Hebrides Ensemble has established itself as one of the foremost chamber music collectives in the UK. Co-founded and led by its artistic director, the cellist and conductor William Conway, the Ensemble is renowned for its fresh and intelligent approach to programming, which places contemporary music at the heart of a diverse range of repertoire. The Ensemble’s flexibility is its strength, drawing its performers from a pool of the most outstanding musicians in the UK and beyond, ensuring the exceptional performance standards for which it has become renowned. This is an international ensemble with its roots in Scottish culture, a collective which performs regularly at venues and festivals throughout the UK and Europe, and is regularly featured in broadcasts for BBC Radio 3. In recent years, the Ensemble has given premieres at the Muziekgebouw in Amsterdam, London’s King’s Place, The Wigmore Hall, Aldeburgh Festival, and in 2018, will make its debut appearance at the BBC Proms. Hebrides Academy supports the next generation of performers, composers, artistic directors and cultural leaders through its mentoring programme and Hebrides Digital allows audiences around the world to be part of every performance the Ensemble gives, using live streaming, Twitter feeds and cutting edge digital technology. In August 2017 Hebrides Ensemble released its second disc in a series of composer-focused discs with Delphian. The Last Island, chamber music by Peter Maxwell Davies follows on from the success of James MacMillan’s *Since it was the day of preparation*…, which went straight to No 1 in the Specialist Classical Charts.

**The Queen’s Hall** (Scottish Charity No SC012294) was officially opened by HM Queen Elizabeth II on 6 July 1979 and is celebrating forty years as Edinburgh’s foremost mid-sized live music venue throughout 2019 with an extraordinary range of world-class artists from all musical fields: classical, jazz, folk and roots, rock and pop and Americana including a series of QH@40 gigs with guest curators, supported by Creative Scotland. The perfectly-proportioned, intimate auditorium, flawless acoustics and adaptability make it a unique and valuable resource in Edinburgh’s cultural life. The Queen’s Hall has provided facilities for the International, Fringe, Jazz, Film, Fiddle and Science Festivals and for many local amateur and professional groups, as well as being a key venue for music, comedy and spoken-word acts touring (inter)nationally.Annual audiences total around 90,000 and the venue works with up to 3,000 artists and support staff as well as partnering on year-round music learning and community engagement projects with the City of Edinburgh Council, The City of Edinburgh Music School, Drake Music Scotland and other schools and education providers.

[www.thequeenshall.net](http://www.thequeenshall.net)
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