

Youth orchestra broadens its horizons with a dynamic list of soloists for summer tour



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You couldn't ask for a better role model than Colin Currie." Nicholas Zekulin, artistic director of the National Youth Orchestras of Scotland since February this year, is talking about the NYOS Symphony Orchestra's concerts in Aberdeen, Perth and Glasgow this week – and the canny choice of soloist for them.

Canny not only because of Currie's undeniable skills – he's quickly soared to become one of the world's most respected percussion soloists, and plays US composer Christopher Rouse's energetic percussion concerto, *Switch*, alongside music by Copland and Gershwin. Canny also because Edinburgh-born Currie is himself a product of NYOS, having honed his skills with the Orchestra in the 1990s.

It's just another example of NYOS's long-standing commitment to providing not only musical opportunities for Scotland's young musicians, but also inspiration. A last-minute change of plan to the summer tour – with advertised conductor Thierry Fischer having to pull out – shouldn't cause much disruption either. "We're delighted that Michael Francis has been able to step in," continues Zekulin. "He conducted NYOS two years ago – he's catching an overnight flight from the States, landing in Scotland on the morning of the first day of rehearsals and then going straight in."

Zekulin is currently still working with projects set up by his much-admired predecessor, Joan Gibson – although, he says, he experienced a bracingly brief period to fine tune his own vision for the organisation since his February start. "The deadline for Creative Scotland's funding submissions fell at the end of March – that was an intense moment, but it really helped to hone my thinking very quickly." It's a case, he says, of building on the three-stage "pathway" of ensembles – NYOS Junior, Senior and Symphony Orchestras – devised by Gibson, while also broadening the organisation's activities in new projects, and new collaborations.

Two of which also take place next



Photographs: Marco Borggreve

NYOS alumnus Colin Currie is one of the soloists for the orchestra's summer tour

month. On 27 August, crack chamber ensemble NYOS Camerata will join comic and composer Vikki Stone for her *Concerto for Comedian and Orchestra* at the Pleasance, as part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. "I was really excited by the idea," says Zekulin. "By positioning it at the Fringe, there's a very contemporary and youthful feel to it, but at the same time there's a great tradition of this kind of work – think of André Previn appearing on *Morecambe and Wise*, or the Hoffnung concerts."

And on 12 August, the members of contemporary ensemble NYOS Futures join Drake Music Scotland, which provides music

moving into? Plenty, he says. "I'm keen for us to be contributing much more at an introductory, grassroots level – to ensure that young people in Scotland, whatever stage they're at, can see that there are pathways for them to learn. I suppose you could even call it a moral obligation to ensure that everyone can find that pathway."

He points, too, to a return to performing outside Scotland. "European and international touring is part of the planning for the next three years. It's a huge part of our thinking." Following an unprecedented two appearances at the BBC Proms last year – one from the NYOS Symphony Orchestra, the other from the equally respected NYOS Jazz Orchestra – the organisation is undeniably riding high. And, says Zekulin, that's only helping bring his plans to fruition. "All this should start to kick in at the start of next year – from then, everything will have my stamp on it – for better or worse! I've found that NYOS is a very powerful and positive brand, and it opens a lot of doors, often in ways I didn't expect."

We'll have to wait until 2018 to see the full detail of Zekulin's thinking, but for Scotland's young musicians, across classical, jazz and possibly even other genres, it looks like opportunities are broadening. ■

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making opportunities for people with disabilities, in a brand new piece by Glasgow-based composer Oliver Searle. "Let's say you're a conservatoire-level musician and you go from the NYOS Symphony Orchestra to the Drake project and then the Camerata project with Vikki Stone," Zekulin summarises. "Those are three very different projects, but any professional musician would say that could easily be a month in their lives. It symbolises the kind of directions I'm hoping to see NYOS going in."

Are there any entirely new areas that Zekulin would like to see NYOS

The NYOS Symphony Orchestra Summer Tour: His Majesty's Theatre, Aberdeen, 3 August; Perth Concert Hall, 4 August; and Glasgow Royal Concert Hall, 5 August, www.nyos.co.uk