

Suite dreams a reality as classical gigs in bars come to Edinburgh and Glasgow



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‘**O**ne consideration when I’m choosing musicians is to make sure they’ll be comfortable on a cramped stage in the basement of a pub – that they’re not going to throw their hands up and say: what the hell is this?’

It’s not a factor that many promoters in the comfortable world of classical music have to consider. But for young Glasgow-based composer Matthew Whiteside, the man behind a series of contemporary music gigs under the banner of *The Night With....*, it’s all part of a refreshingly alternative, informal way of presenting music.

Whiteside has quite a track record of putting on events – which he kicked off initially, he admits, to get his own music played. “I started off programming concerts in Belfast when I was an undergraduate at Queen’s University, and when I was studying in Glasgow I tried a contemporary gig within a bar space – it was a nice idea, but with the number of people who walked in for a normal evening in a bar and got scared off by lots of people sitting quietly, it wasn’t quite what I was after...”

The Night With...., now in its second year and getting support from Creative Scotland, bridges those two worlds. “The concerts still take place in bars, but in their own spaces. I found the Hug and Pint in Glasgow, where the gig space is downstairs and separate from the main bar, so I can create a quieter performance space – well, as quiet as a bar space is ever going to be.”

Informality is central to his concept, Whiteside explains. “The programme is divided into three thirds rather than two halves, with short intervals to give people enough time to refresh their glasses.” And to mingle with the performers themselves, he adds. From its informal home in Glasgow, *The Night With....* also moves east this year to Edinburgh: “We have five concerts, a huge jump up from the first season – four in Glasgow, and one in Edinburgh’s Rowantree. The long-term ambition is to expand even further to several in both Glasgow



Composer Matthew Whiteside: ‘It’s all just music – so come and listen’

and Edinburgh, and elsewhere in Scotland too.”

The concerts’ focus is contemporary music – “largely because that’s my own interest,” Whiteside admits – and they provide a welcome platform for new works and specialist performers seldom heard elsewhere north of the Border. For the two concerts this week – from clarinettist Joanna Nicholson and violinist/violist Emma Lloyd

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– that means music by established names Kaija Saariaho and Ken Ueno alongside brand new pieces from emerging composers Nina Whiteman and Whiteside himself. The following concert – from the Aurea Quartet on 3 May – spreads its net even wider: back in time to Bartók and Shostakovich, and right up to date with a brand new piece selected from an invitation to composers to send in works.

“That’s as much about giving opportunities to composers as it is finding interesting new music that we can programme,” Whiteside explains. He’s had 55 entries

including pieces from Hong Kong, Mexico, Albania and Australia. The shortlisted five will be workshopped before the winner makes it into the Aurea’s final concert. “I know from my own experience as a composer how awkward it can be to get performances of your music. That’s pretty much where this whole concert series comes from.”

What kind of audiences is Whiteside getting? They’re inevitably niche events, but nevertheless receiving reliable and growing support. “We get a really nice mix,” Whiteside explains. “Some DJs and electronic artists – a lot of the concerts use live electronics, so it’s within their interests – as well as composition students, music professionals, and a lot of people who just turn up because it sounds interesting.”

Just turning up and giving it a try seems central to Whiteside’s vision for this valuable addition to Scotland’s music scene. He has a refreshingly frank response to anyone who might be put off by an evening of contemporary sounds: “It’s all just music – so come and listen.” ■

The next The Night With... concerts feature Joanna Nicholson (clarinet) and Emma Lloyd (violin/viola), at Edinburgh’s Rowantree, 11 April, and Glasgow’s Hug and Pint, 12 April, www.thenightwith.co.uk